

Podcast 236 Fathers and Kidz, part 6

Let's pray. Father, thank you that even in the midst of struggles, and pandemics, and just daily routines that you remain the same and you haven't changed a bit. You're not wringing your hands even though you're feeling our despair perhaps and our suffering, but you are still God, and you're on the throne. We draw near to you now, and we pray that you'll help us today to speak well and listen well to what your spirit is saying to us. Give us all ears to hear. In Jesus's name, amen.

I have three points. The first one is not trying to be clever, but I think one of the greatest gifts we can give our children is to be a transparent parent. Years ago somebody talked to me about the need to develop a relationship with my sons through communicating with them. I thought, "Okay, that resonates," and jumped right in. The next morning after we completed family devotions, I asked how they were doing?

They were sitting side by side on the couch, and they said, "Fine." Then it was quiet. I think I prayed, "Lord, what do I do now?" Then I said, "Hey, would you guys like to know how I'm doing?" They sat right up on the edge of the couch, and said, "Yeah." I replied, "I'm overwhelmed and depressed."

The background was that we lived in a big home, but it was unfinished. I didn't have the time or energy to do the work myself. Neither did I have the money to pay somebody else to do it. Every morning, I had to walk out and see the unfinished floors and sheetrock.

Those two little guys could relate to being overwhelmed and they started telling me all the stuff that was discouraging to them. I found out things that I had never known before, and I thought, "Wow. If I hadn't taken the lead and primed the pump, I wouldn't have learned all this." We were able to adjust their schedules to take some of the pressure off of their schoolwork. They hadn't said anything until I shared my situation. Hearing my transparency gave them permission to tell how they were feeling. That was a really special time.

On another occasion one of my sons told me, "Pop, one of the most encouraging things about you is you're always changing and growing. This encourages me that I can continue to change and grow." Personally I have always been encouraged by Abraham in the Bible. He was 99 years old, and God was still giving him tests to see whether he would believe him and whether Abraham loved God more than he loved his son to. Even after Abraham had faithfully walked with God for generations and had an incredible relationship with his heavenly father, and he was still being tested and proven. Abraham was a lifelong learner, and apparently, my life has encouraged my son because I am growing and pursuing God. When our children see us changing and learning, it encourages them to do the same.

Point 2. I believe that the best thing I can do for my relationship with my sons is to have a great relationship with my heavenly father. We have observed the way God

interacted with His Son. The Father loved Jesus to pieces, and told Him so at His baptism. The Holy Spirit descended on him, then God uttered words of affirmation to make Jesus know that he was a loved, well-pleasing Son. Jesus then passed that same love on to us, for as the Father loved Him, so has He loved us.

I need to continue spending time in God's word and on my prayer walks. Adding in His love and coming into God's presence is critical to me. I find that I require regular assurance that I'm a loved, pleasing, adopted child of God. As God affirms these truths, then I can pass this same love on to my sons and help them feel loved and assured.

God the Father loved His Son well. His Son loved us well. If we can love our sons well, hopefully, they can love their sons well, and we can keep passing this on from generation to generation. This divine love all begins with God the Father loving His Son Jesus.

Another component of this relationship was the capacity of Jesus to receive His Father's care and affection. In Ephesians chapter 3:17-18 Paul prays for the believers that they might be "rooted and grounded in love" and "have strength to comprehend with all the saints" how amazing this love is. Jesus had to assimilate and comprehend His Father's love.

One of the breakthroughs for me happened when I started tasting unconditional love and affection from my son with Down Syndrome. He loves me for who I am because I am his dad. I love him because he is my son. The more I thought about John's love, I began to have hope that maybe I was lovable. I know God loves the world, but I have difficulty comprehending that He genuinely cares for me. God used my special needs son who thinks I'm the best thing since sliced bread. John awakened something in me that gave me hope that I was lovable and could receive God's love. The more I have grown in comprehending God's unfailing love, the greater my capacity to love others as He has, and is, living me.

The more rooted and grounded I am in God's love, the more I am convinced in my heart of hearts of God's unfailing love, the better dad and husband I will be. Thus the best thing I can do to love my wife and kids is to first let God love me.

Point 3. I've been recording videos this week because we don't have conferences because of government restrictions and social distancing. Yesterday, I did an online seminar on family communication. My ability to hear well from others and speak the truth in love to others, is also directly tied to how connected and grounded I am with my heavenly Dad.

As I'm finding my identity in him and am assured that I'm an adopted child of God, that He's got my back and likes me, then I won't take things "as personally" (still human) and I'm easier to communicate with. When I'm in a good place myself, I can provide a safe place for my kids.

If I had any advice for a dad, I would say, "The first thing is really work on your own relationship with God. Be a son before trying to be a dad. Be loved before loving." I would also say, "Try to make your home a safe place and work to maintain a safe atmosphere for them.

Every person is unique, and we don't know how to parent every single child. There's not one parenting style that works for everybody, so we need feedback. But we can't get feedback unless we're safe, unless we're transparent, unless we're able to listen to hard things from our wife and children.

Now that I'm in a whole different place rooted and grounded in grace, I've heard things from my sons that I wish I had known 30 years ago. Providing a safe place, and a safe atmosphere, enables those closest to me to help me understand how I am building them up and how I am hurting them.

One of my boys had three foster children in their home. After they had been there for a couple months, I asked him, "Have they settled down now that they feel safer and more at ease?" He said, "Actually, they haven't. It's gotten more intense and at times, more out of control." I said, "I don't understand. I thought that once they were in a structured environment, with you and your wife being accepting and loving, with their meals on time, that they would begin to feel more secure and settled down."

He replied, "Well, what happens is when they feel safe, then they're finally able to start processing the traumatic experiences they've experienced. They're able to open up about these emotions that are just too big for their little bodies, and so the safer they feel, sometimes the more out of control they get because they know that they're not going to be locked into a closet, or smacked around" I thought, "Wow, that's counterintuitive. I would have thought it was the opposite."

Maybe your children, once they begin to experience a rooted and grounded dad will say, "Hey, dad is in a different place, and I feel safe." Now their behavior won't be based on trauma, but it will be based on security. We all need to work through some things before we can begin to calm down, so take it as a plus to your parenting. David in the Psalms, felt safe with God, and he was able to tell Him how he was feeling. He was able to be transparent himself because He was secure in His relationship with God.

Children that are in a situation where they're afraid of God and afraid of their parents, will often toe the line and be outwardly obedient. For some parents, this is the objective. They want their kids to toe the line, so they look good, and they can be proud of their behavior. I am sad to say I was in that situation at times, maybe for a longer time than I realize.

Now I recognize I don't want my kids to live with trauma. I want them to feel safe, and regardless of what they look like to the public, I want my kids to have a place called home where they can be safe and they can talk things out. If you're

having really good communication, it's probably because you're doing something right and your kids feel safe.

I'm going to read this quote from my book *Speaking the Truth in Love* which is attributed to Dr. Daniel Siegel in the introduction to *Anatomy of the Soul* by Curt Thompson. He explained how recent discoveries in neuroscience and attachment are helping people and can measure physical changes in their brain.

“An important part of how people change—not just their experiences but also their brains—is through the process of telling their stories to an empathetic listener. When a person tells her story and is truly heard and understood, both she and the listener undergo actual changes in their brain circuitry. They feel a greater sense of emotional and relational connection, decreased anxiety, and greater awareness of and compassion for others’ suffering.”

As I thought of this observation I thought of how it impacts communication in the home between parents and children. Hopefully, as parents, we will be safe and empathetic listeners. Notice these three results when people are able to be truly heard and understood.

1. “They feel a greater sense of emotional and relational connection.” Isn't that the whole purpose of parenting right there? Our families will feel a greater sense of emotional and relational connection. I think that's what happened when I told my sons how I was feeling that morning in our living room. I confessed that I was struggling. They felt a connection, and they were able to share their own story.

2. “Decreased anxiety.” We live in a world where people are just wound up and stressed, even if we try and cover up our anxiety with happy faces on social media. However when we're able to share our story with somebody who is a compassionate, empathetic listener, we'll have decreased anxiety.

3. “A greater awareness of and compassion for others’ suffering.” As we provide a safe atmosphere, and are willing to be a transparent empathetic listener, we will have a greater awareness and compassion for each other.

When parents are rooted and grounded in God's love and assured of his care for us, then hopefully, we create the kind of atmosphere where we can hear each other, and share our stories. Then we'll feel a greater sense of emotional and relational connection, decreased anxiety, and greater awareness of and compassion for others' suffering.

When I first read those words, I didn't see three points. What I saw was this is the way we bear each other's burdens. Frankly, at this point in my life, my sons are not living in my home. Even though we see each other a good bit, to me, they are now co-adventurers in the journey of life. We're brothers and sisters in Christ now, but I still want to be able to provide a safe place so that I can hear them, support them,

and pray for them. I desire to bear their burdens, as this is what I do for the greater body of Christ.

I think I could be a much better pastor now than when I was just entering the ministry. When I was younger and heard people sharing their burdens with me, I bore them, but I also wanted to help solve their issues and fix them. I'm at a place where I don't think it is my job to fix people. My job is to listen to people, to love people, to pray for people, and to point them to Jesus. It's not my job to walk with them and bear their burden. With this new perspective I can listen to people differently than I could when I was younger.

As we can learn to listen empathetically, that may be the best thing a person needs. They don't really have to find a solution. They do need somebody to hear them and bear their burden. If this book is accurate, when I compassionately listen to them, they'll experience decreased anxiety, greater connection, and more compassion for others.

I'm going to close with the song, "What a friend we have in Jesus." As I understand the meaning of the verses, it seems to me, the quicker we can take our burdens to Jesus, the quicker he'll bear them and carry them for us. But if we try to carry them too long ourselves, then we get discouraged.

Let's close in prayer. Father, we're glad to place our children into your good keeping, and pray that you'll help us to be transparent parents and help us to be ever-growing parents and ever-learning parents. But primarily, help us to be parents who are rooted, grounded, and assured of your unfailing love towards us.

Let your affection seep right into us. Help us to take in your love in a fresh way so we can love our children well. Enable us to provide a safe place, and a safe harbor, and a safe atmosphere for our children where they can be open and free to share their burdens with us. Bless us to that end in Jesus' name. Amen.