

LEGACY OF LOVE

This attack on God's design has had many casualties, but none potentially greater than on fatherhood. At this very moment, there are a staggering number of children growing up in homes without a father. This is not by chance or by accident. Our culture has diminished the role of the father, saying that we are "disposable," "trivial," "sperm donors," "the heavy," "enforcers," "mom with biceps," "baby sitters," and on and on. Some would even go as far as to say, "there is no need for a father," and that "you can raise children without a father" with no ill effect.

If you're paying attention, you will notice that our culture has worked hard to systematically neuter the father's role in the family. The focus is very much on the mother as the center of the family. It goes without saying, but I'll say it just so I'm clear: the mother's role is absolutely vital, but they are not the father. We must remember that the mother and father both have a calling in the family, but they are not the same.

The presence of a father within a home is so vital, and every child feels the deep need for a father. Yet, I'm sad to report that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau data, 43 percent of all children in the United States live in a home where there is no father. The effects of this terrible reality are horrifically staggering. According to the U.S. Department of Health, 63 percent of all youth suicides occur in fatherless homes. The same agency reports that 90 percent of all runaway children live in a home where there is no father. Further, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2012 that 85 percent of children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes, twenty times the national average.

I could go on and on, and this is only showing statistics of the fathers who are not physically present. This is not taking into account the numerous number of fathers who are there to put breathe on glass, but are not really present in their children's lives. They provide money, but not much more. This crisis has left a path of destruction in its wake, and we are all feeling its effects in some shape or fashion. We need men to be good fathers, not just sperm donors. Men, being a father is both an amazing privilege and a monumental responsibility. We are to take the lead in our homes, and this includes pointing our children to the grace of God through Jesus.

Many men are often confused about their call to fatherhood. They are unsure of what it is and what it involves. I, by no means, profess to be father of the year, or the man with all the answers. I am a daddy and a sinner in need of grace. So, by God's grace, we need to humble ourselves and turn to the transforming power of God's Word.

1 Kings 2:1-3

2 When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, ² "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, ³ and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn,

Think about, and even try to imagine, the scene before you. It is a somber moment. David is on his death bed, "*I am about to go the way of all the earth*" is his fancy description of death. Yet, in his last moments, he is giving his son Solomon some final parting words. In his last moments here on earth, he is thinking legacy. He is saying to his son, "*be strong and courageous.....act like a man.*" He's saying, "*keep the charge of the Lord your God*" by knowing and doing the Word. "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*" Son, stick close to the Lord and act like a man.

As I thought about this text, I began to think about what kind of legacy David left his children. I'm not going to spend our time here, but I will say that "*He was a man after God's own heart.*" He was a colossal sinner, a repentant man, a forgiven man, and a man who was in desperate need of grace.

In so many ways, he was just like you and I. We too will face this moment and will die. We will leave our sons and our daughters here, and will stand before the Lord and give an account. It has been said that "when good fathers die, it's always way too soon," and yet this moment is coming for us all. Unless the Lord returns soon, we all will "*go the way of the earth.*"

So what legacy are you and I leaving behind to our children? What do we want our children to remember us for? Every one of us is passed a legacy, lives out a legacy, and passes one on to the next generation. It really is not an option. We all will leave a legacy behind, whether one of life and love or one of death and destruction.

When I think of leaving a legacy, I think of leaving Sarah a legacy love. This is what I want to leave her, and if God be so kind, my grandkids. The legacy I'm thinking of has little to do with business, jobs, riches, and money for me. I have had many great things from my family left behind for me, and yet I also want to break the cycle of generational sins and long string of death and destruction that has been left behind. I want to demonstrate, by God's grace, a life of love, and when I blow it I want to tell my daughter that, "*the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.*" Sinners just like daddy. Sinners just like mommy. Sinners just like you....."*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" This is where we must begin.

New **life** in Jesus makes new **legacies** possible.

1 John 4:9-10

⁹ *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

In order to leave a legacy of love, we must know the deep love of Jesus displayed in the Gospel. The Cross of Jesus is what makes us right with God, and it is also what frees us to delight in God as our Heavenly Father. The good news of what Jesus has done for us changes everything, and when we place our faith in Him, we are given the gift of salvation. We are also given real power to change our lives because we have been given a Helper in the Holy Spirit. That should give us an unshakable hope that we can be different as fathers. The life that Jesus gives us is real and true life! It's freedom, joy, peace, courage, and whatever else we need to be like Him. Additionally, it is all a gift of grace that was given in love.

So, that means that change is possible. In Christ, we are loved and forgiven. We have had our sins covered by the perfect blood of Jesus. So in order to leave a legacy of love, you must know that the Father demonstrated that He loves us by sending Jesus to die in our place so that we might have life in Him! To be a life giving and loving father, you must know the One who gives life from the overflow of his steadfast love.

Leaving a legacy of **love** requires that we know the **Father** who loves us through His **Word**.

Fathers, it is imperative that you be a man of the Word. Some of you might be sitting there thinking, "Oh, easy for you to say Mr. Pastor Man, you're a pastor!" Well, it should come as no surprise to learn that I was not born a pastor. As matter of fact, I was not raised in a Christian home. So, when Jesus saved me at the age of 23, I was totally clueless to the Word of God. Early on in my faith journey, I remember Jessie encouraging me to get into the Bible. I often heard this as nagging, even though God had given me this gift of a woman to encourage and challenge me.

So, in order to please my wife and do this "Christian thing," I picked up a Bible and started to read it. I remember how challenging this was when I first began to read it. I started to read it like I would read any book, and that seemed to work quite well for a while. However, as time went on, I got stuck and confused. So, there were many times that I just would put it down and walk away for quite some time.

I particularly remember this one time in which I was sitting on the edge of the couch reading my Bible and my head kept nodding because I was falling asleep. So, I sat up a little straighter and closer to the edge so that I would not be too comfortable. That worked for a little bit, but then I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I knew, I went crashing down face first onto the hardwood floor in our living room. Jessie was startled, probably thinking that I just died of a heart attack. So, she yelled down the stairs to make sure that I was alright. Well, let me tell you that I was not alright. I was angry and frustrated that I was working hard to know and understand the Bible, but it all seemed to not be happening for me. So, that night, frustrated and humiliated, I prayed that God would humble me and give me a love for the Bible. He did, and in time, by God's grace, I would come to know and love the God of the Bible as I got to know Him through His Word.

Fathers, it is our God given responsibility to train up our children. It is not the responsibility of the teachers who have them on Sunday for an hour and a half. It is not the youth pastor or youth leaders' responsibility, or even the main teaching and preaching pastor's responsibility. They all will play a vital role and part, but at the end of the day, it is your God given responsibility. You're their pastor, Daddy. It is impossible to *"Be strong, and show yourself a man, ³ and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the"....Bible* if you don't know the God who reveals Himself in it.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ 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. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

We should notice that Jesus called verse 5 the first and greatest commandment, and added to it the phrase *"with all your mind"*(Mark 12:30). We must understand this text if we are going to pass on a legacy of love on to our children. What is being laid out here tells us what needs to be done to do just that.

We ourselves must love God whole-heartedly! Fathers, first and foremost, we must remember that we are disciples. We are to have these commandments on OUR hearts. Simply put, this means that we are not hypocritical or inconsistent with our lips and our lives matching up. Our kids are watching us, and they are hounds that can sniff out a bogus love for the Lord. We are to instruct our children in the commandments that have first taken root in our own hearts and life.

We are to *"teach them diligently....."* This instruction comes in the context of our whole lives, and not just a moment in time on a Sunday morning. Notice also that we are to teach practically, not only academically. Verse 7 is not promoting family lectures that produce no fruit. Instead, it promotes a total saturation of one's life as we *"sit.....walk by the way.....lie down.....and when you rise."* This is a picture of your whole life. What we're doing here is not so much about a series of lectures and classes, but instead a relationship with the one true living God. The love of Christ has to impact all of your life.

Fathers, start wherever you are at, and be genuine, practical, and creative. This is what is encouraged in verses 8 and 9. That cannot happen until you have been impacted by the love of your Heavenly Father. By God's grace, this is what happened to me as God answered my prayer to know His love more deeply through His Word.

So, God answered my prayers, and I'm thankful for his perfect timing. It wasn't long after this that God gave us the gift of a daughter. I remember it with vivid detail. After twenty-nine and a half hours of agonizing labor, Sarah Louise Rising made her entrance into the world at 7:06p.m. on August 5th, 2005. She was absolutely lovely. She weighed 7lbs 8oz, and was 23 inches long. She had beautiful big blue eyes, and in a moment, I thought that there is nothing that I would not do for this little girl.

Wait a minute.....a little girl! I don't know what to do with a little girl, but before I knew it, Jessie was swept away and going into recovery because of the emergency surgery that had just taken place. So, there I was with the nurse, overwhelmed with joy and scared out of my mind holding this little baby girl. At this moment, I think I finally understood what it meant to pray without ceasing. Now what?

Well, in short, we brought this little gift of life home, and Jessie and I did our best to love her well. I felt this amazing weight of responsibility to be the best daddy that I could. I have heard it said that, "Children are created to look to the dad in the house as a picture of God." Then, I began to think over that thought for the first few years and the implications that it has or could have in our home. I mean, God is powerful! God is worthy of all trust. God is authoritative and disciplines. But the more I read the Bible and the more I got to know this glorious God, the more I realized that God is good. He is so good and gracious. God is kind, generous, caring, and forgiving. He is a God of steadfast love. This is the kind of Father that my daughter needs.

There were a few things that got in the way of this amazing plan. One, she was a sinner and two, I am a sinner. So, listen. A father's love is not the same as God's love, but it does reflect the truth of God's love. Good fathers are to be a reflection of God's grace.

Leaving a legacy of love requires that you **reflect** God's love, even if it's a **blurred** picture of His **love**.

The shift in my brain that needed to happen was the understanding that a father's primary role is one of a gracious forgiver, and NOT of the strong punisher. This truth is learned as much from your actions as it is your words. To give you a picture of this, I want to share a story about my own father. My dad was, at that time, not a Christian. Looking back, though, I sure can see the love of God that came through many times in my life. None as great as at this one particular moment, though.

It was a really snowy day in the dead of winter, and like most days, I was outside playing with the few neighborhood kids that were around. I was probably in the 5th or 6th grade at the time. This particular day was not much different than most. We were sled riding, playing football, throwing snowballs, and basically wrestling each other to the ground and beating the snot out of each other. It was not that bad because we had huge snow suits on with about 20 layers underneath. I, however, stood up, and one young girl named Megan took a huge chunk of ice that had fallen from the neighbor's roof and chucked it right at me, hitting me right between

the legs. I dropped to my knees, and at that moment, everyone there was having a good laugh at my expense. I got extremely embarrassed and angry all in the same moment. So, I did what any angry little sinner would do in that moment. I stood up in a rage and pretended to throw the ice at her. She flinched and took off running. I then threw the chunk of ice as far and as high as I could, never thinking for a moment that it might come down on someone.....someone like her, but that is exactly what happened next. The chunk of ice landed on her head, and her pretty blond hair turned reddish-pink.

I then watched everyone go and care for her, and I felt this horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach. So, I took off running towards the woods. Many thoughts ran through my mind in that moment, such as, "I hope she is ok," and the fact that I could never go home again. Now, that may seem a little crazy to you as you sit here listening, but in the moment that was extreme logic. I thought my dad would kill me. My dad was, and is, a good dad, but he was a no-nonsense kind of father. And this was really bad. I found my way to a big blue spruce tree and crawled under it as tears and snot were frozen to my face. I was there for what seemed like a really long time. I thought that maybe they would never find me, or even come looking for me. So, there I sat, cold, scared, and greatly saddened by the events that had just taken place.

After what seemed like a really long time, but in all reality was probably just a short time, my dad came. I will never forget what happened next. He crawled under the big tree and gave me a huge hug. He didn't say anything for a while. He just hugged me and told me that everything was going to be just fine. He told me that Meg was ok, and that she just needed a couple of stitches. I didn't know it then, but my dad was showing me grace and forgiveness. My dad was giving me a picture of my Heavenly Father. This would forever shape me.

Fathers , you matter a great deal when it comes to the faith of your children. Give them grace. When your heart and mind has been impacted by the Gospel, you will make the Gospel visible to your children. There is a real "father problem" in our culture. The solution is NOT to give them Law. Instead, what is needed is more Gospel, more forgiveness, more grace, more mercy, more freedom, and more love, not more rules. This is something that I have to fight with all that I have in me. This doesn't come natural to me. We want to come up with more rules, but that will not change their hearts. By God's grace, we need to hand out more grace when our inclination is that more law is needed. The Law will never produce righteousness, nor change a heart in a way that leads to salvation, only the Gospel can do that!

A father's love is to be centered on grace, BUT that does not mean that we are permissive. In our home, we really only discipline two things, back talk and straight out rebellion or disobedience. Our kiddos need some boundaries to feel safe, but these boundaries should give them space to roam and mess up. When they do, and they will, we need to point them to their loving Savior and the grace and forgiveness that is available to them. Fathers, we must, by God's grace, provide a safe place for our children to first taste and see that the Lord is good by being loving fathers.

The best fathers give out **grace** and **love**, even when they don't **understand** why their children do what they do.

May I read you a story of an amazing Father just like that? This story is told by Jesus. It goes without saying that Jesus was and is the greatest story teller ever.

Luke 15:11-24

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."'" ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

I know this story is called the "Prodigal Son," but it is so much more about the heart of our Heavenly Father. What a powerful picture of grace! I remember when this exact text was taught years ago at a men's retreat, and God laid me out with this beautiful picture of love. It has forever changed me and how I approach being a daddy.

Church, this parable is not some fairy tale. This is our story. The Father has shown us absolutely unhindered love and affection, and we have all flat-out denied Him, abandoned Him, and wished Him dead. This is true of all of us. We are the guilty and the disobedient sinners, and because of this truth, we deserve death and condemnation. Our lives would be utterly hopeless if it were not for the mercy, grace, and love of this AMAZING FATHER who offers us life through His Son, and the Father who acts graciously towards us on account of Jesus Christ. Even when we openly reject Him, He continues to love and pursue.

Romans 5:8

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This is the heart of the Father. You see, dads, we need to be forgiven as often as we need to forgive. You and I desperately need grace in order to freely hand it out.

Closing.....

In closing, I want to speak to single moms and single men. First, to the single moms, I want you to know that you are loved, and I want to share a truth that is found in and throughout the Bible. Where what is ideal is lacking, grace abounds. Pray, seek the Lord, and know that He can powerfully make up for an absent father. I have seen it all throughout the church. Do your best to place them in and around godly men. Point them to God the Father, and know that He will fill in all the gaps. All is not lost, and God's grace is sufficient for you and your children.

Single men, submit yourself to King Jesus and love and serve the church. Many of you need to work through your own issues so that you don't pass them on if God graciously gives you a wife and children. Get godly men in your life and learn from them. Real men don't live in isolation from others. They are disciplined by other men and they disciple other men. Don't wait until you're married with children to learn and grow. By God's grace, be a man worthy of a woman and children.

In closing, I want to say to everyone that God wants to work through you more than to just make money, advance your career, and build your mini-kingdom here on earth. He wants to work through you to make a difference in your family, church, neighborhood, community, and ultimately the world. God will work in you as He works through you. God is with us and He is a good Father. He will not give up on us, and we can trust Him with everything, including our families. So, if you want to leave a legacy, submit yourself to King Jesus and then go home and love your family.