

[Audio]

**Shea Sumlin:** Dad? I went fishing with a fishing pole of mine, and I caught a turtle.

**Shea's brother:** Me and David were out riding our bikes and...

**Shea Sumlin:** Shut up. Shut up. Shut up! I'm talking!

**Female:** Let Shea talk first. Tell Daddy what you did at Granny's.

**Shea Sumlin:** I told you. I picked the onions with Rich. I picked the onions with Richie. My mom was there, she was there, and I talked to her.

**Shea's brother:** Happy Father's Day.

**Shea Sumlin:** Happy Father's Day, Dad. Daddy, I love you. Daddy, I wish you could come to our house.

**Shea's brother:** ...and stay there forever.

[End of audio]

Good morning, Village Church. It's good to be here with you this morning. That recording, right there, was recorded 34 years ago this week by myself and my two brothers as a gift to my dad for Father's Day, just two months after he walked out on our family after an affair with his secretary. I think, in the 34 years since that recording, I have been contemplating the effects of what it's like to grow up in a home without a dad.

What you hear, if you listen closely to that recording, is not just a 3-1/2-year-old wishing his father a happy Father's Day, though that was the intention of the tape. If you listen closely, what you hear is a 3-1/2-year-

old wondering why his dad wasn't there on Father's Day...a 3-1/2-year-old proving the fact that there was something abnormal, something not right, about not having his own dad in his home.

This coming week, next weekend is Father's Day, and as we lead up to that, man, it's a time (at least according to Wikipedia) that we celebrate the influence of fathers in our culture here. The last thing I want to do is be Debbie Downer here and really take it to this low place, because we do want to celebrate dads next week. But at the same time, one thing I've witnessed in my own life and that I think is evident in this room today is when it comes to around Father's Day, there's about an 800-pound gorilla that's in the room, that nobody is willing to talk about.

That is the large number of deficits that are coming, in our generation and in our culture, from dads who've either checked out physically from the home, or they've checked out emotionally or spiritually. In their absence, they are leaving wounds that are affecting a large amount of folks in our generation. Simply, what I want to do this morning is just speak to some of those. I want to speak to some of those wounds, some of those deficits, and hopefully allow the Holy Spirit here to just minister in a new way that we might see some things turned around here, starting in our own church.

If I were to do a word association game with you this morning, and I were to say, "What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the phrase, *my dad*?" I wonder what your responses would be. It would probably be all over the board. On one extreme, there are probably many of you in this room who, when you think of the terms, *my dad*, or, *my father*, instantly, warm feelings come to mind. Right?

Because when you think of your father, you think of a man who was not only present, but engaged. You think of a man who put deposits into your life, who literally shaped you positively to who you are today. You owe your life to your dad in so many different ways, and feelings of celebration and thanksgiving come to your mind when you think of your own father, and so for you, that term is a wonderful thing.

But for others of you in this room, I would imagine when you hear the term, *my dad*, or, *my father*, it's on the other side of that spectrum. That term, *father*, or, *dad*, for you, is the same thing as a cuss word, because when you think of your dad, painful memories come to mind. Maybe it's a father who checked out at a young age and walked out on you and your family. Maybe for you, it's thoughts of the abusive home you grew up in. Maybe it's alcoholism. Maybe it's your dad was a pervert. Maybe for you, man, there's just some devastating wounds that come to mind when you hear the term, *dad*.

For you, this week... If that's you, and you're heading toward Father's Day, then maybe what's waiting for you this week is the same thing that has waited for me all these years. When you go into that grocery store and you head to that card aisle, and you sit for about 30 minutes trying to find one card that seems to say

what you think, because none of them do. When you read the words, "Dad, you've always been there for me. Dad, you've shaped me so much toward great things..." You read those and think, *Man, I can't give that to him in good conscience*, and so you walk out of that store with that blank card (like I do) to fill in your own words.

Maybe for some of you it's not either of those extremes, truthfully. Maybe for you it's just somewhere in the middle. It's like, *Man, my dad wasn't Jesus, but man, he was a good dad! He was a solid father. He was there. He was around. He took care of us. I mean he could have been better, but he definitely could have been worse.*

Wherever you are on that spectrum, I think the reality we can all agree on is, to some degree or another, our fathers have shaped us. They have made an indelible imprint in our lives, for better or for worse. I think, for the sake of our time this morning, what I want to do is talk a little bit about that shaping that happens, and what it is I'm seeing coming up the pike with a generation that's before us with some remarkable wounds and some remarkable deficits, and why those things are occurring.

I don't know if you're aware of it or not, but back in the 1960's, only about 11 percent of U.S. homes were missing a biological father. Today it's somewhere between 37 and 45 percent of all homes are missing a biological father, and the trends aren't slowing down. So what you're beginning to see is, really, kind of a Judges 2:10 scenario of a whole new generation that's coming up and it doesn't know the Lord, because in many ways, that central authority figure in their lives is missing to provide that guidance.

For me, having spent 17 years on a college campus, the number of college students I saw coming up who are coming from broken homes and suffering from some of those deficits was extraordinary. With it, man, those wounds are there. So I really want to do three things this morning. First of all, I want to help us, as a church, understand why it is we're seeing some of the trends we're seeing, to not ignore the 800-pound gorilla, but to address it.

Secondly, what I hope to do is begin to address some of those wounds and how we can move forward in healing if you've come from that kind of background. Thirdly, I want to just simply talk to you, as a church, about how we can turn this thing around by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, starting right here in our own church with some of the broken families we're seeing.

The first question is... *Why?* Why are we seeing some of the wounds we're seeing? I think there are three specific reasons why we're seeing what we're seeing at the rate we're seeing it in our culture today. One of those... Robert Lewis, a former pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, who wrote a study called, *Authentic Manhood* (most of which I'm getting this material from, here, that I've gone

through), identifies one particular reason. It's some of the societal shifts that we've seen in our culture that have plagued the home.

There are three specific shifts he talks about that have happened in the American culture that have changed the landscape of manhood in the home. One of those, he said, began after the Industrial Revolution in the early 1900's. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, almost all work done by dads in the home was agricultural-based. It was done around the home on farmlands, where sons and daughters were near and present, where modeling was done with the family, with the father on the site.

Then when the Industrial Revolution hit, it was the first time in our culture when, in mass numbers, you saw men begin to put on suits, grab their lunch pails, and head off and go downtown and work long hours away from the family. For the first time, you begin to see a trend called *distant fathering*, or *distant parenting*, where now, all of a sudden, instead of the dad modeling leadership as a father in the home, that was now relegated to mothers while they were off at work for long hours, coming home just in time to tuck the kids in bed.

A second major shift you saw happened in the 1940's after World War II, when you had a bunch of men who were known as the greatest generation: strong, courageous men who went off to battle. But when they came back, what they had seen on that battlefield emotionally scarred them to the point that you began seeing large disconnects, emotionally, in the home. Men who were unable to process those emotions and extend those emotions to their own families, to where they would begin to withdraw and you had an emotional disconnect... Fathers who no longer knew how to look their children in the eyes and affirm their love for them.

A third major shift that happened was in the 1960's when you get to the feminist movement, a movement that did much to bring a greater understanding to the equality of women, but in the same breath also promoted women in such a way that diminished the role of a man to where most men now, after the 1960's, became confused on who they were as men, now submitting to leadership of women, yet having complete confusion in their own identity as to what their leadership looked like in the home. Now take all those societal factors and you have a confusion of manhood where dads don't know how to be dads. They don't know how to father well because of some of those changes.

Another factor that has changed the landscape is just the dynamics of our homes we're in today. No longer are you having your traditional family sets with Mom and Dad in the home and kids. Most kids, in many ways, are growing up today, either in single-parent homes, blended families, no-parent homes, or homes that are being parented by an aunt, an uncle, or even the state. Latchkey kids coming home, children who are growing up in homes of abuse and neglect, children who are growing up in same-sex-parent homes...

When you take this, the family structure has changed so much in our culture that it's changing those children who are being produced from those family structures, to where no longer does a young boy have a model of what a father even is when he grows up. So by the time he gets married and he enters into a home, he has no framework for how to lead children and how to be a dad, because he never saw it to begin with.

Family dynamics have changed, but obviously (and we would admit to this here, clearly, at The Village), probably the most significant reason why we're seeing what we're seeing today is simply because of sin. Understand we live in a fallen world. When man chose to rebel against God in the garden of Eden and the curse fell upon man, we have this propensity within us to simply just want to seek after what's best for us, our own pleasure, versus seeking what's best for God and best for others.

It's our own sin that creates selfishness within us to where, today, you're having more and more men, because of their own sin and rebellion, neglecting the responsibility God gave them to lead in the home, and who, in many ways, are postponing maturity and extending prolonged adolescence to where they're refusing to grow up quicker and take on responsibility so soon. As marriage comes, and then kids start coming, it becomes too much for men and they check out and they're gone. It's sin that's at the core of the issue for us.

It's sin that's always at the core, but you combine all those factors and it's no wonder why there's so much confusion in most men today on what it means to be a father. The sad thing about this lack of fathering is with it, we're seeing a number of wounds that are happening in the lives of children. Again, as a pastor, we spend most of our days counseling folks, and as you begin to trace the history of some of the damage that's going on in their lives, it goes back to a broken home with a dad that wasn't present.

There's something about the role of a father that has the ability to touch the deepest parts of a child's life. All of us come into this world wanting to be like Dad in some ways. It's no wonder why Proverbs 17:6 says, **"...the glory of children is their fathers."** It's the reason why, when I come home after a long day at work, my kids are crawling over my wife to get to me at the front door with this picture they made for me that I have to take 10 minutes to translate what it is because I'm not sure. They're coming to show me. "Look what I made for you, Daddy! Look what I made for you!" Why do they do that? It's because, in so many ways, the glory of a child is their father.

It's the same reason why, at high school graduations, when that son or daughter is walking that stage and they grab that diploma, they're looking up, trying to find Dad somewhere in the stands to go, "See? Aren't you proud of me?" It's because the glory of a child is their father. It's the same reason why, when I was in

kindergarten, when our teacher in kindergarten had us write out, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

The answers were all over the board. You have Heather, who wanted to be a cheerleader. You have Mark, who wanted to be a policeman; Jay, who wanted to be a Dallas Cowboy football player, absolutely; Laura, who wanted to be the owner of a half of a beach. I mean who doesn't? Right? Who in here doesn't want to be the owner of a half of a beach?

But I've always wondered why, when all my friends want to be cheerleaders, policemen, ambulance drivers, and firemen... I wondered why I put this. What would make a little kindergartener say the one thing he wanted to be when he grows up is a dad? I can't help but think it's because the glory of a child is their father. As a young boy, I was compensating for what I was missing in my life when my dad walked out a year before that was made.

See, there's something within us that is touched deeply by our fathers. The glory of a child is their father, however, unfortunately, in our culture today, we're seeing a lot more wounds come from Dad than we are crowns of glory. Again, the trends are just staggering, but the sad thing about the stats I quoted to you earlier (almost 45 percent of American homes are missing a biological father) is those stats only record the fathers who are physically absent from the home. They don't record the ones who are present but emotionally disengaged or spiritually lethargic.

All research, by the way, indicates, right now, that the most formative years of a child's life are between birth and 5 years old, but that's the exact age when the majority of fathers check out of the home. If a dad does manage to stick around long enough these days, other surveys indicate that it's around the age of 12 that Dad begins to emotionally disconnect from his children, which is around the same age that most American boys and girls go through puberty, a time when they are most confused and need direction and legs to stand on. See, fathers were meant to be there, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, for their children.

Now let me say something. For those of you who had dads who made those kind of deposits in your life, who were engaged, who did lead spiritually, who did pour into your life in a way that God created them to do so... If you've had dads like that, let me tell you something. The best thing you can do when this message is over is go home, and if you have the opportunity, call your dad and thank him. Or, maybe you need to apologize and repent for the kind of child you were toward that dad. If your dad has passed and you don't have the ability to tell him that, you get on your knees and you thank Jesus Christ for the gift you were given, of a dad like that, in a rare day and age like we have. Thank him.

But for those of you who didn't have a dad like that, who didn't make those kinds of deposits, then oftentimes, again, what happens in a child's life is there are deficits and wounds that are created. Oftentimes, what children do (and this is what we see play out in counseling all the time) is begin to take those wounds and act out on them in certain ways. Some of those wounds are acted out in expressive behaviors. We'll take the pain and the hurt we feel from an absent father and, instead of dealing with it properly, we act out in expressive behaviors, whether it's the anger or the rage that comes out where we begin doing self-destructive things as a cry for the help we need for the hurt we have. They are expressive behaviors.

Others, on the other end of that... It's not expressive in the way they deal with it, but more suppressive, meaning they'll take the pain and the hurt they have and, rather than acting out on it, they just want to numb it. They just want to hide it and bury it down deep, so you'll see sons and daughters who will run to addictive substances to try to bury the pain. Whether it's alcohol or pornography, whether it's young women who run to the arms of another man at a young age because they hope that in some way he can fill the void of their daddy... They try to numb out the pain, and they don't even realize they're doing it.

For other folks, those wounds manifest themselves in different ways. Sometimes it's not expressive or suppressive, but sometimes it's just confusion, growing up with this inner sense of lost-ness and incompleteness and lack of direction in life. There hasn't been a moral compass or spiritual compass that has been given to them to know how to guide these waters ahead called life. Some of them, it just shows up in health issues.

I find it interesting that Johns Hopkins University did a 30-year study on what the number one contributing factors to things like heart disease, illness, and suicide were. Do you know what their conclusion was, after 30 years of studying these things? The number one contributing factor to heart disease, illness, and suicide was a lack of connection with one's father. This is Johns Hopkins University. This isn't Focus on the Family doing this study. This is Johns Hopkins University doing this study. That was their conclusion, after 30 years. So it manifests in health.

Sometimes it just manifests in sexual confusion...young men and young women who are confused about their own sexual identity, entering into same-sex attraction or homosexuality. That often stems back to a broken relationship with a father. Now again, what I don't want to do this morning is simply stand up here and say, "All problems have to do with Dad, so let's just blame Dad. Let's just put that victim card... Let's rub it in. All y'all who have wounds with Daddy, bring your dads up here and we're going to flog them publically this morning. All right? Shame on you."

This isn't that. I don't want to go Freud on you and take this all the way back to Daddy. I'm not trying to excuse our victimization of Dad, but at the same time, some of these things do help explain. They don't excuse, but they help explain what we're seeing happen in our culture today: giant wounds and deficits that are taking place. So here's the million-dollar question. If all this is true, these stats we're seeing, and these trends we're seeing, how do we turn this thing around? How did we get from 1960's, when 11 percent of biological fathers aren't in the home, to 2012, when almost 45 percent of biological fathers are missing from the home?

How do we stop this thing so it doesn't get any worse, and actually, we can reverse this thing, starting right here in the church? What are some things we can do? Really briefly, I want to speak to three groups in here. One, I want to speak to sons and daughters who might be experiencing some of these wounds, and talk about how we need to address these wounds first to find healing. Second, I want to speak to dads who are in here, whether it's dads who are thinking, *Man, I don't even know if I've created any of these wounds. Maybe I have; maybe I haven't*, and begin to address what fatherhood looks like. Then thirdly, I want to speak to us, just briefly, as a church, of how we speak to this as a congregation.

To sons and daughters, those of you who may be in here this morning and you have some of those deficits in your life...how do you find healing? The first thing I would tell you is you need to remind yourself this morning that your hope is not in your father. Your hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. See, as much as your dad was created to be in your life, to shape your life, and to invest in your life, God never created your dad to be your savior.

So first of all, if you find yourself at a place where you have transferred the pain you feel from deficits with your dad into unhealthy behaviors to where you can't even function properly because of what you are putting on Dad right now, then what you've done is taken a good thing and you've made it an ultimate thing, and you've begun to make your dad an idol.

You need to transfer that trust and affection from your dad to a perfect Father, a holy Father, your heavenly Father, who will never forsake you, has never abandoned you, and who has provided reconciliation for you in Jesus Christ, and let him be the hope of all your joy. Put it in him. Transfer that to him. Quit looking to your dad to be your savior. That's the first step in your healing process.

The second thing I would tell you is if you do have some of these wounds, you need to begin to touch them responsibly. See, the easy thing to do is to take perceived wounds from your own father and deal with them irresponsibly through expressive or suppressive behaviors, try to numb out the pain, or act on an anger. That's the easy thing to do. The better thing, and the most challenging thing to do, is to begin to touch these wounds responsibly, and there are two ways to do that.

1. *You need to choose to forgive your father for whatever you feel is missing in your life. You need to choose to forgive him. Some of you go, "Man, how can I do that after all he has done?"* Well, one thing that may be helpful is to maybe turn the paradigm around about what you may feel has been a malicious act on the part of your father, but maybe is not as malicious as you think it is.

Listen to this passage from Hebrews, chapter 12, verses 9 and 10. The author of Hebrews is talking about the discipline of God versus the discipline of an earthly father. It says, **"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."**

Did you catch that small little phrase in there? Maybe you've gone over this passage 100 times, but have you caught the phrase that's in there where it says, **"...they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them..."**? Man, there's just something about that phrase that changes my paradigm about my own father a little bit. Maybe my dad is not as malicious as I thought he was.

I mean, do any of you really think your dad woke up in the morning and thought to himself, *Man, how can I really screw up my kid's life today? How can I just really mess them up? How can I screw up Shea's life and create wounds so I cripple him for a lifetime and he hates me? Let's figure it out?* You know? I don't think my dad thought that. I think my dad, as short as he may have fallen from the standard, was simply parenting as best he knew how.

Last month, my grandfather passed away, my dad's dad. As I sat in a room, prior to officiating the service, with my dad and the rest of some family down there, we were sharing stories, and my dad said something. He just said it and just kept going. I don't even know if he understood what he was saying, but it caught my attention when he said, My grandfather was 92 years old when he died. He said, "You know, it wasn't until just the past couple of years that he told me he loved me for the first time." Then he just kept talking.

I was like, *Wait a minute.* For me, that just explained a lot, all of a sudden. My dad didn't have... He was wrestling through his own junk! He was coming from his own wounds. He was taking a paradigm of a fatherhood that was already distorted and bringing that into our home. I think, in some ways, maybe, understanding that your dad didn't wake up with a complete malicious intent toward you may actually help you to forgive him, to extend some grace to him, that he was simply doing his best as he saw how, but maybe it wasn't as good as it could be.

Maybe there are a handful of you in here who will say, *No, no, no. You don't know my dad. You don't know my dad. My dad was evil. My dad did things to me that no father should do to a child.* I will say to you I do believe there are many men who, in the face of God, and the face of their own families, will still choose to do evil to them. In those moments, I would simply encourage you, if that's you, if that's where you've come from... The best thing you can do is simply just release your dad to God and his justice.

Romans 12 assures us that even though there may not be justice in this lifetime, there will be a day that's coming where God will deal with evil, once and for all, and so maybe the best thing you can do is release it. Man, I understand that world. My wife was sexually abused by her stepfather for many years. My wife and I counseled another young couple who I did a wedding for, who, the young gal had been sexually abused by her dad for 21 years, and when it finally came into the light, her dad took his own life. She carries the weight of both those things.

For some of you, if that's where you're coming from, man, the best thing you can do is (although I would encourage you to grant forgiveness as the Scriptures implore, but in addition to that, I would say simply) release your dad to God's justice. Quit harboring that bitterness, and let it go. Let it go. In addition to that, in addition to choosing to touch this wound responsibly, the second thing I would encourage you to do is...

*2. If possible, seek reconciliation with your father.* Now some of you are thinking, *Man, I can't do that. That's hard.* Now a lot of us in here, if that's where you're coming from, you're thinking, *Man, that's my dad's job. He's the one who walked out. He should be the one to come after me and apologize.* Sometimes you're not going to get that opportunity. Sometimes, as a follower of Jesus Christ, it's on you to go be the peacemaker.

I know for me, with my dad, my dad walked out when I was 3-1/2 years old. His absence affected my family differently. I was 3-1/2, my middle brother was 9, and my oldest brother was 12. All of us have been affected differently. For me, it was just growing up thinking having a father was getting on a plane twice a year and going to his place and going out to nice meals and some amusement parks, then jumping back on a plane and coming home to life without Dad. My middle brother had a lot of confusion at the age of 9. Why wasn't Daddy there? My oldest brother, at the age of 12, was filled with a lot of rage and a lot of anger.

In 2005, at the time, 31 years had passed since my dad had left, and not one time in those 31 years had I ever talked to my dad about the divorce or the affair. We never had the conversation. I was going through the authentic manhood series, and at the end of the series, you're pressed to go seek reconciliation with your father if you need it. I thought to myself, *Man, there's no way I can do that. I don't even know how to bridge that conversation. I'm too afraid to go sit down and have that conversation. You have to put on some*

*big boy pants to go have that conversation. I can't do that.* So I just prayed. I was like, "Lord, if you want me to do this, you're going to have to just do it. I don't know how to do it."

Sure enough, the next month, something happened, some crazy little thing happened on email between my dad and myself and my brothers concerning my stepmother. Something happened, and it just kind of blew up, and my two older brothers used that as an opportunity to lash back at him on email, to just vomit some stuff on him. I just thought, *All right. This is it.* So I just started typing. I said, "Dad, would you be willing to fly down here and just visit, one on one, with me and my brothers? Let's just talk about things we've never talked about before. Would you be willing to do that?" *Send.* I just kind of backed up.

Man, he responded back and he said, "You know what? I think it's time. I'll do it." Man, I was *scared*. He jumped on a plane. He flew in, and we sat in my brother's living room for four and a half hours. My dad really didn't say a word. He just listened, and each of my brothers and I just went through, one by one, and shared with him how we felt. It was the first time in my life...

I pulled out a sheet of paper of a journal I had written. I had listed the 18 most significant things I feel like my dad missed out on (or more importantly, I missed him on). I sat there looking in his eyes and I said, "Dad, you weren't there for my baseball games. Dad, you weren't there for my first date. You weren't there for prom. You weren't there for the birth of my three kids. I wished you were there." It was the first time in my life I got to share that with him.

I wish I could sit here and tell you in that moment, my dad just apologized and hugged, and doves descended and the *shekinah* of God came up out of the floor, and since that time, we've gone on eight father/son fishing trips. The reality is I've only seen my dad a couple of times since then. He never apologized. Let me tell you something. The amount of healing I found in just being able to tell my dad how I felt, that I loved him and I forgave him, whether he needed it or not... The amount of healing that came...

So I'd encourage you, if there's an opportunity, if you have the opportunity, pray about it. Maybe the best thing you can do after this service this morning is go initiate with your father and just tell him how you feel. For some of you, that's not going to happen. Your dad may never entertain that conversation. For some of you, your dad has already passed on and you don't have that opportunity anymore. Then I would tell you and encourage you to take that before the Lord and let him do the reconciliation in your own heart.

We serve a God who is in the business of restoration, who is in the business of making old things new, and he can transform your heart. We serve a God who, in the midst of the nation of Israel, when they went their own way, and because of their own sin, were led into bondage, plagues, and disease upon them... Yet God

was faithful to step in through the prophet, Joel, and say, "Man, I can restore the years the locusts have eaten." God can do that in your heart.

The last thing I'd encourage you to do, if that's you, is if you have children of your own, or you're thinking about children, one of the beautiful gifts you can have now is the opportunity to reclaim the relationship with your children you never had with your own father. This becomes such a sweet opportunity. One of the beauties of me having my own kids now is, by the Holy Spirit's power, God has enabled me now to finally be the change agent in my family, to change the family history, to change the trajectory of where the Sumlin family has been headed all these years through divorces and affairs.

I now have the opportunity to demonstrate fidelity to my own wife out of a love for my own Savior, and to now take my children and recapture with them what I so longed for with my own dad, to take my three girls and be able to invest in them, make deposits in them, care for them, and demonstrate that love for them, and affirm that in them in a way I never received.

It's a beautiful thing, how God can turn that around in one generation. It's a beautiful thing. For you, maybe that's that opportunity for you to go and seek reconciliation and then go take the opportunity to reclaim that relationship with your own children. You can be the change agent right now, to stop what has been a progression, maybe, in your family history. Choose to touch the wound responsibly.

Now for dads in this room, wherever you find yourselves, I want to tell you there are a lot of things your children need from you, but for the sake of time, I just want to encourage you in three specific things your child needs from you. I don't care what age you're at. I don't care how old your kids are right now. They still need these three things from you.

1. *Time together.* They just need time. It's time that is missing. If you don't hear anything else, hear this. Dads, your kids don't care about your money. They don't care about the 80-hour job you're working every week at the expense of time with them. What they care about is time with you. It is far more worth it for you to quit your job and go flip burgers at McDonald's if it buys you 15 more hours a week to make deposits in your kids' lives. To simply sit here and justify the fact that you're providing a great education, and providing a house over them, and providing nice clothes...

That will not hold up when they get to college. Trust me; I've counseled your kids. They want time with you. A recent study has shown that the average father in America spends an average of 40 quality minutes a week engaging with his children. He spends 40 minutes of quality time. It's *time* that is missing. You can do all these other things for your children, but it's time that they're going to remember the most. It doesn't matter what you're doing. It's just that you're doing it. You're spending time with them.

My family, man... We've already discovered this in my own girls. We literally craft our entire yearly calendar around family deposits we're going to make together. I go freakin' Griswold on my kids. All right? Just crazy, weird stuff that would be foolish to you... Every now and then, on Thanksgiving, we dress up in pilgrim and indian costumes. How weird is that? But my kids will never forget it.

I go on Daddy/Daughter dates with my girls. I find time with them, one-on-one, just to sit with them. It doesn't matter what we're doing. They don't care what we're doing! They're going to remember they had time with their father. Man, it's *time* that is missing. Every child comes into this world wanting time with daddy, and a father has the chance to either savor that or squander it. It's time.

2. *Verbal affirmation.* Every child needs to know Dad loves them. They need to hear it. There are three specific things they need to hear: "I love you," "I'm proud of you," and, "You're good at this." Every child needs to hear those things from their father. That's the blessing they would long to hear. Michael Jackson... Whatever just came into your mind, suspend that judgment. All right? Michael Jackson had the opportunity, in 2001, to speak to Oxford University, to all the students. There was a time in his speech to them when he began to walk through his childhood history, and he breaks down and starts crying onstage.

He says, "All I ever wanted was just to hear my dad say, 'I love you,' not for what I could do onstage, but just because he loved me for who I am." It explains a lot, when you look at that man's life. He just wanted to have Dad affirm him. That's the one thing that broke him, in a message to those students. Man, you can Google it. You can go find the message on YouTube. It's a little bit odd, but it's powerful. All right? He just wanted to hear, "I love you."

Those three things ("I love you," "I'm proud of you," and, "You're good at this")... It's interesting. It's God the Father who says the same thing of Jesus in Matthew 17:5, when he says, "**This is my beloved Son...**" Did you hear that? "I love you." "**...with whom I am well pleased...**" "I'm proud of him." "**...listen to him.**" Why? It's because he's really good. If God the Father would say that of his begotten Son, how much should we say that to ours? By the way, it's never too late for that. If you're in here right now going, *Hey, my kids are grown. I've wasted it.*

It's never too late for that. I know a 68-year-old man who was sitting on the deathbed with his father, who was 93 years old, and he was helping him do his bills to get all his finances arranged before he passed on, because his death was immanent. As he was sitting there, his dad rolled over and stopped him and said, "Son, I need to tell you I love you." He told me later, "I just sat there and I began to weep, because my dad was 93 years old, and that was the first time I had ever heard him say, 'I love you.' He passed away shortly after that. You have no idea of the amount of healing that brought to me, to hear that." So if you're in here

thinking it's too late, it's never too late, dads. It's never too late. Lastly, the most important thing a child needs (we'll begin to wrap up here) is...

3. *Spiritual direction.* Every son or daughter needs solid, "Why?" answers as to why God put them on planet earth. Dads, the scepter has fallen to you to be the one to initiate that conversation and that string of conversations. They need spiritual direction. Man, I already told you I love Griswold experiences with my kids. I love making memories for them, but let me tell you something. If I died today and all I gave my children was a scrapbook of memories, I have failed as a father, because my number one job is to disciple my kids, to point them to Jesus Christ, and if I have not done that, I've failed as a father. Every child needs spiritual direction.

Grab a Bible really quick. Turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 6, and let me just show you a snapshot of what this was meant to look like. Deuteronomy, chapter 6, starting in verse 4... This is God speaking to Moses, who is then to communicate this to the parents of the nation of Israel. He says, first of all, "**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**" Meaning, dads, your God you serve is not like the world's gods. He shouldn't look like them, because he's not. The God we serve is the almighty maker of heaven and earth, the all-powerful God who is sovereign over all. That's the God we worship, unlike the Greek gods and unlike the American culture gods. That's our God.

He says, in verse 5, "**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.**" In other words, before we even get to your kids, it has to start with you, dads. It has to start with you. You can't impart to your children what you yourself don't possess. You can't do that. It's assumed that *you* are the one who loves God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.

These commands are on your heart first, and when that happens, then you get verse 7. Then you can turn around and begin teaching your children. He says, "**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.**" Did you notice the manner in which you teach your children?

It's not relegated to Sundays, dads. It's not relegated to a 10-minute Bible story at night, and that's it. It's in the totality of your day. Every part of your day is meant to be a living story, testifying to your love for this God, so your children can read it and see it. When you rise up in the morning, when you lie down at night, when you're sitting around the home, and when you're out in the way, every part of your day is to be saturated with the gospel of Jesus Christ for your kids' sake, not just compartmentalized.

Secondly, in verse 8, **"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."** In other words, dads, these are all metaphors. Your love for God should show up in your hands, in what you do. It should show up on your forehead, in how you think. It should show up on the doorposts of your home, which is the entrance into your private life, and it should show up on your gates, which is the entrance into the public arena.

It's holistic. It's the totality of who you are. It should be translated to your children. Dads, it falls upon *you* to start that. That spiritual compass starts with you. Your kids should be able to look at your life and see a picture of who their Savior is in Jesus Christ. They should. Those are the deposits. When those deposits aren't there, then wounds ensue.

Lastly, let me just say we have a lot of young men and young women in our church who quite simply don't have these deposits from their dads, and they're never going to get them. In those instances, I fully believe God's greatest gift to young sons and daughters like that is the church, because that's when we get to step in and fill in some of the gaps. For those who are around us right now, young parents in here, young families in here who don't have that model, you get the opportunity.

Let me tell you something. When I was at Denton Bible Church, I signed up to be a Sunday school teacher, thinking I was going to get, like, 11th graders. Instead, I got 3-year-olds, which is a whole other different caliber of ministry there. There was this one particular dad who would drop his kid off every week, and we'd talk for a minute. About six months in, this dad finally just says, "Hey. Do you know what? Would you like to come over to our house for dinner this Thursday night?" I was like, "Absolutely! I'm in college, so I have nothing to do and I'm hungry. So yes, I would love to."

So I went over to his house and I walk in. The first thing I noticed when I went in his house was a home of peace. It was just a home of peace. We sat down at the table. It was him and his wife and his two boys, and then me. We held hands, and the father prayed over the meal. I had never seen that before. Then one of his sons acted up, and I saw what discipline looked like. Then he got in an argument with his wife, and I saw what marital reconciliation looks like. All in one night... It was an amazing event.

Then the crazy thing is he said, "Hey. Would you like to come over next week?" "Absolutely!" What was one dinner then turned into a year and a half, every Thursday night, of me going over and having dinner with his family. Let me tell you something. What I learned in that home, I didn't get from my dad, but I did get it from the church. We have an amazing opportunity to step in as a church and begin influencing another generation to give them a trajectory God gave the church to give them.

If you're affected by some of these wounds, I pray for healing for you this morning. I pray for hope. If you're a father in here, I pray the Spirit might minister to you and that you would take your role seriously, and we can turn this thing around in our generation. Let's pray.

Father, I'm thankful. I'm thankful that you are our *Abba*, Father. You are perfect in every way. You are like a star; you are fixed and unchanging. You are always faithful. You've never abandoned us, nor forsaken us. You are the perfect Father to us, and I pray we'd find comfort in that this morning. I pray, if there are those in here who have been hurt by an absent father, that they could find their source of hope and joy in you and you alone.

I pray where there's opportunity, Holy Spirit, right now, you might minister in hearts in such a way that maybe those in here could seek out reconciliation, whether it's a son or a daughter needing to go approach their dad, or whether it's a father in this room who maybe needs to go make a call to his child. Father, I pray that you would use us as a church to help turn this thing around, and by the power of your Holy Spirit, we would begin to see restoration take place in our homes, but first in our hearts. I pray that in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.