

Turning the Hearts of Fathers to Their Children

Fatherhood is the foundation of the heart and love of God. And that is what is missing from this generation.

All the insurmountable problems we are facing as a nation today go back to the home, which is the greatest centralized force in any society. Lack of strong, fatherly leadership in the home is the precursor to a nation's demise. Thank God for all the moms who have done it successfully on their own, but that never was heaven's design.

"Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6, NLT).

The Old Testament ends in a rather unusual way, with an abrupt prophetic promise and warning. In one sense the verses act as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments, which is to be expected. But of all the ways to end the Old Testament I would not have expected a description of Elijah the prophet's ministry to be "and he will turn of the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers." To this description is attached the terrible consequences of the failure of hearts to turn—"lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

A recent survey revealed that 98 percent of imprisoned men have contact with their mothers, while only 2 percent have contact with their fathers. Why such a disparity? Isn't it because men are more prone to be hard-hearted (Col. 3:19, 21), and there is an increased risk of their hard-heartedness producing an irreparable and damaged father-son relationship?

Women generally are not hard-hearted in that way.

It is men who find it difficult to forgive, to cry, to say the words "I love you," to show even a little emotion and affection, and to express the tender things that are in their hearts and how they really feel.

A few years ago the Department of Health and Human Services posted these statistics:

- Boys without fathers in their lives are 63 percent more likely to run away from home and 37 percent more likely to use drugs.
- Boys and girls without father involvement are twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to go to jail, and nearly four times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems.

Establishing a strong God-given identity and worth from a very tender age is vital to our children's overall health and effectiveness in life.

Part of a son's identity is established by the constant love and affirmation the parents give him. The father especially is to be a strong affirming voice in his son's life. His masculinity, courage and strength should be continually spoken to. A father should not only correct and discipline his son, but show constant approval and pleasure with him. "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). When a child is valued and esteemed, it increases his chances a hundredfold to be successful in life.

Fathers are foundation layers. They establish their son's (and their daughter's) identity, value and worth, so that a child will never question their father's love for them. Without this assurance sons can grow up hurt, angry and confused, not knowing who they really are, and where they are going. The father's stamp of approval on his son becomes the foundation of his life, his identity, and his future.

Isn't it interesting that even the sexual identity of the son is created by the father? His seed determines the gender of the child.

A child's identity is shaped at a very young age—the way they see themselves, the way God sees them, the way they view themselves in relation to others, their perspective and outlook on life, their expectations of who they can become, and their future place and influence in the world all are formed early in their life through the establishing of their identity. Fathers are the key. Many fathers have little to no understanding of the vital and indispensable role they play in stamping their signature on their son's identity.

"This is My beloved Son" are words that mean far more than identifying the gender of your son. There is an impartation of possession and belonging that is communicated through those words. He is not just anybody's son. He is your very own son—bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. Your blood runs through his veins.

At a very young age sons and daughters adore their fathers. They see him as a superhero, a faithful provider and a strong protector. Through their impressionable young eyes you are the image of God to them—a very present help in time of trouble, a savior who can rescue them out of any real or potential danger.

I remember when I was in fifth grade how a bully and his entourage picked a fight with me at school. How helpless and intimidated I felt when they approached me on the playground! He punched me in the face, but I did not fight back. Knowing, however, that they had to walk past my house after school to get home, I got my dad to come out in the front yard with me and wait for them. A rush of strength and confidence came into me when I stood next to my dad. When I finally saw the bully with his gang I taunted him and challenged him to fight me right there and then. With my dad standing near, this bully

wanted no part of me. This is how most children feel about their dad.

Children, especially sons, identify themselves through their father. Many children are limited because their fathers have never spoken to their identity and defined them. When you identify your son as “my son,” or “my precious son,” or “my beloved son in whom I am well pleased,” or “my son who brings unspeakable joy to my heart,” you are putting your own signature of approval and value on them.

How have you defined your children? What do you call them? What adjectives do you use? How often do you affirm them? Their identity and how they see themselves is usually in proportion to the impartation of spoken blessing and love they receive from their fathers.

As fathers, we need to love and affirm our children, but we also need to teach our children what God says about them, and who they are in Christ. Their esteem and worth is primarily derived from the high price and great sacrifice Jesus paid to save us.

Our children’s worth and esteem must have their roots in knowing that God loves them just the way they are and that His love is not based on their performance or behavior. As fathers, our primary responsibility is to exemplify this heart of our heavenly Father toward our children.

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