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Ephesians 6:4 “The Value of an Involved Father”

Intro. In the 1992 presidential election, you adults probably remember a big controversy over what Vice-President Dan Quayle said. He was making a speech and he was talking about family values, and in the course of his speech he made some remarks concerning the sit-com character Murphy Brown. She chose to get pregnant & give birth to a baby without any intention of marrying the baby's father. Vice President Quayle said that Murphy Brown needed a husband. He said that TV was portraying an unacceptable role model for American family life. Well, that caused a media fire storm in our culture of moral relativism. However, some agreed with Dan Quayle. Let me give you a quotation from Margaret Carlson writing in *Time Magazine* in June of '92. She said, “There is nothing new about having babies without getting married. What's new is society's attitude which has gone from punishing it to tolerating it to celebrating it.” I think she's right on target.

Does Murphy Brown need a husband? The better question is, “Does Murphy Brown's child need a father?” The answer to that is obvious to me, both from Scripture and my life experience. I will also give you some statistical evidence to show that a child needs a father who is involved in their life. But the answer to that question doesn't seem to be very clear to many in this generation. Lesbians & radical feminists say that Murphy Brown doesn't need a husband, nor does her child need a father. In fact, the show reflected the dangerous but increasingly popular notion that fathers are expendable. But of course Murphy Brown's child does need a father. Every child needs a father.

But the United States is in danger of becoming a fatherless society, shorn of its male parents not by war or disease but due to bad parental choices. This is borne out by statistics. For example, in 1990 more than 25% of all births were to unmarried women, a 5-fold increase since 1960, according to the Census Bureau. By 2005 it had increased to 37% of all births.¹ 40% of kids who live in female-headed households haven't seen their fathers in at least a year. Of the remaining 60%, only a fifth sleeps at least one night a month in their father's home. According to a 1996 Gallup poll on fatherhood, nearly 80% of respondents said the most significant family or social problem facing America is the physical absence of the father from the home.

So men, I want you to hear what I am sharing today. I want to show you how important you are to your children. Then I want to share with you how you can be a good father to your children.

Today's message may be a little difficult for single moms, and for children who do not see their fathers nearly enough. But let me say to you who are single moms, you are doing your part. I applaud you and I congratulate you because you are doing a very difficult job. Keep it up. Don't quit. Ask God to give you the strength and perseverance you need. The last thing your children need is to lose both parents! Look to the Lord for His help, and teach your children to do the same. Children, if you're father's not around, remember, God can compensate your losses to a large degree. The Bible says He is “a Father of the fatherless” (Ps. 68:5). So if you do not see your earthly father enough, do not feel sorry for yourself. You have a Heavenly Father who loves you. As you look to Him, and trust in Him, He can help you succeed in life, and be the person you should be. And don't become bitter & angry. You will only hurt yourself. There's no point getting

¹ National Center for Health Statistics.

angry & hurt over things that you have little control over. And there are some single dads out there who are doing a great job. I congratulate you as well. Keep up the good work.

Now let's get into the message. I want to begin by sharing with you:

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF A FATHER

Men, your role as a father is more important than your role on the job, and more important than winning a golf tournament, or a fishing tournament. Some fathers mistakenly believe that their role is not as significant to their children as a mother's role. Actually, both mom and dad are important.

Now the importance of an involved father is first of all demonstrated by:

A. The Negative Impact of the Absent, Uninvolved Father - Half of children being raised by single mothers live in poverty, compared with 8% of those from two-parent families. Children living with a single mother are twice as likely as children living with two parents to drop out of high school. Children from single-parent homes are more than twice as likely to suffer emotional and behavioral problems. Moreover, the most reliable predictor of juvenile crime is not income or race but family structure. A very high percentage of boys in gangs do not have an involved father. In the Fall 2005 issue of *In Character*, James Q. Wilson noted that a boy growing up without a father has no personal conception of what it means to acquire skills, find a job, support a family, and be loyal to one's wife and children.

Furthermore, the research of Joseph Nicolosi and others points to specific social and environmental factors as a prime cause of homosexual orientation. For example, boys who do not identify themselves with dad by age two are clearly at risk of developing a homosexual orientation.

We know that an involved father is important to his children also because of:

B. The Positive Impact of an Involved Father - Almost twice as many high-achievers come from two-parent homes. Fathers who spend time alone with their children more than twice a week reared the most compassionate, caring, & loving adults. When a father is present and actively participates with the family, his children are more secure in their male and female identities, less susceptible to peer pressure, and less likely to be involved in substance abuse and delinquent behaviors. So there is something about that masculine presence in the home that makes a difference.

Since I believe it is very important that a father be involved in your children's lives, married men & women need to go the extra mile to keep the marriage together, for the sake of your children. That used to be common. But in an age of self-centered moral relativism, that is less common today. And single moms should cooperate with your children's father regarding visitation and other regular contact with your children, unless you & the court agree that he is a really bad influence. Don't use your kids as a weapon, or as a means of revenge for the hurt he has caused you. And if your child's father will not maintain close contact with your children, the second best thing is to live near at least one of the grandfathers, who will be heavily involved in the child's life.

Fathers, since you are so important to your children, I want you to be the best dad you can be. So I want to conclude the message by sharing with you:

II. THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR A FATHER

Many want to be a good father, but unfortunately, they feel that their own fathers have not been good role models. In a survey back in the 1990's, only 1/3 of men feel at peace with their fathers and 54% reported having unresolved problems with their fathers. But even if your earthly fathers have not given you a good example, your Heavenly Father has, and He has given instructions to follow in His Word. So what are some of the main biblical instructions for fathers?

There are 3 main things I want to encourage you to do as a father: 1) Meet the needs of your children. 2) Instill moral values to your children. 3) Provide stability & security for your children. So with that overview, let's start with your first obligation:

A. Meet the Needs of Your Children – Your role as a father is to have a significant part in meeting the needs of your children. For starters, you should certainly:

1. Provide for their Physical Needs - The traditional role of the father is to be the primary provider for the family. This is partly based on 1 Timothy 5:8, which says, "If a man does not provide for his own household, he is worse than an infidel." There are too many single dads out there who are not providing child support for their children.

Now even though it is important to provide for your children, bringing home a paycheck or giving child support is not sufficient to fulfill your fathering role. Our children need more than food, clothing, and a place to stay. They need more than the latest toys & electronics. So we should not only meet their physical needs, but we should also:

2. Meet their Need for Love – Your children need to know and feel that you love them. Mothers are usually great at showing love, but fathers have an important role in meeting this need as well. Some of the ways we help our kids know that they are loved is by telling them. It's not unmanly to tell your children that you love them! Also give them physical gestures of love, such as hugs and kisses. Give them focused attention. This means spending time with our kids, and giving them your attention. At its most fundamental level, a father's love is expressed through a man's daily involvement with his family.

Several years ago Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner did a study trying to determine how much time middle class fathers spend in contact with their children each day. They asked these men to estimate the amount of time they spend each day with their one year old children, the average response was between fifteen and twenty minutes a day. But when they attached microphones to the shirts of the kids to record the actual parental interaction, the results were shocking. The average amount of time daily spent by each dad with his child was an average of less than 3 daily encounters of just ten to fifteen seconds each.

I know your schedules are difficult, but being there for your children, to listen to them, to talk with them, to love them, is so critical. You should stop long enough to really listen to them. Don't be like Superman, flying in to meet a need and then flying out before they could find out who that masked man really was. Maybe in the evening when your child is getting ready for bed you may want to think about crawling into bed with them and just listening to them. Some kids can really talk! Tell your children that you love them. Let them go to sleep each night with the security of knowing that mom and dad love them.

Country singer Reba McEntire recorded a song years ago written by Richard Leigh and Layng Martine, Jr. It could tragically be the theme song of many a little boy or little girl as they reflect on their relationship with their daddy. It is entitled, "The Greatest Man."

The greatest man I never knew
Lived just down the hall
And everyday we said hello
But never touched at all.
He was in his paper.
I was in my room
How was I to know he thought I hung the moon?

The greatest man I never knew
Came home late every night
He never had too much to say
Too much was on his mind.
I never really knew him,
And now it seems so sad.
Everything he gave to us took all he had.

Then the days turned into years,
And the memories to black and white.
He grew cold like an old winter wind
Blowing across my life.

The greatest words I never heard
I guess I'll never hear.
The man I thought could never die
Been dead almost a year.
He was good at business,
But there was business left to do.
He never said he loved me, guess he thought I knew.

There's yet another need that you need to meet in the lives of your children:

3. Meet their Need for Self-Esteem – We all need to feel good about ourselves, that we are worthwhile, that we matter, that we have value. We need to feel that we are making a positive impact upon others. People with good self-esteem tend to have healthier relationships and better success in life. One thing that Dr. Danny Akin said about fathers that really stuck with me was this: a child's self-esteem is greatly influenced by the approval or disapproval of their father. In Genesis 48:9 the patriarch Jacob said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." He was talking about blessing his grandchildren, the children of Joseph. One of the greatest things that you could do for your children is to bless them. In the New Testament, the word translated "bless" literally means "to speak well of." The Old Testament word can mean "to praise." Do you bless your children by speaking well of them? Do you give affirmation & approval whenever possible? Sometimes they need rebuke & correction, but be sure to give them affirmation & approval whenever possible.

Ephesians 6:4 says: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath..." Do you know one way you can produce seething, prolonged anger in your children? You provoke them to wrath when you berate them, and even curse at them. Too many fathers have said something like, "Son, you're no good. You'll never amount to anything. Why can't you do anything right?" Some

children have heard demeaning profanity from their father's lips. In fact, it has been said that many workaholic men today are the men who were not blessed by their fathers and somehow are trying subconsciously to get the approval of fathers, even if they have long sense passed away. What is driving them is the desire to be blessed, to know that they are acceptable. Fathers, don't curse your children with your words. Don't use angry, hurtful words to discipline your children. Just take action when they need correction. Instead of cursing your children, bless them with words of approval & affirmation.

Former first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton told a story about her father, who never affirmed her as a child. When she was in high school, she brought home a straight-A report card. She showed it to her dad, hoping for a word of commendation. Instead, he said, "Well, you must be attending an easy school." Thirty five years later the remark still burns in her mind. His thoughtless response may have represented nothing more than a casual retort, but it created a point of pain that has endured to this day.²

B. Instill Moral Values to Your Children – I talked about this last week. According to Proverbs 29:15b, the scripture says: "...but a child left to itself disgraces his mother." Children do not raise themselves physically, mentally, or spiritually. Children must have moral direction. A good dad provides moral direction for his family. I love Psalm 127:4 which says: "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth." What good is an arrow unless it is shot and what good is the shooting of an arrow unless it has direction? As a father, you should provide moral direction for your family. How do you do that?

1. Spend Enough Time with your Children to Instill Your Moral Values - This is brought out in Dt. 6:5-7: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." Every moment that you live, you are in a teaching mode with your child. You don't need to give a formal lecture each day. Just instill biblical values to your children each day by your words and by your example.

However, I pointed out last week that our children's values are being influenced too much by our society. Do you realize that the average child watches four to seven hours a day of TV? This is far more than they spend with their father. What kind of values will they get from TV? They probably aren't watching *Andy Griffith* or *Father Knows Best*. In a recent study 88% of all sexual encounters shown on TV are biblically immoral. Many children & youth spend a great deal of time listening to secular music that emphasizes the themes of promiscuity, death, the occult, drugs & alcohol abuse, and rebellion. You see, our values, our belief systems are influenced by parents, teachers, pastors, entertainment, and by our peers. So we need to spend time with our children, and instill moral values into their hearts and minds. But if a father & mother is gone most of the time, they will pick up their values from whoever or whatever they spend their time with. Our children are being influenced too much by the entertainment industry & their peers. We also need to bring them to church where they will be influenced by pastors and Christian teachers.

2. Lead by Example – Turn over to Acts 16. In Acts 16:31, the apostle Paul said to the Philippian Jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." And then v.33 says, "At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized." Then in v.34: "The jailer brought them into his

² Martha Sherrill, "Mrs. Clinton's Two Weeks out of Time: The Vigil for Her Father, Taking a Toll Both Public and Private," _Washington Post, 3 April 1993, p. C1.

house and set a meal before them, and the whole family was filled with joy, because they had come to believe in God.” What a wonderful commentary about how God can change the direction of an entire family when the dad takes the first step.

Several years ago Billy Graham quoted the following statistics: he said that when the father is the first to accept Christ from his family, the entire family came to faith in Christ in sixty percent of the cases. When the wife came first, forty to fifty percent of the family members followed by receiving Christ. In families in which a child came to Christ first, only twenty-five percent of them saw their entire family become Christians. Blessed is the family, who has a dad who says, “We worship God, we serve Jesus, we stand for Christ.” And by the way, a child’s conception of the Heavenly Father is influenced by their earthly father. Are you giving a good picture of the Heavenly Father for them to relate to?

3. Teach Them about God & His Word - Ephesians 6:4 says: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” That means teach them the Word of God, and impart biblical values to them, especially while they are young. Read the Bible together. Bring your children to church. Then as they get older, you will likely see Proverbs 22:6 fulfilled in your child: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it.”

Of course, you can’t teach what you do not know. So fathers, you need to learn the Word of God. Read it daily. Come to church faithfully to learn even more.

Now when your children go against the moral values you have taught them, you must reinforce those moral values:

4. By Disciplining Them – It’s not enough to teach right from wrong. They also need commendation when they do right, and rebuke and correction when they do wrong. Heb. 12:7 says, “What son is there whom a father does not chasten?”

Now the Old Testament story of Eli the high priest is an example of someone who failed at this. His sons Hophni and Phinehas were very wicked. They abused the sacrificial offering and committed fornication (1 Sam. 2:21). Their sin became so open that their father finally reprimanded them (1 Sam. 2:22-25). But he did nothing else. He did not remove them from the priesthood. So God said to him, you “honor your sons more than Me” (1 Sam. 2:29). And the Scriptures tell us that his own life and that of his sons ended tragically because he had not disciplined them as a firm, caring, loving father. We do have a responsibility to both admonish and discipline our children.

So to be a good father, we must meet the physical & emotional needs of our children, we must instill moral values to our children, and finally, we should:

C. Provide Stability & Security – Those kids that grow up in an unstable, insecure home certainly have a lot to overcome. But those kids that grow up in a stable, secure home tend to do much better. A good dad should be a stabilizing force for his family. With a silent strength and love for his family, he should be a stabilizing force for a child who is growing and changing biologically, emotionally and spiritually.

Junior High School was probably my most difficult time period growing up. I had freckles as a child, and then I developed pimples for the first time. I had a speech impediment. It was 1969 & I had my first exposure to racial conflict. I was still a skinny, 75 lb. weakling in the 7th grade. There were boys there who had repeated 2-3 grades. They were much bigger. Some even had facial hair. I remember one boy who pushed me up against a brick wall & demanded that I “loan” him some money. That year my grades suffered. How did I survive Junior High school without being permanently damaged? I’ll tell you. I was able to go home to a mother who was almost always

there to welcome me with a hug & kiss. At 5:00 o'clock every day I knew my dad would come home from work to a loving kiss & hug from my mother. My dad is a gentle, big man, who provided a good, stable home life. We had a family meal at 6:00 o'clock sharp every evening. I could survive 7 hours of Jr. High each day because I had a good, stable, loving home life to come home to. Fathers, mothers, give your children a place they can call home; a cleft in the rock along life's shore, shielding them from the troubled sea of this world.

But sadly, there are too many kids that don't want to go home each day. Why? It may be because they have a dad who is so frustrated with their job that they come home angry. Mom & dad soon get into an argument. Or he comes home drunk. Dad starts fussing at the kids, and they end up embittering his children. The scripture says in Colossians 3:21: "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Some dads not only verbally abuse their children, but even do so physically. The number one comment that I heard several years ago from a survey of students was that if there was one thing they really wished they understood about their fathers was, "Why are they so angry?" The angry dad today is producing children who are hurt & angry. God wants us to respect our children by not yelling at them every time we turn around. To be a stabilizing force for a family means to hold in your emotions if necessary.

Conclusion: Real men take seriously their responsibility to parent their children. I want to invite all fathers here today to make a commitment to God something like this, "Heavenly Father, from this day forward, help me to focus more on meeting the needs of my children: their physical needs, and their need for love & affirmation. Help me provide moral direction for my children in both word and example. Help me to be strong for my children. Help me provide security and stability for my children." Now with God's help and a commitment on your part to maintain the right priorities, you can be a great dad. However, the key is to know the greatest Father of all, our Heavenly Father. And we can only know Him through Jesus Christ. Dad, do you know Jesus as your Savior. If not, I invite you to trust in Jesus as your Savior. He died for your sins on the cross that you might be forgiven. Set a good example for your children. God will give you a new heart, and your children will have a new dad.

Sources: Tim Clinton, "The Father Factor: Being There Makes a Difference"; Curt Dodd (notes from his sermon entitled, "Real Men Parenting Real Children"); Richard Louv, "The Crisis of the Absent Father"; Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon entitled "Does Murphy Brown Need a Husband" dated 8/23/92). Other sources noted in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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