

Fellowship Bible Church
"Seven Characteristics of a Highly Effective Father"
Dr Crawford W. Loritts, Jr
06-16-2013

TEXT: MICAH 4:6 (ESV)

I don't know about you, but I have to confess some things that some times when I come to worship, there is a whole lot of extraneous noise in my head. There is a whole lot of distractions, and to be honest with you as I listened to that song, some times I am thinking about the transactional stuff in the service, or how come they didn't say this, or you forgot to say this, or Crawford you need to do this, or you need to follow up on this stuff. I am just being human. It is so terribly easy to forget that we are here to meet with God and that what we think at a certain point is categorically irrelevant. Most of us, including yours truly, are too much in control, so it is really hard for us to worship God in spirit and in truth because we even give Him the template and the parameters by and through which He needs to speak to us. Think about how arrogant that is, but we do it. We are to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Maybe what we need to pray right now is, "LORD, clear the decks of my heart and mind. Wash away my expectations. Push back the worry, the distractions, and the stuff so I can hear You. "Listen to me. I think God is speaking more often than we are listening. I think God is speaking a lot and I have to tell you this. Sometimes I have missed God's voice because I have been preoccupied with what I want to do for Him or what needs to be done next or some other areas of my life. As American Christians, we do not do too well with listening and being quiet before the LORD. So, let's bow our heads together. Let's ask God to speak to us, to clear our minds and our hearts. Let's ask Him to help us not to miss anything He wants to say to us today. Let's ask Him to help us not to be defensive and reactionary but responsive.

God, we bow before Your presence to thank You for Jesus and to thank You LORD God for who You are. LORD, I lead the parade in confessing to You that sometimes my little ADD head is going in too many directions at the same time. LORD God, we pray that You will help us to be good listeners. Train our hearts and our minds to discern Your voice, what You are saying to us, the clarity of Your Word. Speak to us Father. We can't make it without a word from You, and we know Your Word is Your presence, Your Word is given to us in the Bible, and yet also there are implications and how to's and solutions and direction that You want to give to us. So, we cast ourselves at Your feet right now. I pray, God, that You will move in this service. I pray that every man here will feel honored, valued, and profoundly appreciated this very day. We give you glory and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

You may be seated. Well, good morning Fellowship. It is good to see you this morning. There is a little something that I want to share with you. The storm came barreling through here on Thursday evening, and early Friday when I came over here, it was one mess. It was unbelievable. The front parking lot was strewn with branches, limbs of trees, and this kind of thing. You may have seen it if you came in the front, but our playground may have been completely destroyed. We are still trying to wait and see on all of that, and yet remarkably nobody was hurt, none of that stuff. God was really good to us along those lines. The FIT staff was here until almost midnight on Thursday. They cleaned this place up. You have no idea what it looked like. Our FIT staff, who are our First Impression Team and the people who take care of the buildings and the grounds, did an incredible job cleaning up this place. So, if you get a chance to see them as they are walking around in their shirts, just say, "Hey we appreciate you." What a great job.

Well, happy Father's Day to you. I hope you dads are feeling loved, valued, and appreciated. Very early this morning Karen gave me a bunch of cards from my kids and grandkids. I know our daughter picked out a card

from Jackson and Ashland. It was a card from them and it said, "To Poppa" and it said some nice things on the front and then as you opened it up, there was this pop-up tree that comes out of that and the little caption is "You are the nut that started this family tree." [laughter]. Yeah, I think my daughter picked that one out. So, it is really great.

If you have a Bible, I want you to open it to I Corinthians 16 and just leave it open there. Obviously, I am going to take a little bit of a break from Matthew today. This is one of those messages that make my heart pound the table and weep. I am particularly passionate about what I want to share with you today. Part of what I struggle with is that I don't want to come across as if I am scolding, getting on dads, or this kind of thing, but there is a particular sense of urgency that I feel about our moment in history. There is a particular sense of urgency, and you will see as we go through this what I am sensing about vanishing manhood.

We are living in an extraordinarily dangerous time, and that is not an overstatement when it comes to men. Everything in the culture is going up against, and I don't mean to sound like some powerless victim here, but everything in the culture is going against what we believe is a biblical definition and framework of what a man should be. This is not overstatement. I was involved with the Promise Keeper's movement and all of that stuff where there was a rise in the 90s especially and in the early 2000's. I actually think that we are worse off, even in the church, in terms of definition and framework for manhood than we were prior to the moment when Promise Keepers came on the scene. What has been happening in our culture and with the divorce culture that is going on today and the disassociation you have heard me talk about before, and now you have several generations of men who are growing up without a positive male role model with them to clarify expectations about what manhood is all about. Then you have a society that is elevating, in a right sense in some degree, the role of women; but it has gotten very confusing out there, and men do not know who they are. We don't know who we are.

The identity confusion is palpable among men – palpable. I am very nervous for my children and my grandchildren. We are living in a culture and society that constantly redefines and constantly reaffirms immorality to be morality, neuters and neutralizes truth, sanitizes preferences, and eradicates all distinctions and definition as it relates to gender. So, what we are left with is this crazy quagmire, this confusion about what a man is. I will stick my neck out. I believe in the next 10 years or less guys like myself, who preach the Bible, believe in biblical framework and biblical definition as it relates to generation, are going to be persecuted out of the kazoo, because increasingly the culture is moving further and further and further away. Unless you think I am just daydreaming or just spouting off, that is already true in Canada to this very day. Bible-believing pastors have to be very careful how they preach through Romans chapter 1. They have to be careful how they talk about roles because they could be arrested for hate speech. So, we are seeing a tremendous shift in society and in the culture. So, what I have to say today about manhood is going to be increasingly rare, and yet it needs to be said, and you need to pray that there will be a revival of healthy, balanced, biblical, gender specific roles where we celebrate who we are and we are no longer confused. My biggest concern is that evangelical churches should be leading the parade. We should be providing the definition.

We should be the ones that present clarity to the argument, and one of two things is happening to us. Number one, we are just as confused as the culture is and we are scared to say anything in the name of compassion because we don't want to offend people, and so that little passive mindset is allowing certain things to take place; so, even believers are getting confused about who they are. The other side of that is you have those other guys that are so truth driven without a sense of a heart and compassion of grace that we come across as legalistic idiots who are uncaring and unconcerned. I am telling you, unless we speak biblically, prophetically, and directly to these things, we are in trouble. So, as I talk about fatherhood, you cannot talk

about fatherhood without talking about manhood. Manhood and fatherhood are like this. Manhood defines fatherhood. There is no such thing as a dad who is not a man. I don't mean that in a superficial way. What makes you an effective dad is a clear definition of who you are as a man.

Have you ever read one of these books where you absolutely loved it but it scared you to death at the same time? I just read a book, which I want to recommend to all of you. It is a novel called, "Fatherless." It is written by James Dobson. The book is situated in the mid 2030s. I actually believe that Dobson has missed it by maybe five or ten years, because I think what he is talking about is coming a lot sooner and is closer. You do understand that in the United States today, about half of all babies born in households where there is no father is about 50%, and in minority communities and in African-American communities, it is 70%? You do understand that don't you? In this book, what he is talking about is a society and a culture where men are essentially not involved in the direction of the family and the moral leadership of society. They had been relegated and marginalized. So, we pick it up on page 137. I want you to read along with me here on the screen. On page 137 in the book Dobson says,

"Over the same period, however, another trend has emerged. American boys were more than happy to hand over the reins to assertive girls. Unlike their grandfathers, more and more guys inhabited the comfortable borders of "guyland," where they formed plans of rent-sharing roommates and worked part-time jobs to protect time for climbing virtual world ladders (Later on he explains what that means. He is talking about sophisticated video games that they spend all day long playing to avoid reality) and sampling the endless supply of young women offering no strings attached pleasure. As age-ambushed millions of women [now check this out] they now sought something no "guy-lander" seemed willing to provide. A child, rather than a mate, became the life partner of choice."

Ladies and gentlemen, that is true today. That is increasingly true today. A child, rather than a mate, is becoming the life partner of choice. So, as I say these things, and I don't want to apologize for my passion, I don't know of another issue that I am screaming about right now. I cannot say this strongly enough. I am literally scared to death. I am afraid for our nation. I am afraid for the church because we are asleep at the switch. What makes me nervous is the language that I hear from some of us, even in here, about these issues. Unless there is a revival, and I will say it clearly, unless there is a revival of authentic manhood from a biblical perspective, our culture and our churches are lost. So, this is a big, big issue. You see, fathers need to step up and stop this run away train of male passivity. It is really left up to us who are followers of Jesus Christ. No, I am not calling us to be some knee-jerk reactionary going around cussing out the culture in Jesus' name and angry, you know full of vitriol, and our little radio shows and talk programs where we are beating up people. That gets us nowhere. I am not talking about any of that, but what I am talking about is a passionate commitment for us to model the stuff in the context of our own families, to stop being so blasted passive about leadership in the home, to really step up to the reality that my family has got to tell the truth about what God is doing in human history and that I need to back up what I am saying by producing models that are coming out of my own household or what it really means to be the healthy, non-reactionary male, to be a follower of Jesus Christ. This male passivity is killing us! It is a runaway train.

Fathers are gatekeepers. If you read and you study manhood in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, over and over and over and over and over again men were meant to be gatekeepers --- gatekeepers. What does that mean? Fathers, in the Bible all the way through, fathers are steward of character, mission, and identity. That belongs to us guys. That does not belong to our wives. No, character belongs to them, too, and don't get me wrong. You have to step in. We have single parents, and there is all kind of stuff. My mother never knew who her father was and thank God for my grandmother, her mother, and extended family clarified that. I am not talking about that. But listen, listen, listen! We...we...we...we...we...are responsible for the shaping of

character, for the direction of our households, and the sense of identity. That is what a man is. We are the bridgers. We are bridge people. That is what men are in the Bible. Study the Scriptures. Read Psalm 78. Notice the charge given to Adam, the first man, all the way through. Read the Bible. We are bridge people. We are bridging one generation to where they need to be and we are clarifying who they are. We are clarifying the direction in which they need to go, and we are clarifying what they need to be built on in terms of character. That is what a man is. That is what a dad is. I cannot sit down and be quiet. That is what a dad is. That is what we do.

I Corinthians 16:13-14 is an extraordinary passage. Paul is giving final instructions, and I think in context he is really asking men to stand up and take charge of the categorical chaos and nonsense that has been going on there in the church at Corinth. I think that is the context here, and listen to what he says. He says,

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith”

[Notice this]

Act like men.

Be strong that all that you do be done in love.

You see Paul made an assumption that he can't make today. When Paul said, **“Act like men,”** he could assume that they knew what a man was. We can't make that same assumption today. We have to back up and kind of like say, “Let's go back to square one and define what a man is,” because what the culture says we are and what the Bible says we are is different. So, we need to go back. He says I want you to act like a man. I want you to understand something here. In the Bible, manhood is a decision. That is right. You heard me right. Manhood is not a feeling in the Bible. I am going to get in trouble, but I will go there. Manhood is not a feeling. “I don't feel like a man.” That is irrelevant. Manhood in the Bible is not a feeling. Manhood is an objective decision. That has to do a little bit with what the vision of what a man is. Manhood is always in a verb position. Men move. Men become something. Men do not feel their way into action. Men respond to what needs to take place. Men respond to crisis. They respond to need. They respond to whatever is out there. So, we don't sit around wondering, “Am I really a man?” No, he says I want you to act like a man. You act like a man. You don't feel your way into your responsibility. You act like a man. This “ain't” PC today [laughter]. This “ain't” PC today. You act like a man.

I want to tell you dads, if I don't get through with all of this, let me tell you this dads. With your boys, especially when they turn about 11, 12, or 13 years old, they have to smell your deodorant, and mom has to step back, and you have to get in their grill and you have to be right here with them and say, “Son, I don't care how you feel. This is what you are going to do. I don't care how you feel. I don't care what mom says. You are going to do this, this, and this, because you are going to learn how to act like a man. When you say, “I do” and all hell breaks loose and your family has to have food on the table and you don't like that job, you don't like that issue, I don't want you shrinking backing saying, “I no longer want to be a man.” No, you are a man. You are going to act like a man [applause]. You are going to do that. This “ain't” no head case. I told my dad this when I was joking with him. After I graduated from high school I said, “Dad, I need to take a year off and go to Europe and find out who I am.” He said, “Look, I am going to save you some money. Here is who you are [laughter, applause]. Yeah, I am going to tell you who you are, buddy.” It was a short conversation.

Let me give you seven characteristics of an effective father. By the way, you have heard me say this, whenever someone gives you lists these are probably not the only things, but these are seven big deals, seven characteristics, seven things the Bible teaches about what a man is and who he needs to become. Now these

are seven characteristics of an effective father, but they are also seven characteristics of a man; and by the way, women, if you are single I want you to write this down, because this is also the template that you need to use to find a husband. I am serious about this. You need to write this stuff down. If you say we need to write this down, write it down, write it down, write it down. If you have daughters who are single, write it down. Dad, you take this and when you interview Leroy; and fear is a good thing, write it down. By the way, these are not earth shattering. You all have figured them out and you could figure them out ahead of time, but they are profoundly simple. I don't know about profoundly, but they are very simple.

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE FATHER

1. HE IS GROWING

The first characteristic of an effective father is, number one, he is growing. I didn't say he was perfect, but he is growing and he is intentional about his growth.

A. He is Growing Spiritually

He is growing spiritually. II Peter 3:18 says: **“To grow in the grace and knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ.”** Grow. It is interesting Peter ends that book with that last verse to grow. What do you mean by that? There are some implications. A dad makes his walk with Christ his top priority. Yo, dudes, don't nail it in. Stop it! It is the greatest gift you can give to your family. I am glad you have a mountain house, a beach house, and places that you go, and maybe you have a little lease on a duck thing in Arkansas and you shoot ducks and all that kind of stuff. I love all that and the great experiences that you have given them, but that means zero in terms of the viability of your family and the foundation of their lives. Your gift that you need to give to them constantly is that Jesus is the top priority in your life. You don't have to have a PhD in marriage and family issues. Jesus is number one to you.

B. He is a Model of Spiritual Preparedness

Determine to be a model of spiritual preparedness is what this implies, that we wear the armor of God as the head of the household. We understand that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood. We understand that the devil is trying to pop me off and pop my family off. He wants to tap me out of the game, so I make sure I am wearing the helmet of salvation and the breastplate or righteousness and my feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and I have the shield of faith and I have the sword of the Spirit and I am praying. So, there is a sense of spiritual preparedness. Listen to me. To be a dad and to be an effective father means hellacious spiritual warfare.

C. He is Addressing His Own Personal Sin

It also means that I am addressing my own personal sin. I am taking care of the sin in my life. Listen guys, you are not going to have the favor of God in your own personal walk and relationship with God if you are kind of like taking porno excursions, your thought life is not what it needs to be, and you are just a nasty old sucker when it comes to your relationship with your wife. You are cranky. You are hard to be around. You have anger issues. You have stuff. We need to bring that stuff to the cross! So, before we can expect our family to be anything, we have to be something. Before we can expect them to get somewhere, we have to be there before they get there! So, it begins by being a growing person spiritually.

D. He is Personally Growing

It also means to be a growing person personally. I think it is interesting that Luke 2:52 says, "**And Jesus increased [or grew] in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man,**" that even our Savior experienced a comprehensive growth. Look, fathers, God does not want us to be boring people. We need to be readers, learners, and developers, and a dad needs to be different by the time the child turns twelve than what he was when the child was three. You have to be different when they are young adults than when they were fifteen. We need to adjust to their world, to learn things, to respond to them. We need to be growing people.

2. HE LOVES

The second characteristic of an effective father or dad is, number two, he loves. Let me tell you specifically what I am talking about. I am not just talking about a general love. There is a targeted love. Ephesians chapter 5 extraordinarily is a familiar passage for those of us who do weddings, counseling, and this kind of thing, is about the role of husband and wife; but I want to remind us again what Paul says about the father, the husband's role in the home. Verse 25 says:

**"Husbands, love your wives,
as Christ loved the church and He gave himself up for her,
that he might sanctify her,
having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
so that he might present the church to himself in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.
In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.
For no one ever hated his own flesh,
but nourishes and cherishes it,
just as Christ does the church."**

I am going to say something that is counterintuitive, and if you listen to the talk shows, Dr. Phil or whatever, they would passionately disagree with me. The core -- and listen to me closely, listen to me very closely, very closely -- the core, core, core love relationship in the household is between the husband and wife. It is *not* between the husband and the child or the wife and the child. The core, the core love relationship, core I said, and I didn't say you don't passionately love your kids or that kind of thing, the core love relationship in the household is between a husband and his wife. The reason for that is this, and now remember the argument from creation all the way through that kids were not created first. A male was created first, and that oneness is to be demonstrated. Genesis 2:24 is the vision for marriage, and that oneness is to be demonstrated and is the core relationship in all of life. The health of that relationship determines the health of the home, which determines the health of the community and the health of society. So, that core relationship between husband and wife, husband and wife is the reason why the man, the leader in that relationship, is to love that woman like Jesus loved the church, because that relationship tells the truth about redemptive history. When the world wants to see what Jesus looks like, they should see the redemptive love demonstrated between a husband and a wife, a self-sacrificial love, an attentive love. That is the reason why we can't deflect. Don't make your child the mate that you never had. Don't deflect that love to that child, because they will listen to you and we have problems over here. No, don't do that. You go solve that problem.

Let me be clearer here. Where the husband and wife are not the core relationship in the family, they are dysfunctional parents. Let me tell you how that works. They end up with an isolated emotionally empty wife and selfish, demanding, entitled children. Let me just say it clearly. The relationship is jacked up. It is screwed up. It was never meant to be that way. I want to balance that by saying some of us because of things that have happened, and it does not mean that you are dysfunctional if there is not a husband at home or a dad at home. I am not saying that at all. There is the grace of God, but what I am talking about is God's primary intention and the primary model. That is the reason why we have to take care of business between us as couples. You know when our children see us pouring into their mother it really does strike a chord in their hearts. What they are saying, and they may not articulate that, is "This is right and I want that one day." That is what they are saying.

I will never forget when our kids were little and I would hug and kiss Karen in front of them, do you know what they would do? They would cover their eyes and giggle. You need to make your kids cover their eyes and giggle. What they are saying is, "Oh, that is nasty, but I like it [laughter]." That is what they were saying. They knew in their hearts that is what they were meant for. The other day our adult kids were at the house and I was being romantic with their mother and my sons said, "Dad, you are too old. Just go get a room some place, but anyway. [laughter]."

3. HE LEADS

The third characteristic of effective fathers, and you got it, they lead. They lead. You might say, "Well, Crawford, I don't want to be a leader." That is irrelevant. If you are a man and married, you can cry and get a big pacifier and put it in your mouth and sit in the corner, "I don't want to be a man. I don't want to lead my home. I didn't have a model of leadership. You don't know my background. You don't know how strong she is. You don't know where I came from. Bring me a big diaper. I don't want to do this [laughter]. That is only a little bit joking. Listen to me, okay, write me if you want to. I will delete it [laughter]. Look. I am serious about this. Stop the whining nonsense. When you said, "I do," you did. You got the job. "Can I renegotiate?" No. You got it. You got it. You see, manhood is a vision of what things need to be. It is what you need to be. Stop saying you don't want it. You got it. You got it. And in leadership, I am not talking about the ability to structure the outcomes of the home, and that might be done, but I am talking primarily about spiritual leadership. Leadership is all about a clear vision of our spiritual stewardship. Asaph says in Psalm 78:5:

"He established a testimony in Jacob

[Meaning, God, and testimony has to do with the character of God]

and appointed a law in Israel,

[that has to do with the content of Scripture]

which he commanded our fathers to teach their children,"

The word "teach" there is actually a Hebrew word. It is not the word to disseminate information. It is a passionate term. It means by all means possible you take the character of God and content of Scripture by formal and informal discipline, in all opportunities, and you make it known. That is what a dad does. You see dad, as fathers, we are responsible for what I call "the great handoff." I use that expression in the Family Matters series. Me, me -- not Karen -- me -- not my wife -- me -- not my oldest child because he knows the Bible more than I do -- no -- me! My role as a father is a prophetic role. Get it. Get it guys. Get it. Get it. Get it.

it. Get it. The only reason why we exist as a dad, and I am going to tell you this and it is going to hurt your feelings, the only reason why we exist as a dad is to get this generation to Jesus and give the truth so that they can make it in their generation – job done [applause]. Job done. Job done. Don't get it twisted. All the rest is icing on the cake, you know, great vacations, Christmas traditions, wonderful stuff we do, ball games that we go to. That is great and wonderful stuff and have those memories, but I have to tell you this. The way God is going to judge me as a dad is, “Did you get them to Jesus and did you give them the truth that they needed to make it?” That is “the great handoff” that we are responsible for. So, as fathers we take the time to consistently and clearly communicate to our children God’s word and what is of eternal value.

I want to say this guys. Please do not hear me as scolding, but stop wasting the opportunity. Every moment a dad is derelict in his duty in terms of stepping up to the plate as a spiritual leader in his home, the more he affirms his kids in carnal behavior, he presents a Christianity that is more like you know if you want to do it, it is all left up to you. Dads don't need to be legalistic. Hear me on this, but dads need to be intentional about the spiritual framework and development of their families, and we need to step up our game here. Step it up. Some suggestions:

- Pray with your children everyday. You don't need to have a master of divinity to do this. We don't need that. You don't need to have some great spiritual Bible training. Just stay half a step ahead of them. Pray with them everyday.
- Have consistent scheduled times where the family reads the Word and prays together. I get it. We have raised four kids, busy kids, and I know that you can't necessarily do that everyday, and as they get older their lives get complicated and they start driving and all this stuff. I got that, but have two or three nights a week; and then if the schedule is chaotic, then divide and conquer, maybe at bedtime or maybe in the morning. You do it. I think the greatest thing Karen and I ever did, and we tripped into this, was to encourage them and to show them how to read the Word on their own and spend time with the LORD. You can't do that soon enough. As soon as they can read, encourage them to get in that habit pattern. Don't wait until they go to Christian school and they get the course later on and maybe they will get it. No, you do it. You do it.

4. HE CONNECTS

Effective dads, effective fathers, connect. When I connect, I am talking about a heart connection. Some might get upset with me using this verse because it is the primary application of this verse has to do with prophecy, but I also believe the second application is true to as it relates to the heart of men. I think it is interesting that the last book and the last verse in the Old Testament says this, Malachi 4:6”

**“And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children,
and the hearts of children to their fathers,”**

Look, look, look. As a man, God does not want us to be some little sawed off Napoleon. He does not want us to be some egomaniac that is so insecure that there is a little reign of terror in our household and everybody is scared of us. That is not being a good dad. That is being an idiot. That is what he is talking about. We do these things because we profoundly love our children. What I am trying to underscore here is that we need to commit to unconditional love for our kids that goes beyond performance. Make sure your kids know this. Make sure they know that you do not love them because they can throw a curve ball. You do not love them because they can get on base. You do not love them because they are just like you. No, you love them unconditionally. You connect with their heart. Keep your heart at home and give your kids focused attention

without distraction. I have to tell you dads, and I know how hard this is, because you are looking at a dude that gets distracted. I have a lot of stuff going on at one time, but when you are with your family, be with your family. Do you understand?

Let me tell you where I failed. Just a few weeks ago when my boys were here, and we don't hang out much because we work on weekends, we were playing golf together and on the second day I had my cell phone with me. So, here I am kind of like going down the fairway in between shots or at the T-box and I pulled out my cell phone and I was just going to check my email and this kind of thing; and I got so convicted. Number one, the Holy Spirit said to me, "You ain't that important. Well, what is up with this? Number two, you are checking on this stuff at the church, but you know the staff is smarter than you anyway and they will figure it out and take care of it. Number three, what are you doing? What are you doing? Bryan and Bryndan are here. Will you turn that blasted thing off?" I turned it off. Some of us are like that.

I want to encourage you fathers, and I know this sounds very persnickety, but when you are with your kids on vacation or at the beach and this kind of thing, don't be looking at your Smart phone and your tablet and all that nonsense. I will throw this one in here. I want to tell you this. Multitasking can be dismissive and disrespectful. Watch it in your meetings. Now I am guilty of this. I am on boards and I have been on the phone with conference calls and they are talking about budgets or whatever, and that "ain't" my sweet spot, so I will be checking on my email. Done it. I think as long as people know that everybody is going to take a bit of a parenthesis every once in awhile, that is fine; but be very careful when you do that, and especially don't do that at home. Don't do that when your son or your daughter is looking in your eye and asking you a question. Don't do that. You see, we need to give our kids more than grunts and nods. We need to give them our eyes and our hearts.

Let me just throw this one out for free. I think there are three phases that you need to think about when you go on vacation, seriously. I even have to do this when I spend time with Karen. Part of the problem with being an empty nester is that you kind of like can take each other for granted, right, those of us who are empty nesters. My wife is low maintenance. Thank you Jesus [laughter]. She is like low maintenance and I married above my head. She just does not put a bunch of demands on me, and because of that we have to be careful because we sort of take each other for granted, even on vacations. I will say, "Okay, we are on vacation and I will go work with this little book project that I have for a couple of hours or I will go over here. I stopped doing that. So, I want to suggest to you these three things.

- When you go on a vacation, number one, determine to release. Whatever you have to do to release the pressure, to take care of what needs to be taken care of, or whatever, release it. Don't put it in that suitcase with you. Release it. Let people know that you are not going to hear from me. I am not going to respond to you, unless the building burns down and there is some major moral crisis with folks, and then again, I might not even come back to that.
- Focus on re-creating. Focus your attention while you are there.
- Number three, one of the things I have had to learn in recent years, and I don't know about you but when I come back and when I am on the plane and my head starts like "spinning" as I have this to do, I have that to do, I need to do this, and you turn on your cell phone and it goes, "Buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz." You are doing all this stuff. Here is what I want to suggest to you. Come back a day or two earlier and re-engage so you are ready to hit the ground, but do not rob the people of what they deserve in terms of your heart connection. Just some random food for thought.

5. HE PROTECTS

An effective father protects. He protects. I am not going to go here for the sake of time, but I want to reference Genesis chapter 14. There is a remarkable story there. You all know that Lot was full of himself. He was a selfish dude, a selfish dude. So, Lot was Abraham's nephew and Lot chooses the best land, so he is over in Sodom and Gomorrah and what ends up happening is that there is this little battle. These kings come against Sodom and Gomorrah and you know the deal. Then Lot and his family are taken away. Well, Abraham hears about this. "Oh, boy, that nephew of mine has gotten absconded and all the stuff is gone with them," and what Abraham does, and Lot is like a son to him. Abraham goes and gets him! He rescues him. I think that is a portrait of what a man does.

Now do not get upset with me, but I want to tell you this. Our wife and children should never doubt that we will do whatever it takes to protect them, including giving your life if necessary. I mean that physically. I can tell you a bunch of stories. It has to do with your kids. I remember when our youngest son Bryndan was 8 or 9 years old, he had moved up in baseball and played for the next level, and he is a little dude. I was there at the practice, and it was the first practice with this coach. Something happened and Bryndan did not do what he asked him to do, but he cussed at my son. I walked right out in the middle of practice and grabbed him by the hand and I went right to him. I said, "Let me tell you something. You will never curse my son again." I said this in front of Bryndan. "You will never curse him again, ever, and you are going to apologize to him right now." Well, I don't feel bad about that. Your kids and your wife ought to know that wherever you are, you will do whatever it takes to make sure that they are safe. I am not objective when it comes to Karen. Admittedly, I am defensive. That is my bride and nobody messes with her. Okay? Nobody – children – yeah, there you go [laughter]. I need to get away from the testimonies here.

6. HE PROVIDES

An effective father provides. He provides. I Timothy 5:8 says, and this is a searing verse and I want you to listen to it:

**"But if anyone does not provide for his relatives,
and especially members of his household,
he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."**

Notice how he links a work ethic with proof of your salvation. Now I want to balance this by saying, look, look, I don't think what Paul is saying if a dude is out of a job and he is shrinking back from his responsibility. That is not what he is saying at all. There are transitions in life. There are things that we need to do. We lose our job. We go onto to the next level in our career. There are holding patterns, and I would suggest to you before the ride is over many of us will be there any number of times. So, he is not saying that you are unspiritual if you are unemployed or if you are out of a job. He is not saying that you are derelict of your responsibility because you don't have a job, but don't go too far. Don't go too far. He is saying that you are intentional, you are aggressive, you are not C- in your search for employment, you are on top of things, you are providing the emotional assurance, you are stepping into this thing and not going out looking for a couple of hours and then watching ESPN all day long. You are taking charge. You are doing all that you possibly can do to make sure that needs of the family are being met. You are taking the initiative and your being responsible. What we communicate to our wife and kids is that we will do whatever it takes to take care of home, even if we die trying. That is what the verse is talking about, that priority.

7. HE RESPONDS

The final one is this. An effective father responds. Actually what I mean by that is that he serves. There is this passage in Matthew 20 where the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come to Jesus and she is kind of like hot-writing Jesus to see if they can sit next to Him in the kingdom. In typical Jesus fashion, He probably gives her a bigger answer than she was looking for. So, in verse 25 Jesus called them to Him, "Hey guys. Come over here," and said,

**"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,
and their great ones exercised authority over them.**

It shall not be so among you.

**But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,
and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,
even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give His life as a ransom for many."**

Listen to me fathers, dads. The ONLY reason why, and this is probably the undertow thesis in the book on leadership that I wrote, the ONLY reason why, the ONLY reason why, the ONLY reason why you and I are head of the household, the ONLY reason why is because we are called to out-serve everybody in that house." We are called to out-serve them. We are called to out-serve them. We are *called* to translate vision into reality. We are called to remove boulders and barriers and blast stuff out of the way. We are called to put our kids on our shoulders. We are called to push them. Every time I think of this, I think of the words of my dad. He would say to me, "Boy, do you know why I am breaking my back? Because I want you kids to have better than what I had." When I was in college and things were better off financially, he said to me, "Son, you work as hard as you can, but what you don't have and what you need, you give me a call. I will make sure you get it." That is what dads do. That is what we are all about. Our joy, our joy, is not getting the big piece of chicken and sitting in the soft chair with the remote. Our joy, our joy, is to see our kids flying. Our joy is to see them making decisions. Our joy is to realize that we have the privilege to drive all over creation and to do what we could to make sure that they had a chance to make it during their moment in history. Guys, that is why we exist. That is why we exist.

I was so moved by Freddy Freeman last week. I watched one of the Braves games with the Dodgers late last week and Freddy had a tremendous game. Freddy is the first baseman. Women are thinking, "Who is Freddy Freeman? Does he go to our church?" He is the first baseman of the Braves. Freddy is having a great year and they interview him after the game. He had a great game. They asked him this question and his eyes filled with tears and I was so moved by this. They said, "Freddy, you are from this area and your dad was in the stands and you had a great game. How does it make you feel?" I don't think Freeman was prepared for that and you could see the tears roll up in his eyes. He said, "It is so great to see my dad here and for him to see me play in the big leagues, with all the sacrifices that he went through for me to get here. It is amazing."

Dads, we are standing in the batter's box. "No, I am not." "Yes, you are." "No, I am not." "Yes, you are." You are standing in the batter's box, and we will do whatever it takes to win the game. If I have to give myself up on a bunt, I will give myself up. If I have to hit a sacrifice fly, I will hit a sacrifice fly. If I need to hit a gaper to move base runners over, I will do it; and if it is at the bottom half of the ninth inning, I am in the batter's box, and I need to swing for the fences, I am going to swing for the fences. Listen to me. You do whatever it takes for your family to be everything God wants them to be, but for heaven's sake don't you look at strike three. If you have to go down, you go down swinging. Let's stand.

Father, we need You. We are living in desperate times right now. The problem is we walk out of here and we turn on the TV and everywhere we go we hear that manhood is irrelevant or it has changed, or it is not so what the Bible says, it does not really mean that, or any of that kind of stuff; but I pray, God, that we will not be confused about what You have said so clearly. I pray, LORD, for every man here that we will all feel the sense of Your presence LORD. None of us are adequate for these things. We all fail and yet we have an unfailing God. We have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. We are not held hostage to the dysfunction of the past, but we are set free by the power of the present. Jesus, is with us, so God build our homes. Build the homes of this church, LORD, the families of this church. For those in this church who are wanting to walk away and turn around, I pray, God, that they will take another holy lap. LORD, work in a great way. We love You. In Jesus' name. Amen.