

A Hall of Fame Dad

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[0 : 00] If you were raised in a home with a godly father, you need to thank the Lord for that.! That is not common. It is rare. Consider these statistics. 24 million children, that's 34% live absent of their biological father. About 40% of those have not seen their father in over a year. 50% of them have never set foot in their father's home. What does that mean?

That means there's a lot of missing dads, a lot of absent dads. Depending on the circumstances, there's a lot of sorry dads. Number two means we have to take up slack. It means the reality is that there's a desperate need and the spiritual impact of godly men helping lead children to be godly could be overwhelming. What would a son, what would happen to a son or a daughter whose father suddenly felt seriously God's call upon him to be a godly leader?

It could change our lives. Nehemiah challenges us as he challenged those who were trying to rebuild the walls of the city and faced a lot of opposition and difficulty along the way. And he said in Nehemiah chapter 4 verse 14, do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers and your sons and your daughters and your wives and your homes. Men, that's what we must do. In the society in which we're in, in the strain in which happens upon us, that comes upon us, we need to fight for our families. In Luke, the prophecy and the ensuing birth of John the Baptist is recorded. It is a prophetic announcement made by Gabriel the angel.

And the angelic messenger of God says something that is easy to pass over. However, if you see it, when you see it, you realize what a heavy matter it is to God to have good godly dads. I want you to see that this morning. It's in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 13. It says this, but the angel said to him, do not be afraid, Zachariah, for your prayer has been heard. And your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he'll be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared. I want to be clear, John's mission, primary mission as the gospels share, was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord, to help them to recognize when Christ came that he in fact was the Messiah. That was John. He was the forerunner of Christ. He was the proclaimer, the herald that came through before him saying, Christ is coming. Prepare your heart. Repent. The time has come.

It was his job to do that. But in the process of doing that, for that mission, God enabled him, it says, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children. It's in that heart change that lives are changed, that homes are changed, that families are changed. Dads have to step up, even if it means for us to look back. Let me explain what that means, because the word there, turn, literally means to make to turn towards. Now that's not good English, but it's good Greek.

[4 : 41] And the reality of what it means is, it was John's job was to help dads crane their neck back to where they belong, to make sure they focused on what they need to focus on. It gives the idea of something that is forgotten, something that is left behind, which means that God's concern was that there had been a turning away of the hearts of fathers for the children. But God's burden was that they love again. Now what a need we have today for that. It is a burden of the Lord to our hearts, to have our hearts in love with our families and toward our families. We live in a world that is pumping prosperity, work all hours of the night, whatever it takes, play ball, some other recreation until we drop, going and going and going. And if we're not careful before long, we'll neglect the very children that live right under our noses, even though we're dressing them well and even though we're playing them hard. So how do we, as the scripture refers, take the turn? Let's stop, look back

a minute and focus on what we are to do. And by the way, yesterday is gone.

There's nothing you can do about yesterday. If there's unforgiving sin from yesterday, you need to ask the Lord to forgive you. You need to repent of it and never do it again, whatever it is, in any scope of life. Yesterday is gone. You can't fix yesterday. Today is a new day. And if God gives us breath, tomorrow will be another day. And we can do something about that. So don't, don't lick your wounds this morning. Don't lament about something that you messed up on, that you really can't do anything about. Instead, let's look back so we can look ahead. How do we honor the Lord and take care of our kids? When I say our kids, I mean not only my own children, I mean the children that God has placed all around us. If you came from vacation Bible school just a couple of weeks ago, little rogue rats running everywhere. And what I noticed in a black light kind of setting where I couldn't even see their faces, they looked pretty eager to listen. And the response of that, as I shared earlier, was, as I shared a couple of weeks ago, was, was that many of them were celebrating the fact that God had given them salvation and they were sure to check that and others were continuing to talk to you. How do we stop and look back and focus on what we're to do? Give your children time.

Give them time. Again, not only your children, but other children that God has placed around you. The most precious thing that you can give your children is not toys, not ball, not trips, not education, not luxury items, but your time. They must have your time. And don't tell me you don't have any that's available because we each have 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It's not really about availability. It's about the economy of time and how important it is and how we spend our time. So what are you doing with it? A few years ago, Dawn and I attended a timeshare seminar. We, we did some of those early in our marriage and, and really considered it when we didn't have any money to do anything with. But thank God we didn't do that at the time. But, but we, we attended a few years ago and I'll be honest. We attended for the free nights. Okay. We listened to the spiel and, uh, it was interesting. Their biggest pitch was, you need to do this for your family. It was a nice place. They had a lot of good ideas. And they said, your family is worth this investment.

Now don't misunderstand me this morning. There's nothing wrong with taking vacations, staying in nice places. Matter of fact, there's something wrong with not doing it. You need to, you need to take time off.

[10:01] And there's nothing wrong with buying property and there's nothing wrong with RVs and there's nothing wrong with timeshare. Man, I've benefited from other people's blessings and I am very appreciative of it. You know, I mean, I am. So there's, there's nothing wrong with it.

However, don't you dare tell me that you have to do that to have time for your family. If what you're doing is setting aside a week or two weeks to spend time with your family, you're not doing enough. It don't take an exotic location to spend time with your family. It don't. Nothing wrong with spending time with your family in exotic places, but that's not what it takes. As a matter of fact, even if we do that, if that's all the time that we spend, it's not enough. The greatest investment we can make in our children is our time. But not only that, give them preparation.

Give them preparation. In other words, raise them up. Raise them up in the love and admonition of the Lord. Unless a father walks before his son showing him how to be a man of God, he's going to have a hard time knowing how to be a man of God. And unless a father walks before his daughter showing him what a man of God is, she'll never know what to look for to find one. Stu Weber wrote in his book, *Tender Warrior*, he shares a story of a 16-year-old boy who wrote an essay on what is a man. And for this 16-year-old boy, his father had abandoned him and he never had experienced the warmth of a truly understanding man in his life. And so he wrote this. He said, a real man is kind. A real man is caring. A real man walks away from silly macho fights. A real man helps his wife. A real man helps his kids when they're sick. A real man doesn't run from his problems. A real man sticks to his word and keeps his promises. A real man's honest. A real man's not in trouble with the law. That's pretty good wisdom from a 16-year-old boy. Let me tell you how the Shema puts it in Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 5-7. It said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children. And you shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise. In other words, prepare them and make them ready to make Christ the Lord of their lives.

I had the opportunity this week to meet with a mother and her 8-year-old child who was at camp and began to ask questions and wanted to talk to me. And so she came in and I began to share with her what it meant to give her life to Christ. And I got a little card that that kind of takes us through that. And it begins by saying that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And I said, have you ever done anything wrong? You know, sheepishly said yes. And I said, well, your mother has too. You know, so have I. But, you know, we've all done wrong. And we need to acknowledge that. We have a need there. And God wants us in the right relationship with Him. But when we do wrong, it separates us from God. Matter of fact, next scripture, the wages, the cost, the penalty of that sin is death. In other words, it separates us from God. And I drew this chasm. Many of you have seen me do that.

[13:58] Draw this chasm and write sin in the middle. See how this separates us and we can't come back to Him on our own. We can't do that. But the gift of God. And if I, if I give you a gift, what am I expecting in return? She's right. She said a thank you. She's right. She's definitely right. Because if we're bartering, if I expect a gift from you because I gave you that's not a gift, that's a trade. But a gift is something that's given. I've had people be generous and give wonderful gifts and I couldn't respond to that. I can't barter with that. You know how to respond to something like that. My mother told me a long time ago, she said, you just need to say thank you. And then thank the Lord for it. And so now regardless, I just say thank you. Because, I mean, how do you, you know, do I cry? Does that help?

You know, how do you, how do you show how much appreciation you have for what somebody does? Say thank you. So when God gives us this gift, what do we say thank you with? We say thank you with our lives. And God demonstrates His love for us that while we were yet sinners, He knows us. He knows us. He knows what we've done wrong.

He died for us. And that if we'll confess that Jesus is Lord and we'll believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, that we shall be saved. It's a commitment that He makes to us. If we'll commit to Him, He'll commit to us. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And as often happens in a conversation with somebody like that with an eight-year-old, she might have been like some of y'all this morning, already lost some interest halfway along the way, you know? And so picking up on that, I took that card like I most commonly do. And I told her mother, I said, this is what I want you to do. I want her to nail this down and know what she's doing before she ever does anything for the Lord. I said, so take this card home. And every day, every night, whenever it's convenient for you, 30 seconds to two minutes a day, not, don't belabor the point, don't bore with your theology, you know? 30 seconds to two minutes go over one of these verses. Just start at the top of this page and explain it. The next day, 30 seconds to two minutes, go through the next one. There's five verses on this sheet. I want you to write down two more. John 3, 16.

First John 1, 9. We confess our sins. He's faithful and just forgives us of our sins. And He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. I said, that's seven. I'll take you a week to do. Just 30 seconds to two minutes a day. You'll miss a day or two, by the way. And when you get done, start over and do it again. And when you get done, start over and do it again. Just a verse in one. Before long, that child will begin to finish your sentences. She'll know where you're going.

Now, God's already drawn her or she wouldn't have been asking questions. She didn't come up with that on her own. Romans 1 tells us that. God's drawing her. And as she becomes more attuned to the gospel message and the salvation message, she'll be drawn that much more.

[17:45] And I will tell you that in the coming days, weeks, possibly months, that little girl will probably make a decision for the Lord. I've never seen it any other way, quite honestly, in ministry. To just trust the Lord and good godly parents talking of those things when they sit in the house, when they walk by the way. That's in the car. Cut the radio off. When they lie down. When they lie down. Prepare them and make them ready to make Christ the Lord of their lives.

Listen. Listen. We cannot make that decision for them. It's not our decision to make. But we can usher them to Christ. Give them preparation. Lastly, give them love. Many fathers are afraid to show love. They're afraid to love. They're afraid to show love. And what it produces in response can be unlovely. Men, I want you to hear me this morning. You need to love your children affectionately. Don't be afraid to give your child a kiss or a hug. Many boys grow up not knowing how to be tender because they never saw a man tender. Many girls grow up going too far too early because they never had healthy, proper affection from their fathers. And so show them affection. I want to warn

you, we have allowed perversion to redefine affection.

And we need to take it back for the gospel's sake. Now many fathers are afraid to show healthy affection to their children. Or maybe they were never taught. Men, hear me. You can hug your son. Many girls spend years searching for affirmation, searching for acceptance, searching for affection because they never consistently received it from their fathers. Healthy, godly affection is needed. So love your children affectionately. Second, love your children verbally. Let them hear it. Men, it's the macho thing never to say I love you. And that's of the devil. It's also of the devil to tell too many people you love them. But that's a whole other sermon. But the great theologian, Reba McIntyre, sang these lyrics.

The greatest man I never knew lived just down the hall. And every day we'd say hello but never touched at all. He was in his paper. I was in my room.

[21 : 10] How was I to know? He thought I hung the moon. The greatest man I never knew came home late every night. He never had too much to say.

Too much was on his mind. I never really knew him. And now it seems so sad. Everything he gave us took all he had.

Then the days turned into years and the memories to black and white. He grew cold like an old winter wind blowing across my life.

The greatest words I never heard, I guess I'll never hear. The man I thought could never die has been dead almost a year. Oh, he was good at business.

But there was business left to do. He never said he loved me. I guess he thought I knew. I don't want my kids to ever wonder if their daddy loved them.

[22 : 17] And I don't want your kids to ever wonder if their daddy loved them. Show your love for them. Act out your love for them.

And love them verbally. Say it to them. As well, love your children cheerfully.

Love them with the love of the Lord. Laugh. Be silly. Have fun. The video of me dancing with Abby in the daddy-daughter dance has been seen by too many people.

She asked me nine months ago at least to do a fun mash-up dance with her for the daddy-daughter dance. And I said, get it to me soon.

And in classic Abby fashion, I got it about 24 hours ahead of the reception. We were to keep it a secret from her mother.

[23 : 19] And so I could not watch it, the video, and listen to the music in front of her. And so most of the instructions that I was instructed about the songs was listened to as I drove back and forth between Pickens and Clemson in wedding preparation.

I would have been a whole lot better on the dance floor if I'd only known. But that's what she wanted.

And there's nothing wrong with that fun dance. Dudes, I want you to listen to me. Don't always be the straight man. There's a time for serious and there's a time for fun.

And don't always be the fun guy either, by the way. But anyway, work at these things. I'm going to give you a disclosure. You're not going to get it all right.

You're not. You're going to drop the ball. You're going to mess up. But let's work at it.

[24 : 31] Diligently in the Lord. And we'll run the risk of being a Hall of Fame dad. In 1993, they remodeled the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

And when they were remodeling it, some workers removed a display case and found an old photograph tucked behind the case. It was a photo of a stocky, friendly-looking man in a baseball uniform that had Sinclair Oil written across the front of it.

Stapled to the picture was a note that said, you were never too tired to play ball. On your days off, you helped build the Little League field.

You always came to watch me play. You were a Hall of Fame dad. I wish I could share this moment with you. And a reporter got a hold of the story and researched it.

The man in the picture was Joe O'Donnell. He was a great hitter in that league that he was in in his day. And he died at the age of 50 in 1966.

[25 : 43] And 22 years later, his son, Pat, slid the note and the picture behind the display in a private induction ceremony for his father in the Hall of Fame. After Pat was located, his story was shared and he threw out the first pitch in 2009 in Cooperstown on Father's Day.

And that note and that picture and that explanation is on display in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

Now, I don't care that my daughters ever do anything like that, but I want to be a Hall of Fame dad. And I want you to be.

How? By giving them time. By preparing them. By loving them. And as the text says, turning your heart toward your children.

And with an effort to do that, mixed in with the grace of God, we might just be able to be Hall of Fame dads for our children.

[26 : 57] that's my prayer for you today. And it's my prayer for me as well. You know, that starts with a personal relationship with Christ.

Because, Dad, there's nothing you can share with somebody else that you ain't got yourself. And some of you know the greatest burden that I have in ministry is that there might be dads and husbands that come to church just following their family and never quite take in the message themselves.

It is a nightmare for me that somebody could sit and listen to me preach multiple times and never give their heart and life to the Lord Jesus.

There's only so much I can do about that. But I'm telling you, men, women, boys and girls, if you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm thankful today that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

He'll take you as you are and make you what you need to be. Don't wait until you get it fixed. You won't get it fixed. You can't. You were made for Him and you've lived apart from Him.

[28 : 29] There's no way you can fix this yourself. Today, as we stand and sing, if God's leading you, you come. Pastor, I need to give my life to Christ today.

Maybe you're here and you've done that privately. You've never done it publicly. And the reality is, by Jesus' example and by His commission, He tells us not only to make that public but to do that through baptism.

And if you've never done that, you've missed the first step of obedience after a private decision for Christ. And you need to do that. You come.

We're not doing it this morning but we'll line it up. We'll talk about it. Maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church. I'm thankful how God is moving in this church and moving in the lives of many.

Just spoke to someone before the 9 o'clock worship hour about the possibility to join this church and how God continues to move. It's just a blessing to see. And so if God's drawing you this morning, I encourage you to come as God leads you.

[29 : 29] We'll guide you in that. Maybe you're here and whether you're a dad or a mom or a knucklehead kid and you realize the family dynamic is not what it needs to be and some of that is your fault.

And today, you say, Lord, I want you to help me to be what I need to be for my family.

And I'm thankful that He'll forgive you with repentance and He'll lead you from this day forward.

Let's be diligent with what God's invested to us.

Not just for today, but every day. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you, Lord, for the love that you have for us and I ask today, dear God, you'll lead us to simply be obedient to follow you any way you'd have us to go.

In Jesus' precious name, amen. Thank you.