

A Necessary Change to Ignite the Church to the Next Level

Thousands of years ago, the Apostle Paul observed an absence of spiritual fathers; we have the same gap facing us today. Thousands of teachers, instructors, lecturers and pontificators surround us. Yet it seems that very few genuine fathers exist among us (1 Cor. 4:15).

True spiritual fathers are the very thing we need to move securely into the next level of health and power as a generation. This is especially true because the body of Christ is not built on a family of slaves, but on those who know how to live securely in sonship. The power of sonship becomes magnified when pure spiritual fathering takes place.

A spiritual father does more than teach or give lessons. He cultivates an environment of identity empowerment by developing powerful relationships. A true father's desire is for those around him to excel beyond his reach and to surpass his level of growth. His agenda is never control nor limiting, but an empowering presence of love that helps others gain confidence in their identity and calling.

No spiritual father needs to call himself father. His sons naturally do all the referencing of his role for him.

The Disappointing Search

I searched for many years for spiritual fathers in my life. I traveled to different cities and went far out of my way to connect with someone I hoped could be a fathering presence in my life. In knowing that sonship was key to my development, my heart longed for the presence of a father.

Unfortunately, I wept in continual disappointment, as the connection was just not what God has in mind, or the person I

sought to build relationship with had no ability to be a father. Most men of God that I networked with were just too overloaded to even consider the concept.

In my prayer with God, I vented to Him often. I cried out, "God you know my heart's desire. Why is there such a desert when it comes to the fathering need of this generation? What do you expect me to do?"

As I tuned my ear to listen, I felt the Holy Spirit give me this one simple prompting.

"What are you going to do about this? Will you let this become an excuse to not move forward, or will you be the change for the next generation?"

My response to this thought was, "But how can I do that?"

"You cannot let the lack of fathers in the world hold you back from learning what it means to be a son. The only way you will learn to be a spiritual father to the next generation is by simply learning to grow in your own sonship."

So I decided to be a part of the solution—to grow in my own sonship while encouraging others to do the same. My heart burned that we'd make the transition from slave-master leadership into spiritual fathering empowerment. This is the change that is needed to ignite the church to the next level. Sons and fathers must rise up and meet each other.

So in this decades-long process, I learned why we lack true spiritual fathering. Here are a few of the reasons we keep experiencing this spiritual vacuum in our generations.

1. No one fathered them. This is by far the biggest reason—we have no healthy model of replication. We often duplicate what we experienced, unless we have a new model and demonstration of health. Without demonstration, even teaching on the subject will not move us into power of spiritual fathering.

Most of us have had to do ministry and life on our own. We were not equipped to empower people because we are not empowered. Many grew up in homes that were unloving and restricting, so the precept of spiritual fathering was not understood.

2. Spiritual fathering is not seen as a value. Structure, programs and presentation take priority over quality relationship and investment into people's lives.

Modern church culture becomes more concerned about the overall image and presentation of its platform than anything else. We've all been guilty of it to some extent. In the process, we lost the value of leading a ministry as a family, because the machine took over.

Most people run from the concept of fathering, because it takes a lot more risk and investment to pour into someone than to just talk at congregants from a stage. Relationships are messy and any spiritual father knows it takes work and investment. There are betrayals, fallouts and messy situations that come into play. But if fathering is not a value, organizations will continue to follow the machine of work and shallow church will be the name of the game.

3. We have spiritual orphans leading the family of God. To be a father, you must first learn to be a son, otherwise, orphan living will become the default setting in leadership. Orphans live from survival, not empowerment, because their identity has been shaped by their fatherlessness.

Orphans have no time to consider fathering, because they are too busy slaving in their personal mission. Yet at the end of the day, the church is not an orphanage, but a family. We have to learn to operate as a family.

Yet people who come into the body have terrible family references. How can we father them if we ourselves have unaddressed orphan living in our own lives?

At the end of the day, we don't replicate what we want, but who we are. Those we lead receive the impartation of the ways we carry. Those who did not have spiritual fathers and do not grow into sonship will struggle to authentically replicate healthy fathering connections to others.

In fact, I have watched people attempt to be spiritual fathers who did not carry sonship in their own life. It became incredibly awkward. They walked around naming who their sons were and many of them even ignored their biological children in the quest of fathering others. Most of the time spiritual fathering has more control than empowerment anyway.

4. A rejection mindset breeds very insecure leaders. A father empowers. A slave-master controls.

Insecure leaders, driven by a rejection mindset do not know how to empower people in their identities and calling.

Those who live as slaves instead of sons end of leading people out of their own insecurities. Slaves tend to cover up their insecurities and this manifests in how they lead people.

Slave leaders do not want people rising up and surpassing them. They hate not feeling 100 percent in control, so they use anger, pressure tactics, manipulation and control. Things get done, but people become clamped around the fist of a slave-master, rather than being empowered to leap into their own calling.

Insecure leaders are concerned about building their own mission and causes, not the whole body of Christ. Their conversations stem around what they are doing and what effects themselves, rather than constantly seeing the big picture and appreciating what God is doing in others.

A key sign of an insecure slave-master is that they see a lot of situations around them as a threat to their personal authority, control and success. Therefore, releasing people

into their identity and calling is only done to a certain extent.

5. Too many sons are not willing to step up and submit to people in authority. This is not a bashing session on leadership, because in order for healthy fathering to take place, sons must rise up and be willing to enter a fathering relationship. Many people today have been wounded by someone in authority. It seems that every other person I talk to has had intense trauma and emotional abuse from a spiritual leader in their life.

Masses react to this abuse by running from church all together. Sometimes I don't blame them, because church relationships can be incredibly dysfunctional if the church family does not pursue health.

On the other hand, those who have been damaged by leadership can often see any exercise of authority as abuse, simply because their past wounds are projecting onto the current situation.

After one particular teaching I gave, a woman stood in the back and yelled at me. I had taught on breaking free of dysfunctional church relationships and I could tell it stirred up some pain in her. As she yelled, I knew her hurt was not from me, but from a past leader who had deeply wounded her.

Just because we are wounded by one father role does not mean a healthy one cannot be found. Sons *and* fathers must both come together for this to work.

Rebellion will keep a son in slavery by preventing them from the humility and teachability they need to thrive. Only in submitting to authority do we show ourselves trustworthy under God to handle more authority ourselves.

6. Spiritual fathering has been abused. Because of this, many people stay away from it completely. Years ago, a pastor heard

me preach on the love of Father God. He pulled me aside and shared with me his concern about me emphasizing the role of fathers.

As I listened, he shared about self-appointed spiritual fathers who controlled people in the church, to the extent that every choice they made and every decision in life had to be run by the approval of their father figure.

Decades ago, there was a fathering movement that got out of control. Some called it the shepherding movement. What started as a genuine desire for accountability and covenant relationship developed major dysfunctions. Control issues, power abuse and money manipulation left a stench in the nose of many.

This is primarily what happens when people attempt to be spiritual fathers without taking the long journey of learning to be a son. There is no shortcut to the process.

Unfortunately, too many churches today operate from an abusive pattern, yet it is very subtle and conniving. Pull back the curtain on private meetings and the undercurrent operations and you will find more political control and manipulating than you'll find in Washington D.C. politics. Spiritual fathering can turn into cult leadership quickly if there is not a healthy environment established.

But just because there is abuse out there doesn't mean there is not still a biblical value of spiritual fathering that needs to be embraced. People need genuine relationships today more than ever and my prayer is that many will respond to the call to walk in health as we learn to live as the powerful family of God that Christ has called us to be.

Question: What factors do you think hinder true spiritual fathering from taking place? {eo}