

EFC

June 18, 2023

Father's Day Message: "Who's Building Your House?"

Good morning English Fellowship Church. My name is Jeremy, and I'm one of the Pastors here. We are pausing our "Big Story. Bigger God." series for a few weeks. Today is Father's Day, and I want to give a special message for fathers this morning. Then, starting next Sunday, Pastor John Lennon will be back with us for several weeks, and he'll preach through a series on prayer: "Prayer – a Relational Conversation with God" while my family and I are travelling.

Pray.

One of the things I enjoy about being a dad is that I get to tell ridiculous "dad jokes" that make my kids laugh and cringe at the same time.

"What did the ocean say to the beach?" "Nothing, it just waved."

"What do you call a factory that makes okay products?" "A satisfactory."

"What did Baby Corn say to Mama Corn?" "Where's Pop Corn?"

"Why don't eggs tell jokes? They'd crack each other up."

As enjoyable as that is (at least for me), being a dad is obviously far more enjoyable and challenging.

As fathers, we make a lasting impact on our children. Much of who I am is due, at least in part, to the impact my father had on me. Things like: I'm pretty handy with projects and repairs – my dad taught me much of that; showing respect to everyone – that's how my dad treated people; choosing to do the right thing even when it's difficult – saw my dad do that more than once; being grumpy when someone doesn't act with responsibility – yup, got that not so good trait from him, too. I'm thankful for my dad, and all dads who take their role seriously. There is no denying the fact that fathers make a profound impact on their children, which means that fatherhood is one of the most important things we ever do.

Today, I'm going to speak directly to fathers. We have been given a great privilege to be fathers, for God has entrusted to us one of His image bearers. We have been given a unique privilege and gift, to be enjoyed as well as to be taken seriously.

While some of what I will say is directly aimed at men who are married to the mother of their children and share daily life with their family, I realize not all fathers are in this situation. I believe that you, also, will find what the Bible says useful as you think about your role as a father. Every father, regardless of current situation or past choices, is called to fully engage as completely as possible in the lives of his children. If you are married, remain married and prioritize a healthy marriage and family. If you are no longer (or never were) married to the mother of your children, your situation may require more creativity, but you are no less called by God to be the godly and engaged father of your children to the fullest extent possible.

I think every father desires to bless his children and see them grow up to be good people of character – and every Christian father desires them to grow up to be godly men and women. This is a high calling. Indeed, it is far higher than we can navigate on our own! But fortunately, we are not alone.

In fact, if we want our efforts to raise our children to have lasting blessing and good impact in their lives, there is only one way to do so. The Psalm we'll begin with this morning tells us that secret.

Psalm 127:1-5

A SONG OF ASCENTS. OF SOLOMON. Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

When I think about that first verse, I often think of projects and work I dedicate my effort to building. But it struck me deeply when I realized that the Hebrew word for "house" is used not only for physical buildings, but also for families! In the Bible we hear of "the house of David" or "the house of Judah" referring to families.

So, this verse is saying, "Unless the LORD builds the family, our efforts are in vain."

Fathers, what does it mean for God to build our families? How can the LORD build your family?

Foundationally, for God to establish our families and help them grow into something enduring and good is a gift of grace. We can't force God to do this, and we certainly don't deserve it. But if we ask Him, if we invite Him to be Lord of our family and place them into His hands, He is gracious and kind.

Then, trusting that God does indeed desire to do good to our children and knows how to take care of them, we depend on Him in faith.

Christian faith is a verb – an action word. If we are trusting God with the care of our family and children, we will take up the tools God has given us to work in their lives in line with His work.

Illustration – doctor says to change aspect of diet because it will help our blood pressure; faith believes he knows what he's talking about, and then makes the changes he directs us to make.

In the Bible, God has given parents tools we can take up in faith as we parent our children. Here are three major themes or tools God gives us, so we can depend on Him in faith to build up our children. They are: lead by example; actively teach and instruct them; and discipline them with care.

First, if we want God to build our children up in a lasting and good way, we need to lead by example. Fathers, seek to constantly grow to be the kind of person yourself that you would like your children to be.

Do you want them to love God with all their heart? Grow to love God with your whole heart, too. Instructive that a passage in Deuteronomy 6 begins with loving God, before it commands us to teach our children. Let me begin reading in verse 4.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children.... (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

We'll get to the teaching part in a bit, but order is important here. You can't honestly and with integrity teach your children to love God if you yourself don't love Him.

Proverbs 20:7 makes a similar point: "The righteous who walks in his integrity - blessed are his children after him!" They'll be blessed for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is that they will be impacted by your own example.

One of the things I really admire about my dad is that he was a man of his word, even if it cost him. Electrical quote. Not only has his example impressed upon me the importance of being a man of integrity, but my children also have been impacted by his example.

Another area that our example will greatly impact our children, fathers, is in our marriages, and how we treat our wives. Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...." Fathers, you have an important opportunity to show your children what a godly husband is like. You are modelling for your daughters what they will look for in a husband; you are modelling for your sons what they will likely act like as a husband someday. Fathers, how you treat their mother is one of the most powerful gifts you can give your children.

Again, I realize some of you are in different situations: if you aren't married to the mother of your children, application is different for you, but not irrelevant. How you treat their mother will still be a model for them. Do you treat her with respect and dignity? Are you kind to her? Do you pray for her?

One of the great ways we must walk by faith as we trust God to build our families is to lead by example.

The second way we walk by faith as we trust God to build our families is that fathers must teach and instruct their children. Let's go back to Deuteronomy 6 again, to get a few ideas about this.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Fathers, we are commanded (along with our wives) to teach our children God's Word. The impression I get from this passage is that there is no bad time to talk to your children about God and His Word.

Looking at the stars, learning about biology, driving through Ecuador's beautiful mountains, after you've been to church together, and on and on. Open your eyes, pay attention – the world endlessly points to God.

This can also be more formal – perhaps at meal times.

My mom and dad used to teach us regularly – family devotions at breakfast or dinner; memorizing Scripture together. Our family does these things as well – Sara and I in partnership.

Resources:

- Read the Bible together!
- “Big Beliefs: Introducing your Family to Big Truths (David R. Helm)
- Fighter Verses (with our church family)
- Missionary biographies
- Search google for Christian apologetics resources (Biola University’s bookstore, Stand to Reason, Answers in Genesis, Lee Strobel)
- Raising a Modern Day Knight (Robert Lewis)
- Bringing Up Boys; Bringing Up Girls (James Dobson)

There are lots of resources and methods to approach it. But whatever you do, teach your children of God and His Word – diligently. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 “For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

And you yourself need to study, if you will be able to teach your children.

If God is to build your family, fathers, you must lead by example, and teach them diligently. Finally, fathers, you must also discipline your children with godly care.

Discipline is often seen in a negative light, because it has not always been carried out in a godly and appropriately manner (and because sinful human nature is opposed to God’s design). Discipline should be understood at times as appropriate consequences to help correct misbehavior; discipline is also simply training and correction when a child simply does not know better.

Example: My parents required an apology when I mistreated a player on the soccer field.

Either way, it is always to be done for the good of the child, and never to their harm. We should never be physically or emotionally or psychologically harmful to our children when we discipline them, but always loving and purposeful. Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

But not disciplining our children is to their harm as well. An undisciplined child is being harmed by their parents, as they will not learn and grow as they need to.

Proverbs 19:18 “Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.”

Proverbs 3:11-12 “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Hebrews 12:5-11 “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate

children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Fathers, I hope you want God to establish your family, to build up your children into godly men and women of character, who leave an impact on this world.

But fathers, this is not an easy calling for the lazy or fearful. To be a godly father requires that we be men, as God defines it: strong and gentle; full of conviction and compassion; uncompromising yet approachable; sacrificially loving and wisely disciplining; bold and courageous; protecting and providing. And above all, dedicated to God with your whole life.

We need to be godly men, not the abusive machismo man that is all too often championed in parts of society. And not the sissified, passive, distracted, disengaged man championed by other parts of society. We need to be engaged, with conviction and compassion, fully depending on God and following Him courageously in faith as we father our children. We need to be men, and teach our boys to be men, and show our girls what men are.

It will cost you your time and energy, and you’ll need to set aside selfish pursuits. But it is totally worth it. This is for the eternal good of your children’s souls – and the souls of your grandchildren after them, and the generations to come.

Fathers, you have been given a great gift and a great responsibility. Love God, love your wife, and love your children. Depend upon God, pray to Him to build your family, and follow Him by faith. Leaving a legacy of godly children is one of the most valuable things you can do in this life, for it makes an eternal impact.

To all you fathers, who by faith take this call to true fatherhood seriously, thank you. There isn’t much in this world as amazing and powerful as a father who honors God as he fathers his children.