

Well we have had a busy January. We had a mens time of fellowship in St. Louis, with a bunch of husbands and fathers men. We arrive Thursday night and have our first meeting where we introduce some of the new guys. Then we meet all day Friday and all day Saturday. Everybody has 15 minutes to talk and share what's going on in their life and then the rest of us have 15 minutes to ask them questions.

With 21 men that pretty much fills up the time and it's always good. At the end of the weekend, even if you can't put your finger on specific things that you learned, just hearing each other's stories helps us bear each other's burdens. We're all changed by being with each other and having God join us

I had a similar opportunity to meet with fathers who have children with disability at Spruce Lake Retreat Center in the Pocono Mountains of NE Pennsylvania. We did have a speaker, a good friend Mike King who was hit by a car when he was 19 or 20 and he's a paraplegic and been in the paraplegic Olympics. He has a ministry to people with disability, called Powered to Move. Mike's from the Dallas area. After each session where he spoke, we broke up into small groups and connected with each other.

This past weekend we had a conference here in Lancaster called Mid Winter Encouragement. It was for home educators who are tempted to throw in the towel. Things get a little discouraging sometimes in the middle of the winter. We are trying to encourage parents. There were eight speakers, 16 workshops, and 25 vendors, and about 81 adults.

We're hoping to be posting pictures of these conferences on our website. One of our speakers was a lady named Bonnie Greiner who has eight children that they homeschooled and the youngest three got married this last year. She's got eight married children and I'm sure there's lots of grandchildren and she was one of our speakers who was very encouraging, very helpful, very experienced.

I was talking to her and she said this coming Tuesday night, she has 25 moms coming to her house because they're all wanting to stop home educating, and she's attempting to encourage them.

Let's pray and we'll jump in. Father thank you for bringing us through half of winter and being with us and I pray that you'll be with us the second half of winter and draw near to us today as we consider this topic of dads and kids. In Jesus name amen.

One of the sessions that I did this past weekend was called "Dads and Kidz" and it was a talk focusing on father children activities. The primary purpose was to

be intentional about encouraging dads to do stuff with their kids. The fact that a dad is even listening to this tells me this guy wants to be a better dad. I believe that a father who is wanting to improve as a parent is a testimony to the work of God mentioned in Malachi chapter four when God says He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the children to the fathers.

If you feel like you need more of that then join me because I frequently ask God to turn my heart towards God himself which is the first commandment, to love him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. And then I ask God to turn my heart towards my family and which is my second priority. I know that God will answer this prayer because it says in 1 John 5 that if we ask anything according to his will He hears us and we have the request that we have asked of Him.

It is definitely God's will to turn our hearts towards God himself and God will turn our hearts towards our children and our families as well. I want to start by saying I don't think we can measure the impact of a father in the home especially when we see the lack of fathers in homes. There are more and more studies coming out on this important topic. If you are a single parent, may God give you extra grace for the difficult task of raising children.

This podcast is geared to helping those dads who are in their home. I want them to recognize how significant they are in their lives of their children. One of the men's retreats I attended I asked the men to share who were the most significant people in their lives who had shaped them and had the most influence on them. I was surprised when everybody in our small group mentioned their dad.

I thought some of the guys would talk about their youth group leader, or some teacher that they had, or a coach, or an uncle but they all mentioned their dad. A few of them were good, some were bad. One fellow sticks out in my mind who has a great dad. They have a great relationship and he has sought to emulate him. Another father in the group who is in his 70s, has a horrific experience with his father.

Sadly, those kinds of experiences can shape our view of our heavenly father because in a sense we're the first "father" that a child encounters. Many years later they will start hearing about somebody else, this person in heaven, who is our creator and can be our Heavenly Father. They may hear father and start thinking about him through the lens of their earthly father.

I was really surprised to discover, when I was going through times of reflection and therapy, how much my earthly dad had shaped my view of my Heavenly Dad. If you had asked me what do you think God looks like, or perhaps to

describe God, I would have said, everybody likes him, he seems to be a good guy, he is generous, he's there for me in a pinch, but I don't have much of a relationship with him.

That pretty much capsulizes up how I viewed my heavenly father; everybody likes him, everybody speaks well of him, he's generous, he's there for me in a pinch but I don't have much of a relationship with him. With the help of God's word and His Spirit, He's correcting that image. For the past 7-8 years I have been seeking to rebuild my understanding of who God is based on Scripture.

My point is that even as a born again believer, who had read his Bible through probably 30 times at that point, I was struck by how much my earthly father colored my taste of my heavenly father.

Let's go a little further. This is an overview of this series before we get into specific activities to do with your children. I'm going to talk about three levels of parenting and I'm going to try to describe a picture which illustrates these levels. If there's any artists listening that want to help me with this I am wide open for this but I think there are three levels of parenting.

Level 1 is what I will call horizontal parenting. At this level, in which I think all parents function, whether you're a Christian, a non Christian, living in a jungle, or living in a city. Most parents either want to do better than their parents or they want to emulate their parents. Whether they recognize it or not, their parents have been some of the most significant people in their life. They want to either do better or they want to do as well as they were parented.

It's horizontal because they're looking at their parents and they're looking at their children and they're just trying to be a good parent themselves. I am aware there's some abusive parents and some really sad sick parents out there, but most of the time parents that I meet, want their children to have a good upbringing.

I'll give you some examples of level 1 parenting. I mentioned that my dad was generous and everyone liked him. He helped me with my college tuition, he let me live in his house, he fed me, he bought me clothes, he was a nice guy. He was a salesman, generally everybody that I met had nothing but good things to say about my dad. He was there if I needed him. When I needed someone to help me buy my first MathUSee plastic molds and purchase my first house he was there for me. When we had a son with special needs my mom and dad drove down and were there for us. But I never really felt like I had a relational connection, which deep down I thoroughly desired. Sadly I just didn't have it.

Looking back I attribute this lack to his not being home much of the first five years of my life when a lot of that bonding happens. He was a hard working traveling salesman, and he wasn't home. I recognize this now, but all I know is that because of this I wanted to have a close relationship with my kids. I wanted to be there for them and whenever possible I chose to work from home. I tried to be with my family so I wouldn't be gone all the time. You wouldn't believe that now considering how much I travel to conferences but the kids are grown up men now.

There are also positive things that I wanted to emulate. I wanted to be generous. I wanted to be there for my kids. I wanted to attend events. My dad was at all my little league baseball games. He traveled to college to watch me play basketball, et cetera. So there were good things I sought to emulate, I wanted to be generous, but at the same time, there were some things that I felt I could do better by being present and having a relationship so that's what I did.

Each of us could probably sit down and make a journal, or put together lists. What did your parents do well? What do you wish your parents had done better? We might be surprised how much we're like our mom and our dad and observe how much of those characteristics have been passed on. Even if we didn't seek to pass them on, it's called modeling. You watch mom and dad in your home for 18, 20 years and you're going to be more like your parents than you think.

Then I'm going to say there's level two parenting. This is parenting where we're looking up a little bit, that's why I call it level two. What I want you to do now is picture that you're in Israel and you're in the Sinai desert and you're looking all around at all the other parents there, which is level one parenting. You're looking at your parents, you're looking at other parents, and you're realizing that you're basing all of your parenting skills of what you see around you.

But then there's level two, where you look up and you see this man coming down from a mountain and he's carrying two tablets of stone and his name is Moses. He has specific instructions on how to raise your children. In Deuteronomy 4 God says, "What great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him and what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today."

Paul almost said the same thing in Romans 9 when he says talking about his kinsmen, "They are Israelites and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises. To them belong all the patriarchs and from their race according to the flesh is the Christ who is God over all blessed forever amen."

God gave us His word and He gave us Deuteronomy 6:7, "Parents you shall teach these commands diligently to your children and you shall do it when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up, you shall write them on your home." There are many other scriptures that speak to parenting.

One of the things I want to do as a dad is go through all of scripture to look at specific scriptures like, "Fathers do not aggravate or provoke or be hard or harass your children or they will become discouraged," that's Colossians 3 with some help from the Amplified Version.

Then there's Ephesians 6 which is similar, "Children obey your parents because you belong to the Lord for this is the right thing to do. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise. If you honor your father and mother things will go well with you and you will have a long life on the earth." When I read that I don't think about my children so much as I think, "Boy Steve, you need to be honorable so your children can inherit the blessings from that promise."

This passage ends with, "Do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them but bring them up in the nurture and admonition." Another translation says, "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The Amplified Version says, "Do not irritate and provoke your children to anger but rear them tenderly." It seems we need to have the discipline aspect without provoking them to anger, but you also have rear them tenderly, one of the few positive scriptures for dads.

As I read through scripture I also keep an eye out for dads in the Bible which I've talked about in previous podcasts. I consider Abraham a good dad, a little blind spot about his sin, when he was lying about his wife being his sister, but generally a good dad. And as a result his son Isaac, who honored him had a long and fruitful life.

Then I look at Samuel, a great prophet, but a bad dad. I shouldn't say bad it sounds a little strong but he dropped the ball, and his children didn't do well. Then you have David, an amazing king, prophet and priest, but whose sin made a shambles of his family. Then there is Enoch who had his son Methuselah and then he became transformed in the process of becoming a parent and became a new man. So that's another way I've gone through scripture, I call that level two parenting. I'm not going to specify all of those I'm just touching on them.

Then there is the ultimate parenting style which is based on looking at Jesus. So if you're at level one looking around at your parents and relatives on the plain,

and level two looking up the mountain at Moses bringing down the law, level three is looking above the mountain to God himself. Level 3 is asking yourself, "How did the Heavenly Father love His Son?" That to me is the ideal. I don't want to just do the best I can with levels one and two, I want to look at the perfect example of a Father – Son relationship. In John 15:9, Jesus is speaking to his disciples when He says, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you."

How did the Father love the Son? In our last podcast series we looked at Jesus, and considered how did He love His bride for we should love our bride the same way that He loved His bride. In these episodes I'm going to be asking myself the question, how did the Father love His Son.

For example, He loved His Son by being with him and He showed Him all things that He did. Jesus said at one point, "I don't do anything by myself. I just look at what my father's doing and do the same stuff." So the Father and the Son had an incredible relationship. They did life together, and that's the spirit that we're going into this series of podcasts for dads and kids.

What are some things that we can do with our kids that will help to engage them and be intentional and develop our relationship with them? And we're going to stop right here and pick it up in the next podcast. The fact that we're even considering this topic can do nothing but edify us.

Let's pray in closing: Father thank you for this good start and thank you for giving us a fleshly, earthly, human, example of Jesus and how He loved His disciples and how He loved children and how He took care of people. And I pray that you'll transfer this loving attitude to us and help us to flesh it out in our homes. Help us to take in your love as Your sons and then pass it on to our children in a way that draws them closer to You and reveals You, in Jesus' name amen.