

In week one of this series, we started out defining what manhood is, defining masculinity. And we said that God created men and women equal and yet very distinct. And if you don't believe me, I think all you need to do is look at small children and you can see that, although they're equal, they're very distinct in how they operate and what they do. Boys will build things and knock them over; girls will take two objects and make them friends. And that's pretty much universal. So we've kind of defined it: What is masculinity? What does it mean to be a man? Do women need to be more masculine? Do men need to be more feminine? We kind of answered those questions. And what we said is that it's clean in Scripture that men are to be cultivators, builders. It's what God created them to be. But because of sin and because of the fall, everything that man has been charged to cultivate will at times war against him. But it's in that difficulty that God teaches the man the gospel. So that was week one. And last week, I preached like an hour and ten minutes on the man as a husband. It is by far the most complex, and it is by far the most difficult, because God comes to the man and says, "You will love your wife like I love the church in that I gave Christ for her." So we talked about our role as husbands to be the initiators in our home across all lines. Because Jesus didn't die for the church in response to the church, but simply because He loved the church. And so, we love our wives, not in response to what they do for us, but because we are the initiators. And we talked about nourishing, and we talked about cherishing and we talked about all those things. And now I want to move on and talk about men as fathers, and it's not complex. Now, it's not easy, but it's not complex.

So let's look at Ephesians 6, we'll pick it up in verse 1. It's really interesting how it plays out here. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Now, let me point out a couple of things. The Bible over and over again is going to line out how God created the universe to operate rhythmically, and you've got it happening here, because the progression of what happens with children is they simply start out obeying, and if you grow them and pour into them, it ends in honor. But I'm not looking for honor in my six month old. That's not what I'm looking for. Obedience is what I'm looking for. And then obedience should lead into honor. But I want to point out something really interesting to you. He starts by addressing the children, and he says to them, "Obey your parents," husband and wife. Then he moves on and says, "Honor your father and mother." Once again, he addresses both parents. When he's talking to the children, he addresses the parents as a singular unit. But when he moves on and begins to address the home, what's the first word in verse 4? Fathers. So I'll continue to push like I have this entire series that men do not have the sole responsibility in the home but the leading one. Because how the home's wired here, God says, "fathers" not "parents," not "fathers and mothers" but "fathers." So I'll continue to say that, although my wife, Lauren, has some responsibility in the rearing of our children and the ordering of our home, if Jesus knocks on the door and she answers, He'll go, "Good morning, Lauren. Where's Matt?" And He's not asking where I am because He needs to know.

"Fathers,..." so fathers who are to take the leading role. It's a very interesting, right-out-of-the-gate command "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,..." There's only two commands here to fathers. That's it, two commands. Of all the commands that you can unpack, of all the things you can command a father to do, why is it right out of the gate, "Hey, don't provoke your children to anger." Let me try to explain because I think this is so big. Wherever you have an authority that is intrinsically broken itself, which all of us are, because it's a fallen world. So what I mean by that is every man in here, every father in here, we've got places of insecurity in our soul, we get tired, we could get to that place where we have a short fuse, if we feel disrespected, someone has to die. I mean, "You can steal our car, burn down our house, but

don't you disrespect me." Respect is just such a huge thing for men. So you've got a man who's got those frailties, and then you've got a sinful subordinate underneath the sinful authority.

Well, when those two things collide, both of them have sinful tendencies, the illegitimate child that's born out of that is anger. So what's he's saying here is, "Fathers, be careful when you get disrespected, when there's questions, when you've got a smart-mouthed kid, when you've got issues in your house, be careful not to provoke them to more anger. And let me tell you why this is so huge. It's so huge because anger, more than any other emotion, completely trumps and removes your ability to feel or think rationally or sanely about anything. And if you'll think back on your life to some of the dumbest stuff that's ever come out of your mouth, I would guarantee you that it came out when you were angry. Because when anger is owning your soul, you cannot comprehend, you cannot understand grace, you cannot see tomorrow, you cannot think that this will pass. It deadens the soul. And so if I could make this as simple as I can, it's going, "Dad, don't poke your kids with stick. Don't do that." Don't poke them with a stick, because even Superparent, even if you're the greatest parents in the world, if you've got a cape on that has "Dobson" on the back of it, there are going to be moments and run-ins and collisions with your children where their heart's going to be angered towards you. And listen, I'm in no way trying to remove your authority, your call to discipline or your command to preach, teach and work truth out in your home. I'm not saying don't make your kids angry. I'm saying avoid avoidable anger. Because if my kid ever tries to quote this text to me, I am whipping 'em. "You're not supposed to provoke me to anger." "You haven't been provoked. (Spank, spank, spank....) Now, you're provoked!!!" That's what I'm talking about; you can't do that. That's what you can't do. So the text says, "Fathers, as much as you can avoid anger, avoid it. You've got to try to circumvent it, you've got to try to cut it out of their lives because it will destroy them. And if we had time in here, I guarantee you there's some grown men in here who had fathers who would provoke them and provoke them and provoke them to anger, and even now, on darker days, that anger owns you, even now you'll find yourself just raging on a certain day over nothing. You can't even put your finger on it. Anger is unbelievably devastating to the human soul. So it says that fathers have a responsibility to not provoke this in their children.

So, what are some ways that we battle this? I'm going to be real careful about giving you, "This is what you should do." What I more want to do is put an umbrella over you and let you work it out with your family, you go sit down your wife and go "How do we do this?" But let me tell you some things that I just don't think you can argue. I think you've got to be careful of volume. You can't scream at your kids. And listen, I know you're like, "That's the only way they hear." No, I don't think it is. I think the higher the volume, the less chance of sanity. I mean, do you think they listen more when you're screaming at the top of your lungs and they're screaming back at you? I'm guessing that that's not an intelligent, sane conversation, to which most parent's reply, "Who said my kid was intelligent and sane?" Well, I don't know about that. But I'm telling you try to defuse it, try to take ownership of where you're to blame. I think more and more fathers should be going into children's bedrooms at night before they go to bed, after the big explosion and go, "I handled that wrong. Now, what you did was not right and it was not excusable, but I handled it wrong. And I need to ask for your forgiveness. Will you forgive me?" And once again, we can keep going. Some of you are like, "You cannot show weakness in front of them. Nuh-uh. You are going to get someone killed, Chandler." But it's funny. It's in that simple weakness that love is so clearly seen. And I think you can teach more in that than you could ever teach with volume. So if your kid pops off to you, there tends to be this natural response to let the punishment go well beyond the Geneva Convention. In that moment that you feel disrespected, there's just this, "Oh yeah? Well here's your punishment: you can't breathe for three days. You're done. Quit it. Suck it up. You're done." And I think you have to be a little bit prepared that twelve year olds are going to act like twelve year olds and you don't get to respond like another twelve year old. You've got to think through, you've got to be prepared, don't let it surprise you because it shouldn't surprise you. Specifically, I'll give you some examples. Our whole role as fathers to our daughters is to dote on them and tell them how beautiful they are and how amazing they are and how great they are. And so what happens the first ten years of their life is they're like, "I'm the center of the universe." Then they turn 13, and you're like, "You ain't the center of the universe. Why's my daughter so

selfish? She's just acting like the whole thing's about her." Well yeah, you've been teaching her that since she was born, and it was right and good and necessary. And now, it's right and good and necessary to teach her that she's not. I told you it's not easy. Don't yell.

And then I'll tell you another thing. If you're married, you'll be able to follow me here. If you're single, I don't know that you will if you're single. It's been too long for me. There are times when Lauren and I have been in a fight where I've felt wounded by her, so I'll jab her soul. Like everybody in here knows the one thing to say to who they're with that will absolutely...like it's not a grenade, it's an atomic bomb. It's like, "If you touch that, if you say that, if you do that..." Like it's kind of been "Don't ever go here. Say whatever else you want, but don't address this." But in that moment where you feel disrespected, you just jab it at that spot. You know what I'm talking about or you're a liar or you're not married, you're a single guy. In that, my fear that we need to watch for is our little creativity and our wit and our sarcasm can never be thrown onto our children. I think we've got to be very, very careful about those little jabs. Be really careful not to jab at your children.

So, this is the big one: "Father's don't provoke your children to anger." Don't do it. In fact, I'll go a step farther, and I think it's the father's role to take some preemptive measures against anger in the hearts of our children. And I honestly think the best way to do that is time, creative time. And I don't think you have to be a genius; I just think you have to let your little boy or girl get their pajamas on and then say, "Hey, instead of going to bed, hop in the car," and take them out, find some donut joint and get them a sugary donut and just talk with them about life. Something as simple as that says, "I care for you, I love you, I value you," and begins to build in them security. It's not complex; it's just very easy. Just don't buy into the group mob thing. I think you have to find individual time for your children. That's a preemptive measure against anger. And so I already have conversations with Audrey that I know she doesn't quite understand, but I'm just looking five years down the road. I'm not worried about today. We talk all the time. Like, "Who wants you to be happier, you or me?" And right now, it's easy. It's me. I want her to be happier than she wants to be. And so I want her to know that. "Who's looking out for your happiness? Who wants you to be happy?" And I want her thinking, "Daddy. Daddy wants me to be happier than I want to be. Daddy wants more for me than I even want for myself." And I want that in her head. I don't even think she comprehends it right now, but when she's eleven, I hope some of it's still there. I know some of you are thinking "Eleven year olds? Rookie. Good luck with that, buddy." But I'm trying to lay a foundation. Don't provoke your children to anger. Don't do it. It's devastating to the soul.

Let's look at what he says next. What he says next is what we would figure he would say. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Once again, we'll talk about what this looks like in terms of umbrella statements, but I want to attack something in our culture. It seems in our culture that the woman's role is to raise the children and the man's role is like recreational coordinator or something. And the woman has to discipline and she has to shape, but the man's job is to make shin guards and coach the team. And I want to stress to you that the Scriptures put the weight of discipline on the father and not on the mother. Scriptures say that discipline is handled best and received best by children when it's the father that does the disciplining. That's just what the Scriptures teach, so men need to take an active role in discipline in their homes.

Now, the Bible doesn't leave us hanging here; it's really going to get into some detail about how we discipline and train our children in the instruction of the Lord. And some of it will sting, but let's go over to Psalm 78. We'll pick it up in verse 1, "Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done." I love this text because it's about as umbrella as it gets. Here's what it's saying. It falls on the father to make known the grandeur and the goodness and the beauty of God in His home, particularly with their

children. So here's the best way I can unpack it for you. It is our job to continually take everything that is good, everything that is right, everything that is enjoyable, everything that is lovely and bring it back for our children to its place of origin, God, the creator God. So an example I've used here historically is when my daughter was two, she had this thing for pink. I mean, everything had to be pink. Bowls, cups, clothes, everything was pink. And so, we has constant conversations about where pink came from. "Who made pink? Well, God made pink. Well why would God make pink?" She's only to so, "I don't know." We had a long talk repeatedly about "how amazing is God that, out of nowhere, He just thought up the color pink in order to communicate Himself to you. So that joy that you're feeling, that beauty you're seeing, that's God teaching you. How much does God love you, how beautiful is God that this is what He does?" And we try to do that with everything. I mean, anything that is good, anything that is right, anything that is spectacular, God's going to get the credit for that. Even difficult times, He's given credit for. "How much does He love us that He would let us grow and learn through this?" So our hope is that as you ask Audrey or Reid, 20-30 years from now, "Tell me about your house. Tell me about your home, growing up," what we want, whether they believe or not, is our kids to say, "God was central. God was what he talked about. God is who he loved. He gave God credit for everything. I mean, I couldn't even eat a piece of chocolate, I couldn't play in the pool without my dad going, 'How amazing is God that He gave us water slides? How good is He in that?'" And let me tell you where we've erred. Let me tell you my problem historically with fundamentalists, and I don't mean that in the fun way. My historical problem is they make God a policeman. Think about what this does to anybody. They go, "God hates liars." Uh oh! Guess who He hates. Everyone. So when the message to your kids is "God doesn't like this and God doesn't like that and God doesn't appreciate that and don't do that because God will do this" and that is the umbrella message to your children, are you teaching them to run towards Him or be absolutely terrified of Him? And early on in the Evangelical community children are taught to hide their struggles, to hide their fears and to hide their shame because we've told them how furious God gets at all of that stuff, instead of, "How much must God love you that He gave you a water slide, that He gave you bubble gum, that He gave you pink, that He gave you mommy and daddy, that He gave us dinner, that God created guacamole and skirt steak and flour tortillas and cheese and that when you combine them all together? How amazing is that? Praise Him!" That's how it should happen. And it's also why the world outside of Christianity keeps thinking that Christianity is a religion. It's not a religion. Religion is outside in. Religion states, across the board, all religion states this, "I will do this to be accepted by God." That is not Christianity. That's not even our message. Nowhere in our sacred literature can you find that. Our message is that we cannot; Christ paid the bill. But you don't even hear that when the message is "Don't do this...don't do this...don't do this..." What we're to communicate is the wonders of God, the mind of God, the beauty of God, the creativity of God, the size of God.

And it's really fun watching your kid kind of struggle and figure it out. Like, Audrey's big question for the last year has just been, anytime we see something big, is "Is God bigger than that?" I'm like, "Please, that is like a pimple on the neck of God. That is nothing. How tiny is that." So, that's job one: make known the wonders of God. But it's going to keep going. Look at verse 5; it's going to be a reference the Torah or the Old Testament. "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them..." This is a reference to the Torah or the first five books of the Old Testament. In the New Covenant, where we find ourselves now, this would be a reference to the Scriptures in the home, that the Scriptures should be known, that they should be taught, that they should be embraced in our home as God's self-disclosure of Himself. Now, not only should the Scriptures be known, but the command there is to teach them. I want to be real careful here because I don't think this means that you've got to sit your kid down and go, "Um, this word in Hebrew is ahava, the root meaning..." I don't think that's the kind of teaching that needs to occur. I think that the Scriptures must be known and embraced and that you can do things that supplement you not being a teacher that feels like you can engage your children. In fact, what we want to be here at the Village is a supplement to that. Like Anne was saying in the video that F.M. 360 is a big thing we do here. On a Friday night, we want you to bring your children to a worship service designed for

you to interact with your children and then to go home with a thing to talk about and an activity to do. And we're trying to help you get here.

But let me speak to two things, both of them I think will probably create seats. Number one: having kids, it just blows my mind what they're born with. And kids at a very early age are born with this hypocrisy meter. And I'm not even speaking religiously. Please don't hear hypocrisy as a religious reference. Like my daughter's already like, "Why do you get to popsicles? I don't get two popsicles. I thought too many popsicles will make you sick. Because I had a red one and you had a purple one, and you have a green one now. Purple's not green, and I thought that it would make you sick." What do you even say to that? You're just like, "Here's another popsicle, alright." Or when we put her to bed at 8:00, "You need your rest. You need your sleep. We don't want you to be cranky tomorrow." And it's "When are you going to bed?" "Well, don't worry about me. I'm the daddy." "But you said..." "I know what I said. We're different. Old people don't need as much sleep." And then you're like, "Is that even true? Did I just lie to my kid unbeknownst to me? Do we need less sleep? Google." So yeah, they pick it up. "Make your bed." "Well, I was just downstairs, and who's making your bed?" So they pick it up.

Now let me tell you something that occurs down here in the Bible Belt. I don't think it occurs in other places. There's just kind of a moral stronghold, verbally, externally in the Bible Belt that doesn't exist in most of the rest of our country. Don't worry about it; it will disappear soon enough. But what ends up happening, specifically here in the Bible Belt, is men have children and they think to themselves, "You know what? I don't want my little girl getting pregnant. I don't want my boy getting on drugs. I want them to be good kids and respectful kids. I want them to do that, so you know what? We've got to find a church. We've got to start going to church. This is a really weird animal, and let me be honest with you. I think you doing that, you making that move might just have an unbelievable damning effect on your family. Do you seriously think that your kid doesn't see the disjoint between what they're learning here and the way you're living? If my daughter can see the inconsistencies in popsicles... So here, you're going, "Go to church" where we're saying the gospel is primary, worship of God is primary. It's the pinnacle of what we're created for. We should be in glad submission to the plans of God, because He is after our joy, and our highest joy will be in obedience to him." They're learning that and you are, with every angle of your life, living opposite. I mean, what you do is make liars out of both of us. What I'm saying is this. This is an impossible task if you're not willing to submit to God yourself. You can put the ten commandments up in your home, you can know the moral things to say, "Don't do this...don't do that..." but if you're not in glad submission to God yourself, nothing happens. Now, this is one of those points, and I continually say, "Listen, we're not going to be perfect. We are going to blow it. We are going to be hypocrites. We are going to have seasons that are difficult for us. We are, but the grace of God covers those things and we'll continue to press in. So that's number one. I think you've got to be in glad submission yourself or there's no way you can do this.

Here's the second thing: I think you need to relish the role. Here's what I mean by that. I have young children, a four year old and a two year old. On the way home from work, specifically long days, I have to, in my mind, prepare myself for walking in our front door. Because if I'm not careful, I'll go, "Man, I just worked a long day. I just want to lay on the couch, I just want to watch SportsCenter and drink a frothy...Coke. And that's what I want to do tonight. I just want to do that and enjoy that." And then I'm going to walk in the door and I've got two kids, they're going to run up, they're going to want to play, Lauren's going to tell me about her day. And I've had in my mind...is this not true? All frustration is birthed out of unmet expectation. So I've got to come home going, "Job's not done today. I've got three and a half more hours. It's not over...three and a half more hours to love, to shape, to pour into, to speak, go give out of myself, three and a half more hours." And if our mind hasn't shifted like that, then our three and a half hours with our children and our wife are more often that not going to be combative. And so on the way home, I try to go, "When I get home, the kids are going to be hopped up on sugar, Lauren will be duct taped in a closet and the house will be on fire," so that when I get in I'm like, "Nothing's on fire. Awesome," and I free Lauren and we play with the kids for like an hour and a half or two hours. We

have to relish our role. We have to say, "Thank You, God. You gave me babies to pour into for such a short period of time, that I might pour into love and joy, communicate, walk with." And that will transcend the Cowboys' '07 season. I promise you. So you've got to attack it like that. You have to walk in the door knowing that. Just embrace it. This is my role.

And let me speak to this. This is what I think will creates seats. What if you're going, "What about my needs?" Well, what about your needs? If you wanted to be a narcissist, you shouldn't have gotten married or had children. Because the second you signed up for those two, you got to die. Because that's the call on a man's life. Now, I think you can call your wife at 3:00 in the afternoon and go, "This has been a brutal, brutal day. When I get home tonight, can I just lay down on the couch for an hour or so? Can you help me with that?" I think you can make the call and go, "Listen, this game is on, and I want this, baby. Please, just tonight." But here's what I've found. If you'll be who God's asked you to be in your home most of the other time, your wife with glad submission would love for you to do those things, she would want to give you those things. But what normally happens is you just take it all the time and don't fill your role, and then one night, you really want that thing but it's the one night she needs a break too and you have this cataclysmic blow-up where you feel disrespected because you've been a little boy who's married with children and your wife finally called you on it. So I think you have to relish the role, man. I think you have to relish it, be grateful for it. I mean honestly, who gets to be a hero? Daddies do. Daddies get to be heroes. What a great gift. Who gets to be unconditionally loved by beautiful little baby girls? Daddies do. Who gets to be looked up at by young boys who go, "That's what I want to be.?" Who gets that? Daddies do. You should relish that. You shouldn't let a day escape. I think we forget that we only get to do this once. You just get today once. Teach these things, but not just with your mouth. You've got to teach them with your life.

And then I want to throw this at you because we've got to address it. There's a disjoint between teaching and knowing. And what I mean by that is you can teach all you want, but the knowing is not under your control and that can be frustrating. Because listen, what I'm after is not regurgitation. If my daughter and son can systematically lay out a belief system in God but they don't have hearts that worship Him, I don't think we've won. But here's the thing. I can't make my son or daughter fall in love with Jesus like their mom and I have. I can't do that for them. I can teach them about Him, I can let the joy of Christ flood my home, I can romance and love my wife on good days and bad days, I can walk in the door every night and long kiss their and make them go, "Oh my gosh. Get a room," I can do all that over and over and over again, teach them love, teach them some security, teach them the goodness and grandeur of a creator God and the glory of the gospels, I can teach them those things, but God has to awaken it in their hearts. I can't do that. So this makes me desperate. This makes me pray. This makes me plead. This makes me plead very honest prayers for them, over them. Which means I have prayed on more than one occasion, held my little daughter's hand as we go to bed at night and prayed, "Please don't let my sins affect my daughter, and please save her soul." To which she's gone, "Jesus is in my heart." So I go, "I'm so glad. I'm going to keep praying though. When you're 40, if I'm still alive, I'll still be praying this." So I want her to hear those things. I want her to hear "I can't make her love You, God. Help her. Stir her heart towards You. Show her that You don't love some future version of her, but You love her right now." Because that's a beautiful piece of the gospel, that God doesn't love some future version of you but your right now, as jacked up as your are. That's such the good news.

So if we would do it and the Holy Spirit would speak, here's what He says will happen. And this is kind of a little bit horrifying, but we'll just embrace it. Verse 6, "...that the next generation..." So that's your children's children. "...might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children,..." Fathers, that's a horrifying idea, that the way you're fathering right now affects not only your children but your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren. Mm hmm. It's okay. Listen, I've said this since I've gotten here. There's a good kind of fear. There's a kind of fear that will save your life. I think these thoughts and the thought of, "Hey, this goes on for generations" is a good kind of fear. So let's see what happens. "...so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation

whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God." Let me chat with you about what He's saying here. Basically He's referencing the people of Israel wandering around in the desert for 40 years until they all died off. So here's what he says, "If we'll do this for our children, if we'll be this for our children, if the Holy Spirit fills it, what will end up happening is they'll put their hope in God, they'll walk in obedience to the commands of Christ, which always increases joy. God is after joy. And they won't spend their life in the desert, in that emotional spiritual wasteland." That's a pretty good promise.

Let me throw a couple of things at you in closing us out today. Let me speak first to single moms. I'm glad you're here, and we love you. Can I tell you something that's true in the Scriptures and true in life? Where what is ideal is lacking, grace abounds. Pray, seek the Lord, and He can powerfully make up for an absentee father. And you know I know this because I'm on this stage and come from a little bit of an abusive home. Michael Bleecker is on this stage, singing from a neglected, abusive home. I mean, I could go on and on and on here. Half our staff...we've even got some people who have spent some time in jail on our staff. That's why I love it. I mean, I don't ever leave my wallet in my office, but I love it. Why are you guys laughing? So listen, where what is idea, what the Lord commands, "This is the way it should be," when it's not that way, it doesn't mean all is lost. The grace of God works powerfully where the ideal is lacking.

Now, I want to speak to our community specifically. I know we've got tons of people who listen to the podcast. I don't know that this will work in your community, but I'll tell you about ours. Be very, very, very, very careful that you don't say with your mouth that the gospel is primary but with your time, energy and efforts as a family teach that something else is. And I'm speaking directly to our unbelievable addiction to athletics. And here's what I see over and over and over again. You've got parents that want to do nothing towards their kids' spiritual development because they're on a select soccer team, and that's a little insane. And if I had to guess, I'd say it probably stems more from your insecurity than their real desire. And listen, even if you were to say, "My kid loves soccer, Chandler." I would say, "Okay, I'm glad he or she does, but my kid loves to go to not go to bed at night and eat chocolate. My job as the father is to lead and guide her into wholeness." And so, what ends up happening, you've got F.M. 360, you've got camp, you've got places where they can forge spiritual relationships, where they can learn the way to the gospel in a way they can understand, and so many of us are going, "Nope, can't go to that....Uh-uh, they can't go to that...Oop, can't go to that...Cant' be a part of that..." all for a sport. And listen, I'm not anti-athletic. Please don't hear me say that. I love them. In fact, some of you are right now like, "That's right. You've probably got a kid that can't ball." In the end, here's what I'm saying. You've got to be careful about what you're communicating to your children. And I'll quote the great theologian, Jim Brown here. Jim Brown, the former tailback for the Cleveland Browns, who retired early, was asked up on his retirement, "Do you not love the game anymore?" To which Jim Brown responded, "I love the game, but the game don't love no one." And we're telling our kids, "This is what it's all about...You've got to succeed at this...You've got to be the best at this." I mean, that's where you're going to invest all your time, energy and influence? Into a game? I'm just saying be careful. Play, let them play, spend three or four grand on shin guards, do it, but I'm saying you had better be careful that you're not, with your life, making yourself out to be a liar and removing the weight of the gospel. It's just madness. Our role as fathers is to sit above the whole thing and go, "In the long run, how do I shape and mold godliness and depth of life into my child?" That's the role.

One last thing. I want to talk to single men, because I got a lot of e-mails and stuff saying, "Hey!" because all the single dudes are getting broken up with right now. They're like, "What in the world! Finish this man series yesterday." So there's been a lot of questions about, "How are we supposed to spiritually lead when we're not married? Because my girl's saying, 'You're not spiritually leading me,' and I don't even know what she's talking about. How am I supposed to do that when we're not married?" Anytime a girl breaks up with you and says that God told her to, that's kind of like double rejection. That's kind of hard. Not only did you get rejected by her but God too. So not only now are you emotionally a wreck, but spiritually you're like, "Am I out of the kingdom?" So let me address just a couple of little things for you. How

do you lead a woman that you're not married to? Because it's not a good idea to go, "Hey, come back here and let's pray for an hour." I'll tell you some things that I think you can do. I think that you can have a conversation very early on about what physically your relationship's going to look like. Because the Scripture says that until she's your wife, she's your sister. And so then you say, "Hey, this is what we're going to be, and I don't want to go past this," and then you're man enough to stick to it. And listen, that urge that you have to touch and kiss and to do all those things, that's a good urge. That's a God-given urge. Like God tells Solomon and his wife, "Eat and drink your fill, you lovers." I don't know how God became the anti-sex God. Because I read Genesis, and Genesis goes, "Be fruitful and multiply." And if you don't know how that happens, I don't have time. That urge is not a bad urge, but it definitely has to be tempered under the weight of God's commands for it to be the best it possibly could be. God's not anti-sex; He's unbelievably pro-sex, good, deep, amazing, great sex. So He goes, "This is how it works best." So be a man in that regard.

The second thing I would tell you to do is, as the relationship deepens, I think maybe you call your shot and go, "Hey, why don't we hang out with some married people? Why don't we find some married couples who do marriage well? And why don't we try to learn some things from them?" This is a way you can take spiritual leadership without getting yourself into intimate, way too close for comfort type positions. These are some small things you can do.

So if I had a glass up here and I was going to end with a toast tonight, I'd lift my glass and say, "May God help us be the cultivators He's called us to be. May we love our wives like He loved the church in that He gave Himself for her. May we nourish and cherish the wives of our youth. May we protect our children from anger. May we mold and shape them. May we take the initiative to be all that God has asked us to be. And in the end, may His grace cover our shortcomings."

Let's pray, "I pray that males would want to be men, Father. I pray that single women would want a man over a male. I pray that we would be the initiators that You've called us to be. And I thank You for Your grace and love that covers our shortcomings and failures. We'll need Your help in all this. It's for You beautiful name I pray. Amen."