

[Video]

Shea Sumlin: Dad, I went fishing with a fishing pole of mine.

Shea's brother: I just got done mowing...

Shea Sumlin: And I caught a turtle.

Shea's brother: And me and David were out riding our bikes and then went...

Shea Sumlin: Shut up. Shut up.

Shea's brother: This is a private golf course...

Shea Sumlin: 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 onions with Richie and I was... And my mom was there and 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.

Shea Sumlin: Daddy, Mommy bought me some jogging shorts and a tank...

[End of video]

Good morning, Village Church, Dallas Campus. It's good to be with you. My name is Shea Sumlin, campus pastor up in Flower Mound. It's just great to be with you here. First of all, it's an honor to be with you guys, and to be in a room that has natural light is a win for me, versus the bear cave I'm in up in Flower Mound. So I'm glad to be here.

The video you just saw was a recording that my brothers and I made for my dad for Father's Day just a little bit over 34 years ago to wish him happy Father's Day. It was just a few months before that that my dad walked out on our family after having an affair with his secretary. So that was our first Father's Day without Dad, and it was a tape we were sending him. As you listen to that recording, what you hear is a little boy trying to wish his dad a happy Father's Day, but if you actually listen beyond that, what you hear is a little boy wondering why Daddy isn't there. Even to a young 3-year-old kid there was something that was abnormal that on a day like that, when we were celebrating dads, Dad wasn't there in the home.

For the past 34 years since that recording was made, I've still been working through many of the implications of what it means to grow up in a home without a father. As I've seen it in our generation around us, I've been contemplating the implications of generations of folks amongst us right now who are growing up in homes without a dad. What I've witnessed over that has shown me that an absent father in whatever form that may be, whether it's a father who's physically absent or emotionally disengaged, has certain deficits that leaves in a son or daughter's life growing up in that area.

Steve has asked me to come in here this morning and just share with you a little bit of what I've witnessed and what I believe the Scriptures speak to concerning what we're seeing in some of the fatherlessness in our country and in our churches, and hopefully try to reshape some of the trajectory of where we're seeing some of these trends go and begin to find healing and reshaping of the home in a way that God would get the most glory from it. So that's kind of the hope today.

Now if I was to play a little word-association game with you here this morning, and I was to ask you, "What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word *Dad*?" I'm curious how that would play out in this room. I would bet that chances are it is all across the spectrum. For some of you when you hear the word *Dad*, the first thing that comes to mind for you is just a flood of warm emotions, because when you think of your father, you think of a dad who was there for you, who was engaged, who poured into your life, who made the right kind of deposits, that you literally are who you are today because of the shaping God used your dad for in your life. So when you hear the word *Dad*, warm affections flow up for you. That's a sweet thing.

For some of you though, it's probably on the other end of that spectrum. For some of you when you hear the word *Dad*, painful wounds rise up. For some of you the word *Dad* is like a cussword. When you think of the absence of him, when you think of maybe the abuse you suffered, the alcoholism... Maybe your dad was a pervert. Maybe your dad just checked out on you when you were little. Whatever it may be, for some of you there are painful wounds and memories that come to mind and flood over you and hurt when you think of the word *Dad*.

For some of you though, maybe it's not either one extreme or the other. It's just probably right in the middle, and I imagine this is probably the majority. *My dad was a good dad. He was there. He was present. He could have been better but he could have been worse. But I'm thankful for him. I'm glad.* Wherever you are though on that spectrum, whatever associations come to mind right now with that term, I think the one thing we can all agree on is that to one degree or another dads are tremendously influential in their children's lives. For better or for worse, a dad has the ability to incredibly shape a young son or young daughter's life in the time we have here on this earth.

So wherever you're at in that, for the sake of our time today what I really want to do is begin showing you a little bit about where we've come from over the last probably 50 years. I spent 17 years on a college campus, most of that as a college pastor, and seeing the next generation of folks coming up the pike and seeing where they come from and the broken homes and the deficits and the wounds that are there was alarming to me.

I'm not sure if you're aware of it. In 1960, the number of homes that were missing a biological father was only 11 percent. Only 11 percent of all homes in the United States were missing a biological father. Today it is hovering around 47 percent. In 50 years we've gone from 11 percent to 47 percent of homes missing a biological father. If you get into the African American community, that's 70 percent of homes that are missing a biological father. So there is a whole new generation of folks among us who are growing up in homes that are vastly different than what they were just a half-century ago. With that absence there come wounds oftentimes.

So today I want to do three things: First, I want to help us understand as a church how we have gotten to where we're at right now in our culture. How has that shift taken place so much in such a short period of time? Why are we finding ourselves in the situation we're in today? Then secondly, for those who maybe have experienced some of that 47 percent, those who've experienced some of the deficits and wounds from an absent father, I want to speak to those wounds this morning in a way I think will offer hope and healing and hopefully reshape the trajectory of where we're headed. Then thirdly, I just want to speak to us as a church on how the church plays into this, so we can lay out a plan here in the church for how to reshape this trajectory.

The first question is... *Why?* Why are we seeing those stats climb like they are? Why are we seeing the trends we're seeing in homes like we are? A guy by the name of Robert Lewis (he was a former pastor at Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Arkansas) wrote a study years ago called "Authentic Manhood." It was a study that was used by God to really transform my life and my understanding of what it means to be a father, much of what I'm sharing with you today. He talked about the idea that some of it has to do with some societal shifts we've seen in our American culture in the last 100 years. He said there are really three significant shifts we've seen happen that have changed some of the definition of manhood and some of the understanding of what a father is.

The first major shift happened, he said, around the turn of the century in the 1900s in the industrial revolution. It's the first time we saw dads no longer anchored in an agricultural setting with sons and daughters and wife near in and around the home and all working together. For the first time you saw in mass droves dads pick up their lunch pails and head downtown to a commute, to work a job of 60-80 hours a week away from his family. It was the first time you saw this phenomenon start creeping in called "distant fathering," where much of the role of the home was now delegated to Mom to both be the mom *and* the dad for the kids, while Dad was gone and got home maybe in time to tuck his kids in at night. So this distant fathering started taking place. This is one early shift.

The second major shift came around the 1940s in World War II. What's known as the greatest generation, right? A number of strong, courageous men who for the sake of the call of our country left their families, went overseas, and fought for us to defend our freedoms. But on the battlefield what they witnessed, what they saw, was so traumatic that when they returned you had a whole generation of men who were trying to find ways to compensate for what they had seen on the battlefield. They had a difficult time processing those emotions and began emotionally disconnecting from the home in new ways we hadn't seen before. So distant fathering, and now emotional disconnect is happening.

Then by the time we get to the 1960s we have the feminist movement, which did a tremendous amount of bringing dignity and equality to women but also did a tremendous amount of confusing what manhood is. To where for the first time now, a dad really doesn't know what his role *is* in the home. *Am I the leader? What does leadership look like? What does spiritual leadership look like? How do I process this thing?* Confusion sets in on just what being a dad is all about.

So three societal shifts are part of why we've seen some of this so rampantly change in our American culture. But some of it has to do, no doubt, with just the family dynamics that have now changed, especially in the last few decades. No longer do you have a young boy growing up in a home with a

traditional parent set of Mom and Dad, and having that influence and model to look at. More and more homes these days are broken in many ways.

So you have young boys growing up in single-parent homes, no-parent homes, homes parented by grandparents, homes that are abusive, homes where there has been abandonment, and homes where there has been favoritism. You have young boys growing up in same-sex parent homes now. So all of a sudden, the young boys who are coming up now these days no longer have the model in front of them of what fatherhood looks like. So by the time they get to the altar and they enter into marriage and they begin having kids, they're literally pulling from the air to figure out what a father is, because they've never seen it. The model hasn't been there.

So some of the family dynamics have helped shape this, but no doubt, as we would all agree to here at The Village Church, without saying...probably the number one contributing factor of why we're seeing what we're seeing simply has to do with sin; the same thing that happened in the garden in Genesis, chapter 3, where man was deceived, and instead of following after God's way, chose his own way and rebelled against God, did not trust God, and wanted to create a life for himself where he was in control.

Because of sin in our lives, no doubt we have young men who are growing up who are postponing maturity, prolonging adolescence, seeking to create lives that are self-absorbed and narcissistic about what's good for them, so the moment drama hits in marriage, the moment parenting gets difficult, it's much easier because of sin in our lives now for a young father to go, "I'm out," and abandon a family because, *This is not what I signed up for*, and check out of the home. So sin is always at the core.

So you start combining all those factors together, and it's no wonder why we have such a confused generation of men who have a difficult time understanding what a father was meant to be, is designed to be by God himself. With those absences come tremendous deficits and tremendous wounds in a child's life. There is something about a father that was meant and designed by God to shape a son and daughter's life for the good. Was *meant* to. I think it's why we all start out to some degree wanting to be like Dad. It's why Proverbs 17:6 says that the glory of a child is their father.

It's interesting. It's the reason why when I come home after a long day at work and that door opens and I go, "I'm home!" my three daughters start climbing over their mother to get to me. "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" and they start showing me this picture that I have no idea what it's about and I'm going to try to translate it. They come running to me. It's because in many ways the glory of a child is their father. It's the reason why when you go to a high school graduation or a college graduation and you watch that son or daughter cross that stage, they're looking up in those stands to say, "Dad, are you proud of me? I did it." The glory of a son and daughter, the glory of a child, is their father.

I've always thought about the reason why when I was in kindergarten and the teacher had all these kindergarten students write out what it is we wanted to be when we grow up... It's interesting, Heather wanted to be a cheerleader. Mark wanted to be a policeman. Jay wanted to be a Dallas Cowboy football player. Good luck. Laura (I love this one) wanted to be the owner of half a beach. Don't we all? Right? Don't we all? A full beach...much too much. Half a beach...more reasonable.

I've thought about it. Why in a kindergarten classroom, a bunch of 5- and 6-year-olds, when they have anything in the world they want to be and all my friends want to be an ambulance driver and a fireman and a police officer, why did I want to be this? Why did I want to be a dad? Why did I want to be a dad? What makes a 5- or 6-year-old, out of all the things they could dream about being, want to be a dad? I think the reason is because the glory of a child is their father, and I was simply compensating for what was missing in my life at that point when my dad left. I wanted what I didn't have. I wanted to be my dad.

So the glory of a child is their father. Unfortunately, in our world today we're seeing far more wounds come from Dad than we are crowns of glory. We have a lot of fathers who are turning their backs on their responsibility to their children. Again, the trends are staggering. To go from 11 percent to roughly 47 percent in 50 years? What's sad about those stats is those statistics are only measuring the biological fathers who are absent from their home. What they *don't* measure are the ones who are there but are emotionally or spiritually disengaged.

All the research, by the way, indicates that the most formative years of a child's life are between birth and 5 years old, and those are the exact years the majority of dads leave the home. If a dad *is* able to stick around long enough these days, research also tells us it's around age 12 when dads begin to emotionally disconnect from their children, which happens to be the same age that most young men and young women start going through puberty, the most confusing time of their lives, when they need legs to stand on, and Dad disappears. Fathers were meant to be there for their children. They were meant to make physical, spiritual, and emotional deposits into their children's lives.

Now let me be clear. For those of you who have had those kinds of dads who *were* there for you, who *did* pour into you, that you have those warm affections for your father, can I tell you the best thing you can do after this service today? If you have the opportunity, you go home, get on the phone, and you call Dad and tell him, "Thank you." Or repent and apologize if you need to. If your dad has passed and you don't have that opportunity, then fall on your knees and thank your heavenly Father for giving you the opportunity you had with that kind of dad, because in this culture it's a rare thing today. So thank God for your dad.

But for those of you who didn't, those of you in this room this morning who maybe are wrestling with some of these wounds and trying to figure out what your relationship with your dad looks like... You know that oftentimes when there is distance or absence of a father there are those deficits there, and those deficits turn into wounds, and those wounds tend to manifest themselves in a number of ways. After spending years counseling many young men and women who are coming out from broken relationships with Dad, let me tell you how these manifest themselves.

Sometimes what folks do in this type of pain is they take that pain, they take that wound, and they turn it into an expressive form of acting out. It turns into anger and rage. So we have a generation of young men and young women who are walking around bitter and frustrated and angry because Dad isn't there. They're mad about it and they're acting out on it. That's how they try to deal with the pain...through self-destructive behaviors.

Other folks, though, go the opposite route. Rather than *expressing* their pain, they *suppress* it. It manifests itself in a way where they turn to things that will try to serve as an anesthetic and numb out the pain they feel. That's why so many folks will turn to addictive substances or pornography. That's why young women will look to the opposite sex to try to find their fulfillment of Daddy, which never does. They try to do these things because somehow they think that will numb out the pain. For other folks it manifests itself in confusion, lack of direction, aimlessness, wondering, *What is my anchor? I don't know what my trajectory is for life because it was never imparted to me there.*

For other folks it manifests itself in physiological ways, with health problems. I find this interesting. Johns Hopkins University did a 30-year study on what is the number one contributing factor to heart disease, illness, and suicide. Do you know what they found? Think about that. A 30-year study...and this wasn't Focus on the Family running this study. This was Johns Hopkins University. Do you know what they concluded? The number one contributing factor was disconnectedness with a father. It's amazing. For other folks maybe it manifests itself in sexual identity struggles, same-sex attraction and homosexuality, trying to take the wounds they've felt and try to find them in the same sex. All of these things are ways in which people try to deal with pain.

Now, listen. Let me be clear. The last thing I want to do is go Freud on you up here, so I'm not trying to tell you that everything bad that's ever happened in your life, just trace it back to Daddy. That's not what we're saying. Okay? Please don't misunderstand me. I'm just trying to explain one aspect of something. What this isn't is just a "hate-Dad" ceremony this morning. "After this service if you have a father wound, call your dad up, bring him up here at 3:00, and we're going to flog him publicly." That's not where we're going with that.

At the same time, let's be honest. This is a real issue. This is an 800-pound gorilla walking through our culture that nobody is really speaking to. I think in some ways we need to address it. We need to look at it and understand. So here comes the million-dollar question: If this is all true, if everything we've talked about is true and where it's at, and these statistics are climbing, what are we going to do? What can we know, what can we do, to ensure that we can stop some of these trends, at least starting right here in this church, so that 20 years from now we're not up at 60 percent of homes? What can we do?

I want to speak to three different groups in here. First, I want to speak to sons and daughters who maybe have experienced some of these wounds I've been talking about. I want to appeal to you for what healing needs to look like and what a proper perspective needs to look like in this. Second, I want to speak to dads...current dads and future dads...about some of the ways you too can find healing, forgiveness, and the reshaping of the trajectory you're on, so that the right kind of deposits can be made from this point forward. Then third, I'll speak to us briefly about the church's role in this.

First, to sons and daughters. There are three things I want to encourage you to do if you have experienced a father wound. The first thing, and the most important thing, is it has to start with a cognitive understanding that your hope is not in your dad. Your hope is in your heavenly Father, who is perfect, who is trustworthy, who has not forsaken you, who has not abandoned you, who has not left you like an orphan, and he is faithful and he is not your dad. So don't take what you have on your dad and project it on God. It's different. Fathers were meant to be a shadow, as dimly and imperfect as they are, but they're not God.

So if you have gotten to the place where you've allowed a wound to manifest itself in non-helpful ways, whether through expressive behaviors or suppressive behaviors, then what you have done, what you're demonstrating by that is that you have taken a good thing, which is a father, and you have made it an ultimate thing in your life, and it has now become an idol you worship. Because that idol has disappointed you, you are unable to function in life. That's unhealthy. So the first thing you need to do is transfer that trust and that hope from your dad to your heavenly Father. Put your hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ and find your healing there. Amen? That's what we have to do. God is your healer. He's perfect in every way.

Secondly, and in keeping with that, you have to begin seeking to choose to touch this wound responsibly. The easy thing to do is to touch this wound irresponsibly, to act out in violent ways, to numb it out through substances and addictive patterns and whatnot. That's the easy thing to do. The better thing to do though is to touch this wound responsibly. You have a couple of choices when it comes to that.

Number one is I would say you need to first choose to forgive your dad as you have been forgiven by your heavenly Father in Jesus Christ. That you would choose to forgive him. Some of you go, *Man, how? After all he has done? I can't even get that, what he has done.* Let me just say this: Have you ever thought for a

moment that maybe your dad wasn't as malicious as you think he is? It's interesting, in Hebrews, chapter 12, verses 9-10, 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 [your dads] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness."**

There's an interesting cryptic little phrase in there that never made sense to me before, but I understand it now. Your dad parented you as seemed best to him. Maybe the possibility is that your dad was just simply dealing with his own wounds, his own pain. It doesn't excuse him, but maybe it helps explain a little better that maybe your dad didn't wake up in the morning and simply think to himself, *How can I really screw up my kid's life this morning? How can I just cripple them in such an amazing way that they'll hate me for the rest of their life? Let's figure this out.* Do you really think your dad did that? I would bet most dads didn't. Most dads didn't. I don't think my dad did.

Just a couple of months ago my grandfather passed away, my dad's dad. He was 92 years old. We went down. I was officiating the funeral. We're in the room. I have my dad in the room and my brothers and several of us, and we're sharing stories about my grandfather. In the middle of it, just almost out of nowhere, my dad said something I haven't heard before. He said, "You know, growing up... It wasn't until just a few years ago that my dad first told me he loved me." Then he just kept going, talking about something else, and it just hit me. My dad was simply just processing his own wounds. Again, it doesn't excuse, but it surely helped reframe my dad a little bit, that I can maybe extend him a little bit more grace, that he wasn't perfect.

So maybe that is with your dads. Now I know there are some in here though who will say, *No, you don't know my dad. You don't know my dad. You don't know the evil my dad did to me. My dad did to me what no father should ever do to a child.* If that's you, let me encourage you. I do believe in evil. I do believe there are some men who in the face of God and the face of their own family still choose to do evil to their children. I share this with permission. My wife was sexually abused by her father growing up. She knows that pain. We counseled a girl who was sexually abused by *her* father until she was 21 years old, and then when it finally came out, finally stopped, and he got exposed, he took his own life, and she now carries the guilt of that.

Let me just say, if you're one of the ones who have come from that kind of family, can I just speak a word of healing to you? Maybe you have another choice. In addition to forgiving your dad, which I would still plead with you to do, maybe the best thing you can do is simply just release your dad to God's justice. Revelation 12 says that one day there is a day that's coming when God will deal with evil once and for all. So maybe

the best thing you can do is simply hand your dad over and find healing and reconciliation in your own heart to let him go for what he has done.

Thirdly, I would encourage you, if possible, to courageously seek reconciliation with your father if you can. Some of you go, *Man, I can't do that. That's a DTR I do not want to have at this point in my life with my dad. That would be fearful for me.* Some of you are going to go, *You know what? That's his job. That's his job. He's the one...* Let me just say, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you've been called to be a peacemaker. Maybe it shouldn't be fair that it falls on you, but maybe the best thing is for you to initiate reconciliation with your father if at all possible.

I'll tell you this: Up until 2005, I had never talked to my dad once about the divorce and the affair and his walking out on our family. Not once. At that time 31 years had passed, and I had never had a conversation with him about it. That abandonment affected my brothers and me differently. I have a brother who's nine years older than me. He was 12 when my dad walked out. He has been filled with rage and anger most of his life because of the season he was in when Dad checked out.

My middle brother is six years older than me. He has been filled with lots of confusion. He fell into drugs and addictions and has tried to numb things. I was 3 years old when my dad walked out, almost 4. I grew up thinking that's just what you do. You jump on a plane, you go see Dad twice a year, he spends a lot of money on you and takes you to nice restaurants and you get to have a fun time, you jump on a plane, come back, and tell your friends how cool it was. I kind of thought that's how it was.

I never had this conversation. I'm going through this "Authentic Manhood" study. I'm reframing my entire worldview about what it means to be a father and have intentionality and responsibility. I'm married. I've just had children of my own, and I'm getting challenged in this study to go seek reconciliation with your dad if you need it. Much like some of you I'm going, *There is no way I'm doing that, man. I'm not having that conversation.*

I just challenged myself. *All right, I'll just pray. I'm just going to pray through it.* "God, if you want to open some doors, do it." Well, long story short, some crazy email chains get going between my dad and my brothers, and something blows up crazy. All kind of venom is getting spewed one way and another, and I was like, *All right, this is it.* So I just sat down at my computer and typed an email to my dad. I said, "Dad, would you be willing to come down here to Texas and sit in a room with your sons and for the first time ever talk about what happened? Would you be willing to do that?" Send. And then I was nervous...

He emailed back and he said, "You know what? I think it's time. I'll do it. I'm going to fly in this weekend." I was like, *Uh-oh.* So he flies in. We sit down in the living room. It was the most surreal moment of my life.

It's my dad sitting on the couch and the three brothers in this tribunal court sitting right here looking at him. We just began to open up and share. Again, because it's manifested differently, it was different for each of us in how we shared. For four and a half hours we sat there in a room with my dad telling him everything we've always wanted to tell him.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I am praying for my father. I'm praying for this meeting. What I shared with him... I had written out 18 of the most significant things he wasn't there for or that I missed him there for. I just said, "Dad, you weren't there for my Little League games. You weren't there for my first date. You weren't there for prom. You weren't there for the birth of my three daughters." With tears I'm just sharing with him. I said, "Dad, I just missed you. I just missed you. I wish you had been there. But I want you to know I forgive you. I forgive you and I love you."

I wish I could tell you in that moment that the *shekinah* of God dropped right there in the living room, doves came down, and we all started line dancing and shouting praises. I wish I could tell you that since then we've gone on eight father-son fishing trips and it has been awesome. None of those things happened. The reality is I've seen my dad only a handful of times since then. My dad never said he was sorry. But I can't tell you how much healing that gave me. I can't tell you how much healing it gave me to actually sit in a room and for the first time in my life look my dad in the eyes and tell him how I felt and tell him I forgive him and tell him I'm praying for him. So if it's possible, seek out reconciliation.

For some of you maybe that's impossible. Maybe your dad has passed away. Maybe you don't know where your dad is. Maybe your dad is not going to have that conversation. Then for you, take it to the Lord and allow him to reconcile it in your own heart. We serve a God, by the way, who is a God of restoration. He's in the business of making old things new. He has the ability to regenerate a dead heart, and he has the ability to heal the deepest wounds in your heart and your soul. So take it to him and find the reconciliation you need, rather than harboring the bitterness and the pain and the hurt. Take it to your heavenly Father to heal.

Fourthly, I would simply say that if you have experienced these types of wounds, you have another opportunity. That is to reclaim the relationship with your *own* children that you missed out on with your dad. If you're a parent in here or expecting to be at some point, this is one of the beauties of... You're just one generation away from getting to turn it all around. Because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for you on the cross, the blood that was shed for you on the cross, you get the opportunity by the Holy Spirit's power to reshape the trajectory of your family, starting right now in your own parenting.

This has been a beautiful thing for me. I have three beautiful little daughters, who by God's grace will never know the kind of home I grew up in. I recognize that at any given moment God can take my life and

take me out, and I thank God, because I have put before them that their ultimate Father is not me but their heavenly Father, and they can trust him and he'll be their daddy way more than I'll ever be. But in the meantime, I get to play the wonderful role of stepping in and being the change agent, and by the cross of Jesus Christ recapturing the Sumlin family name. It's a beautiful thing. Moms and dads, you get that privilege with your kids too. It's a beautiful thing to recapture it.

For the dads who are in the room, or future dads, number one, I want to tell you, wherever you've been, you've been forgiven in Jesus Christ. It's the beauty of the cross. You've been forgiven. Today is a new day, you're a new creation, and it's never too late to reengage with your kids. There are three things, though, that your children need from you more than anything else. Number one, they need time from you. They need time. It's time that is missing in families right now.

A recent study that was done found that the average dad in America spends an average of 40 minutes a week in quality investment with his children. Can you believe that? Think about it. The average dad, who goes to work early and comes home late at night just in time to tuck kids in bed, and on the weekends instead of logging time with the kids hits out on that hobby he has, playing golf, heading out... It's easy to see that in an American work week, the average dad can spend an average of 40 minutes of quality, intentional time with his children. It's time that's missing. It's time.

I've already discovered this with my three girls. As much as they love it when I take them out to buy them stuff and go to these cool places, what they really want is time with me. It really doesn't matter what we're doing. It's time. So I've crafted my entire calendar around making intentional time deposits with my daughters. I mean I go Grizzwold on them. It's crazy. We'll go out camping. Thanksgiving comes around and we get weird. We'll dress up as Pilgrims and Indians and go out. It's just crazy. All right? But we spend time. Daddy-daughter dates. They're on the calendar. I'm going out with one of my daughters at some point every week. It's time. They don't care what we do. They're going to remember time with Daddy.

Dads, that's what you need to give your kids. Can I just tell you something real quick, after years of counseling your children? They don't care about your money. You can justify it all day long, dads. *Well I work these 80 hours and that gives them a home and gives enough food for them and clothes on their back, a college education.* You don't think they would trade that all in a heartbeat for an hour with you? It's time that's missing. If you need to reprioritize, if you need to walk away from that luxurious job and go flip burgers at McDonald's and free you up on the weekends so you can spend some time with your kids, it's worth it. It's time that's missing.

Secondly, they also need some affirmation. They need some verbal blessing spoken over their lives. They need to hear what they mean to you. There are three specific things every child needs to hear. The first is,

"I love you." The second is, "I'm proud of you." The third is, "You're really good at this." Those three blessings verbalized over your child's life bring gravity to their soul.

It's interesting, Michael Jackson... Whatever just came into your mind right now, shelve that. All right? Michael Jackson had a chance to speak at Oxford University to 800 students. You can go Google this and you can hear this actual message. It's pretty powerful actually, because halfway through it he starts telling the story about his upbringing. In front of all these students he just breaks down and starts weeping. He says, "All I ever wanted was my dad just to say he loved me, apart from what I did on stage. I just wanted to hear he loved me."

They need to hear it. They need to hear those things from you, Dad. I don't care what kind of home you grew up in, whether you didn't hear it from your dad. Again, as a follower of Jesus Christ, it starts anew. They need to hear those things from you. We all long to hear those words from our father. I find it interesting in Matthew, chapter 17, God the Father says the same thing of Jesus Christ, 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 you. "...listen to him."* Why? *Because he is good.* Even God the Father can affirm that in his Son.

Let me tell you, dads, it is never too late. Don't you dare sit in here and listen to the lie of the Enemy that says, *Oh my kids are grown. I missed that boat.* It is *never* too late to reengage with your children. I just met with a girl right after the 9:00 a.m. service who came up here. She never even knew who her dad was. At age 14 a girl walks up to her door and says, "Hi, I'm your sister."

She finds out she has a sister for the first time. "You need to come meet Dad." She goes and meets her dad. It's a train wreck. He wants nothing to do with her. So years go by. She's in college. She gets a phone call here recently. Her dad leaves a message on the machine basically saying, "I just want you to know I went to church yesterday and I gave my life to the Lord. I'm sorry, and I love you." It is never too late.

I had a 68-year-old man sitting at the deathbed with his 93-year-old father, doing his bills, trying to get everything squared away before he passes. His dad rolls over and stops him and says, "You need to know something. You need to know I love you." He told me, "Shea, I'm 68 years old. That's the first time I'd ever heard him say that. Two weeks later he passed away. You don't know the healing that has flooded over me from hearing those words." It is never too late, dads. *Never.* That's a lie of the Enemy that would tell you otherwise.

The last thing (and this is the most important thing) you need to give to your kids is spiritual direction. They need a compass. Turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 6, and we'll wrap up right here. Every son or

daughter needs solid answers for why it is God put them on planet earth. Dad, that scepter of leadership has been given to you.

I already told you, by the way, how important Grizzwold experiences are for me. I have a whole list of things I've done with my kids and continue to do with my kids, but let me tell you something. If I died today and all I left was a scrapbook of memories of Disneyland and water parks, and that's all I left with my kids...you need to hear me...I failed as a father. My number one job isn't just to go on fun trips with my kids; my number one job is to disciple my kids, to point them toward Jesus Christ. If I don't leave them with that, then I've failed.

So the biggest investment you can give to your kids is that spiritual compass that anchors them in Jesus Christ. Listen to this in Deuteronomy, chapter 6, starting in verse 4. This is a famous passage for the nation of Israel over what was expected of a parent to a child in teaching them the things of God. It's called the great *shema*, which means to hear. Verse 4: **"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."** In other words, "Our God is not like the other nations' gods." Dad, the God you serve is not like the god of this world. He's not like the Greek gods or the god of American culture. The God you serve is the one true living 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."** Do you see how many times it's *your, your, your?* Dads, you cannot impart to your kids what you first do not possess. This has to start with you. Before we get to verse 7, you have to have verses 5 and 6. You have to have your own walking, abiding relationship with Jesus Christ, or else you're pouring out of an empty bucket. It has to start with you.

Once you've established that, once you're walking with Jesus Christ, then you get to verse 7, and here's how you pour out with your kids: **"You shall teach them diligently to your children..."** You shall teach what he has commanded here, to love God. **"...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."**

In other words, guys, this can't be just 15 minutes of your week with your kid. This can't be delegated to Sunday mornings and that's it. That's your deposit and the other six days are off. This is a holistic totality of your day, every day. When they sit down in the home, when they're out and about in the community, when they lie down in bed at night, when they get up in the morning, their whole day should be a lesson from you in your life about who their God is who loves them. The greatest Bible they're going to read, dads, is you. So that's where it has to go holistically.

Then 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."** Those are all metaphors, meaning how you love God, fellows, has to show up in your hands in what you do, on your forehead in how you think; it has to be on the doorposts of your home, which is the entrance into your private world, and it has to be on your gates, which is the exit into the public arena. Every bit of who you are should be telling your kids the story about their great and awesome God they serve, their true heavenly Father. That's the investment you make in your kids, and it starts with you, and it starts in the home.

Let me just close with this. There are some folks in here who won't have that opportunity, who *haven't* had that opportunity. You don't have a biological father who has made those investments in your life, and that's just where you are. That's where I was. I think in those moments, when the biological family checks out, that is when God is gracious enough to raise up a new family, and it's called the church. That's where we get the opportunity to pour into one another.

When I was in college, I had no framework of what it is to be a dad. I was still trying to get married. I was volunteering in Sunday school for some 3-year-old boys, and this one dad would come every week and drop off his son. We'd chat at the door a little bit. Then one particular week he just says, "Hey, what are you doing this Thursday night? Do you want to come over to our house for dinner?"

"Well yeah! I'm in college. I'm hungry. Let's do this." So I show up at his house. Let me tell you, the door opens and the first thing I physically felt was that this was a home of peace. I had never felt that before. We sit down at a table over dinner. We all hold hands and he prays over his boys, prays over his wife, and prays over me. He prays over his family. I'd never seen that happen before until that night. The kids acted up that night. I saw what family discipline looked like. The husband and wife got in an argument that night. I saw what marital reconciliation looks like.

He then says, "Hey, do you want to come over next week?" "Yes." A year and a half later... I spent every Thursday night for a year and a half in college watching God work in this family, teaching me how to be a dad. I didn't get that from my dad. Do you know who I got it from? I got it from the church. If that's where you're at, welcome to your family. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you are not like our earthly fathers, even the best of them. You are God Almighty, and by the right of Jesus Christ and our faith in him, you have given us direct access to you, to cry out to you, "Abba Father." You have adopted us as sons and daughters into a new life. So Father, we just want to pause and say thank you. Thank you for being faithful to us. Thank you for not abandoning us and forsaking us but walking with us and saving us.

Father, I pray right now, I pray where there are wounds and there are hurts in here, I pray, Holy Spirit, would you minister? Would you remind sons and daughters that you are their heavenly Father, that they can trust you? Would you start working healing in their souls? Where there are dads in here who feel beaten up and maybe a weight of shame that's over them, would you remind them they've been forgiven? Remind them that you are in the business of redeeming what has been tattered and mending it back together. So would you bring healing there as well? For the sake of your name, would you change the trajectory of what's happening in our country? Might it start not by politics and schools, but may it be started by your bride, the church. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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