

God's Fatherhood Released in the Church and the Home

INTRODUCTION

This morning I want to talk about the revelation of God's Father's heart, His fatherhood or His Father's heart. You can use any phrase you want. It's released in the church and it's released in the home. I mention in this handout twelve different principles or truths related to God's heart as our Father. We won't cover all of them, but I have them as a reference point. I'll mention a few of them in a few moments. Here's the point I want to make.

Paragraph A. These twelve truths, these twelve principles, have a threefold application. Every born-again believer applies these truths in his or her relationship to God directly. They're truths about how God relates to us, and they're very encouraging for understanding what God has committed in terms of His relationship to us.

The principles don't stop there. These very principles are also applied and expressed in the home as we parent our children. Whether you're a mother or a father, the principles of expressing God's heart are really the same. There are some distinctions between moms and dads, obviously, but in terms of manifesting the heart of God to our children, they're the same. I'm referencing moms and dads as both operating in this principle.

The third application that applies to every one in this room is that as we invest in the lives of others and make disciples of other believers, we become spiritual fathers to other people. When I talk about being a spiritual father, I'm talking about investing in a regular, ongoing way to a small group of people. You may do it for a few months or a few years, or you may do it longer or shorter. I'm talking about making a commitment and expressing to a few younger believers some of the principles of God's heart that He has revealed to you that operate in your own life.

AN INVITATION TO EVERY BELIEVER IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Paragraph B. You might say, "I'm not a physical father. How can I be a spiritual father?" This call to be a spiritual father is actually an invitation to every single believer in the Body of Christ. Jesus was the premier example: He was a young man, a single, young man, but He's called in the Scriptures "the Everlasting Father" (Isa. 9:6). That means He possessed the heart of the Father, the Father's heart as a young man, and He expressed it to the people to whom He was ministering.

This morning I'll focus a little more on having the heart of a spiritual father, and then I'll focus a little on physical mothers and fathers. Then I'll reference the Father-heart of God and how we can experience it as individuals. Again, I'm only going to allude to a few of these twelve points.

SPIRITUAL FATHERHOOD: INVESTING IN OTHERS WHAT THE LORD GAVE TO US

Paragraph C. Here's one of my points of emphasis this morning. I want to encourage young people, all these teens who are with us this morning. I want to encourage you to set your heart to be a spiritual father, even now. I'm talking about young men and women being spiritual fathers now and not waiting for some day in the future; not seeking a spiritual father, but actually being one. That might sound a little strange. I'm using my own experience personally and what I've observed in the lives of a lot of young people over the years in over thirty-five years of ministry.

It was the summer of 1971, forty years ago this summer. I had just met the Lord. I walked into the church just down the road, Colonial Presbyterian Church, and I met the youth pastor the first time I walked in. We established a little friendship, and one of the first things he told me to do, at age sixteen, was to make disciples of younger believers.

I had only known the Lord for two months. I didn't know what a disciple was. I didn't know the difference between a gospel, a disciple, an apostle, and an epistle. Those were all confusing terms to me. I said, "Make a *disciple*? What does that mean?"

He said, "Go find some younger believers right now and invest in them. Go get three or four or five of them. Just go find them and start investing your life in them. You've known the Lord for two months now; you're ready to go."

NO ONE IS TOO OLD OR TOO YOUNG TO BE A SPIRITUAL FATHER

The amazing thing about this Presbyterian church is that this one youth pastor, Richard Beech, permeated the entire youth ministry with this idea, that every single one of us, from the day we met the Lord, was to invest in others what the Lord gave to us. We were to make disciples, which is the same thing, in essence, as being a spiritual father. If we do it consistently to the same people, we don't have to use the term 'spiritual father,' but that's what we are. That's true of men or women, old or young.

God has called us to do this. Someone might say, "I'm too young or I'm too old." No one is too old or too young to be a spiritual father. Whether you're fifteen, fifty, or eighty, the Holy Spirit has plans for you to invest in others.

Someone might say at eighty, "I'm already retired. Not only that, but I'm tired. I'm tired and retired."

I have good news for you: the Holy Spirit isn't tired or retired, and He's in you. He has plans for you to touch other people. He has a creative plan for you that's oftentimes completely outside the box, something that's unique and only for you in this hour.

I want to go back to my story. I was sixteen years old, forty years ago this summer, and I had been two months in the Lord. I resolved to make disciples. I asked the man, "How?"

He said, "Pick a night of the week"—I picked Tuesday—"and go find some younger believers." I was sixteen, so I found some twelve- and thirteen-year olds. He said, "Invite them to a meeting, go to the Christian bookstore, get a book, any book that moves you, read it, and if it touches you, use it."

"What do I do with this book?"

He said, "Tell those twelve- and thirteen-year olds to get the book, too. You read chapter one your first week; they read it before they get there, and then you have a big question-and-answer discussion time."

I said, "OK, I can do that." I did that. I went out and got myself a few junior high kids, got them a book, they read the first chapter beforehand, we got there, and they got to ask me any questions they wanted.

LEARNING THE BIBLE BY LEADING A BIBLE STUDY

I knew nothing about the Bible—nothing. I remember telling them a verse that excited me. I said, “I know this amazing verse in the book of Palms.” I didn’t know it was called *Psalms*. I said, “It’s in the book of Palms!”

Some twelve-year-old boy said, “Where’s Palms?”

I said, “It’s right after Job. It’s the book about how to get a job!”

I didn’t know it was *Job*. I remember when I needed a job I read the book of Job and could find nothing about jobs. I said, “They need to change the title of that book, because that’s false advertising.” I mean it. I had zero religious background.

I had this book and we would read through it, and I can’t imagine the crazy answers I gave to the questions these thirteen-year-olds asked me. I didn’t know anything about the Bible, but I answered from the premise of, “If I was God, this is what the answer would be.”

I know that’s a little dangerous, but what happened is that I learned the Bible by leading discussions on the Bible. Even though I only had a small group of people, I would read my chapter ahead of time and I would be so nervous for five or ten twelve-year-olds to show up. “I don’t know what it means.”

I look back forty years later and think, “How could I have been so nervous about a group of twelve-year-olds asking me questions when I had no knowledge whatsoever about anything involving the Bible?” But I was.

I studied it. I asked my leaders ahead of time and I went to those meetings prepared. I was a little discouraged when half of my twelve-year-olds didn’t read the chapter ahead of time and faked it during the meeting, but that’s OK. That happens.

THE LORD HAS A SOLUTION FOR EVERY OBSTACLE IN MINISTRY

I was cheating a little with my group of thirteen-year-olds. What I mean by *cheating* is that I wasn’t very anointed. In order to get the twelve-year-olds to show up at the meeting, I had to pick them up first with my own car, and I had to take them to Dairy Queen afterwards or they wouldn’t come to the meeting. I realize they weren’t coming because they were wowed by the presence of God in my amazing teaching and leading. They wanted the ice cream. It worked for me. I went to my leader and said, “I don’t have any money for the gas or the ice cream. What do I do?”

He said, “Get money.”

I said, “Yeah, I know. How?”

He said, “Ask the Lord. He has a plan for you. Just ask Him. The Lord has a solution for every obstacle that will stop you in ministry. Ask Him. Don’t look to me; ask Him.”

I didn’t know what to do, but I ended up getting a job as a janitor in the junior high. At first I said, “Where do I find some young people?”

He said, "There are four or five junior highs in the area. Go to one."

I said, "What do you mean, 'go to one'?"

He said, "Go to a basketball or football game and meet a few kids and invite them to a Bible study."

I said, "Just go?"

He said, "Yeah, that's how you do it. Go."

I went and got myself three kids, and grew it to ten. I was given a job as a junior high janitor two nights a week. At the same time, I was playing on the football team and I was in school. I had a lot going on, and I spent two nights a week working so that I could "fund" this "habit" I had of investing in twelve-year-olds. I beat the system a little, because I had these two nights, four hours a night, where I did something that wasn't exactly straightforward, so I don't recommend doing it. I did a little Tom Sawyer deal. I got my thirteen-year-olds to help me clean the school. I didn't tell anyone; I just opened the door and said, "Shh!" Of course, they were running around the halls screaming and hollering. I got my four hours of cleaning done in two hours. I divided up the brooms and the mops and we took the floors one-by-one. It worked.

THE GREAT COMMISSION IS THE GREAT PERMISSION TO ACT IN THE NAME OF JESUS

My point is this: when we run into an obstacle, ask the Lord, "Is there any way around this?"

The reason I'm making this point is that a lot of people have a very wrong approach to ministry, to making disciples of other people. A disciple is a follower of Jesus. There are a number of very wrong approaches people make to taking what the Lord has given you and investing in another. They never enter into this glorious invitation to be a spiritual father. One of the obstacles they have is in their mindsets: they're waiting for someone in the church to give them permission to go start a group. Beloved, you don't need permission from the church org chart or a church leader to go start a group. The Great Commission is the great permission to act in the name of Jesus. The day you were born again, you had permission to represent Jesus and to pour your life into other people.

I was only two months old in the Lord; I never thought of saying no to this man, because I didn't know any better. I thought everyone did it this way. Some years later I found out that very few people did it this way. This youth group had a culture established where all the fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds were spiritual moms and dads to the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds. We thought it was normal. We weren't looking for a spiritual dad; we were concerned to be one. I realize we weren't doing a great job; we weren't mature at it, but it really changed our lives. This is what I did, rather than waiting for a new position to open on the church org chart, or for some man to leave so that finally I could get a position. Beloved, 90 percent of the ministry of the Body of Christ is outside of the church building and outside of the church organizational charts. In other words, it isn't a department in the church; it's something the Lord has for you out there in the community. You don't need permission from a leader; the Great Commission is the great permission to act in the name of Jesus.

A lot of people are waiting for someone to tell them they can, and then they're waiting for someone to hand them a group. I've watched this throughout my thirty-five years of pastoring. A man says, "Hey, I want to be in the ministry. Where's my group?"

I say, "Go start your group. Go to the junior high." I tell them what they told me: "Go to the basketball game, meet a few kids, start a Bible study with three, and if you don't know the Bible, buy a book from the Christian bookstore. Read the same chapter together, ask one another questions, sow into them, and take them to Dairy Queen; that's how you start your group."

They say, "No, I don't want that. I'm waiting for someone in the church to hand me a ready-made group and a microphone so that I can show my leadership and my great teaching ability."

I so appreciate this youth ministry because—I don't know the exact number, I wasn't counting—but they had 100 or 200 high school groups spread out over South Kansas City in probably ten different high schools. This youth pastor so infected and infused young people with this culture of wanting to make disciples and be a spiritual mom or dad now—not waiting until later, but doing it now. I found that one of the greatest ways to learn is by doing.

We learn so much more by doing. As a matter of fact, we only retain about 10 percent of what we hear in a classroom. Seventy percent of what we learn in life, we learn by experiencing and doing it, by applying the principles.

Here's how some people approach ministry. Again, I'm talking about being a spiritual father or a spiritual mother. I'll use the term "spiritual father" because it's true of male and female, old and young. Again, whether you're sixty, eighty, fifteen, or sixteen, this principle applies to you even now, today.

"READY, FIRE, AIM"

One approach to ministry is, "Ready, aim, fire." That seems logical. They get ready, they aim, they go get some training, and they don't fire. Then, after they aim for a while, they go to seminary: "Ready, aim," again. Then after seminary, they get a PhD. "Ready, aim." Then, after that, they get their second PhD. "Ready, aim!"

They're fifty years old and they've never fired the gun but they've aimed their whole life. They have spiritual frustration.

The way that I encourage people is, "Ready, fire, aim." I'm serious. This isn't entirely how it was, but the way I learned the Bible was by having twelve-year-olds in a circle asking me questions to which I didn't know the answers. I was sweating bullets. I was determined to learn it. I would bring the answer next week. Those little whippersnappers forgot the question that I worked all week to answer. I said, "Remember what you asked last week?"

The boy said, "I forgot what I asked."

I said, "Oh, great! Here I stayed up all night learning the answer."

THE GREAT COMMISSION: A COMMANDMENT WITH THE PROMISE OF GOD'S ENABLING

Paragraph D. The Great Commission isn't the Great Option; it's a commandment with the promise of God's enabling. As we disciple people or become spiritual fathers, you can see the objectives summed up here in Paragraph D. We're helping people grow in Christ so that they can feed themselves in the Word, so that they have confidence to read the Bible and feed themselves and hear from God, and so that they have confidence and resolve to make godly decisions.

Above that, one of the main things we want when we invest in a group of three or four or five—my group grew to ten, and I ended up with two or three groups going at the same time. I was so busy; I was pouring into people. When I was sixteen, they were twelve and thirteen. When I was eighteen, I aimed for the sixteen-year-olds. When I was twenty, I aimed for the eighteen-year-olds. I just went a few years younger, and I would start Bible studies. I didn't wait for anyone to start them, because our youth leader told us, "Don't wait for anyone to ask you. Just obey the Holy Spirit, ask the Holy Spirit where His harvest is, go out in the community, and start something."

Don't think of a Bible study where the people go and sit in a church on Sunday morning. It's OK that they go to church. Think of a Bible study in which you'll find people out in the community whom you'll recruit one by one. This is such a different paradigm. I'm so grateful to this Presbyterian church. They were really involved in the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. As I got to know that ministry over the years, there's such a connection between them. Most people are waiting for permission; they're waiting for a place on the org chart; they're waiting for someone to hand them a ministry and they wait for years and years and years in utter frustration, never using their God-given gifts.

“AND HE WILL TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN. . .”

II. Look at Malachi 4:4-6. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet" (Mal. 4:5). This is talking about the generation in which the Lord returns. Elijah the prophet will come just before the Day of the Lord, which means the second coming of Christ. I believe Elijah is literally going to come. I believe it's more than that. I believe there will be such a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit releasing the prophetic anointing. Look at what this great outpouring of the Spirit is to be focused on. As a matter of fact, I believe the greatest prophetic movement in history will be the one that leads to the return of the Lord. In this hour of history, we need the prophetic anointing and the prophetic spirit worse than ever because there's a great crisis in the land.

Look here in verse 6. Elijah the prophet; really, it's in addition to Elijah: it's what the prophetic anointing will do and how it will influence us. It will turn the hearts of fathers to the children (Mal. 4:6). One of the primary distinctives of the move of the Holy Spirit in power in the generation in which the Lord returns is that people will see the value of investing in twelve-year-olds. The anointing of the Holy Spirit will convince people and empower them to invest in younger believers. They don't have to be twelve years old, but they're younger than you.

There are many different categories of the children to whom God is turning the fathers. I don't want to break all that down. The point is, there's a turning to younger ones. That's one of the primary distinctives of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sixteen-year-olds, He wants you to turn your heart to twelve-year-olds even now. Fourteen-year-olds, don't wait until you're fifty to reach the sixteen-year-olds. When you're sixteen, go reach the twelve-year-olds right now. Go reach the eight-year-olds. It doesn't have to be in your church. It's in your neighborhood; it's in your city. Say, "Holy Spirit, where are the young ones?" You may be seventy or eighty. Maybe the young ones you're turning to are older than fourteen or fifteen or sixteen, but it's younger believers. You'll invest in them on a regular basis.

Again, it isn't just casually giving a word of encouragement here and there. It's regular, consistent investment for a few months or a few years in the same group of people. The idea is that once they have been touched, they go invest in a group of people, and the thing just multiplies over and over and over again.

And again, back in 1971-73, we were affecting ten different high schools in the Kansas City area. We had 100-200 small groups. They weren't on the church org chart. If you went to the Presbyterian church and said, "Where's the list of all the small groups?" the pastor would have said, "There's no list."

"There are hundreds of groups coming out of this church. What do you mean there's no list?"

"We just encourage all the fifteen-, sixteen-, eighteen-, and twenty-year-olds to go find three or four people to invest in, and no one knows the number of the groups. They're all over the area. Only the Lord knows the number." It's the turning of the hearts of the fathers to the children.

THE FIRST GENERATION WHERE CHILDREN ARE MOSTLY SHAPED OUTSIDE THE HOME

Paragraph A. Look at this. This is the first generation in which children are influenced more outside their homes than inside it. This is the first generation in history where children are more influenced by people outside of their home than by those inside of it. It's a very disastrous hour of history for children. What's the solution to the crisis? It's the prophetic anointing, the power of the Holy Spirit turning the hearts of twenty-year-old fathers to twelve-year-olds. He's talking the hearts of thirty- and forty- and eighty-year-olds and turning them to the young ones. Again, there are many expressions of this turning.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS A UNIQUE PLAN TO REACH EVERY SPHERE OF SOCIETY

Look at Paragraph B. It's the prophetic spirit, which is the spirit of Elijah, which is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. God is a creative thinker. That's an understatement. God thinks outside the box. We typically think inside of the box. In other words, we like what's normative, what's been done before, what everyone else is doing. The Lord would say, "Don't be limited by what's normal and what everyone else is doing."

The Holy Spirit has a unique plan to reach every sphere of society and to use His people to touch every sphere of society in this hour of history in a way that fits our unique personality and our unique gifting. The Holy Spirit has this very creative plan to invade every sphere of society in this city and the cities of the earth.

Someone comes to me and says, "I don't know what my ministry is."

I say, "Ask the Holy Spirit. He's so creative. He has a tailor-made plan that fits just you."

"I mean in the church ministry. I don't know what my ministry is. I want to teach people or something."

I say, "There are two million people in Kansas City. Go find three of them and grow it to ten."

Karen Anderson is the most amazing woman. We know Mark Anderson; he's one of the top leaders of YWAM, and he's been on the platform here a lot over the years. His wife, Karen, a very dear friend, started asking the Holy Spirit when they lived in Lee's Summit. They live in Hawaii now where the YWAM world headquarters is. They moved there.

Karen was a housewife with six children in the home. She said, "Holy Spirit, what do You want me to do?"

The Holy Spirit began to stir her: "Reach the children in your neighborhood."

“How?” She started really simply. I won’t give all the details, but she had some ways for ten- and twelve- and thirteen-year-olds to come to her home.

Then they had a little Bible discussion and it grew over a few years to affecting hundreds of people in her neighborhood. Then it started reaching the high schools and junior highs because of their brothers and sisters. It was this remarkable ministry. If you would go to Karen, she would say, “I’m not a Bible teacher. I don’t have a ministry on the church organizational chart; I don’t have a department. I just opened my home and reached out to five or ten twelve-year-olds and it grew into something. Who would have guessed it?”

What a great example of a spiritual father. She asked the Holy Spirit, “I want to be a part of Your creative plan for my city.”

ASK THE LORD TO STIR UP YOUR HOLY IMAGINATION

Beloved, the Lord put you on the earth to be a part of His miracle of the end-time church transforming the nations. Each one of you has gifts and abilities. You have natural ones and you have supernatural ones. Each one of your gifts represents part of God’s plan to win the city or the cities of the earth, and you’re a part of it. Your gift represents that. Only about 10 percent of the gifts and the ministries fit inside the church building and the church department org chart. Ninety percent of them are done out there. Most people don’t have a vision to function out there; they have a vision to function in the room here. For 90 percent of them, there’s no place on the org chart.

For two million people in the city, and we could name any city of the earth, it’s the same situation. If you don’t use your gift, negative things will happen in your emotions—depression, feeling of worthlessness, despair. You have to use your gift. “I’ve been in the church for ten years and no one will use me.” That’s a crazy way to think. Throw away that way of thinking. Don’t wait on someone in the church to discover you and hand you a room full of people to whom you can minister. There are fifty or 100 high schools in Kansas City. Go invade one of them. There are thousands of businesses. There’s the fire department all over the city, the police department, the school board. Go invade them and invest in a few of those people and disciple a few of them. You may be seventy years old, and the Lord may want you to touch the twelve-year-old soccer league in a way that you can’t even imagine. Ask Him. Say, “Lord, I want to be a spiritual father.” Ask the Lord to give you a vision or a dream, and to stir up your holy imagination.

I have five sisters, and a brother who is with the Lord now. There are seven of us in my family, seven siblings in nine years, so we’re all really close together. All of my brothers and sisters are pressing in and walking fervently with God. I was just thinking about this the other day, and thanking the Lord for it. I was going down the list of each of my sisters, who have all been part of the church here over the years, and the initiative that each one of them took to initiate a ministry that wasn’t officially a part of the church. It was just out there somewhere. I was going down the list and it was remarkable to me. We didn’t have an inner city outreach. My youngest sister of the five, Lisa, lived here in this part of town. She said, “I will go down to the inner city and just start feeding a few people.”

I said, “That’s cool.”

Fifteen years, or twenty, went by; I don’t know, but she stayed with it. She didn’t have a degree. She didn’t have any money behind her. She didn’t have a position in the church. No one in the church even recognized it.

She did it because the Lord put it in her heart. Fifteen or twenty years later—I guess I have to get that number down one way or the other—she was still feeding people. She stayed with it. She led a bunch of people to the Lord, started Bible studies, and now she has a flourishing ministry, both she and her husband, Ray, that's a part of IHOP-KC. Now she's an IHOP-KC department leader, fifteen or twenty years later.

Being a department leader isn't the point. The point is this: when there was no department, just as Karen did in her neighborhood with the children, Lisa went down to the inner city simply because that was the vision of her heart, to go do that. It was small for a long time. She said, "I'm doing it because it's right; I'm not doing it because it's supposed to get big." It's getting big, but that surprises her. She went down because it was right.

One of the most remarkable stories is my brother, Pat. He's with the Lord now. He broke his neck at a high school football game and was totally paralyzed from the shoulders down. He couldn't move anything, not even a finger. For thirty-three years he was totally paralyzed, but on fire for the Lord. He said, "Lord, I can't move, I can't go out; do You have a ministry?" He began to sow into twelve- and thirteen-year-olds. They began to come visit him. He began to give them Bible studies and counseling. He did this for years.

One night we had an "Honor Pat" night. A bunch of us came to honor him for his perseverance in the Lord before he went to be with the Lord. I don't know the number, but about twenty of these junior high and high school kids got up, one after the other on the microphone, and said, "Pat Bickle has changed my life radically. I have no father, my parents hate each other, my family is in disarray. Pat has changed my life because he has poured the love of God into me."

We didn't have a ministry on the org chart to do that at the church. He just did it on his own. That's how the Body of Christ functions.

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS OF SPIRITUAL FATHERHOOD

Top of page two. Paragraph E. I'll just mention a few of these twelve principles. They're pretty straightforward, and most of you can make sense of them yourselves. I just want to list them there. Paragraph E. There are various expressions of spiritual fatherhood. They're valid for each individual in different seasons of your life. I was functioning as a spiritual father when I was sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen. I didn't have that terminology, but that's what it really was. As a matter of fact, there are people today who are a part of IHOP-KC whom I knew forty years ago in my junior high and high school ministries, in the Bible studies I gave, and some of them are still here. We talk about the "good ole days." I make them vow never to quote anything I said in those days. The good news is that they can't remember it. Most of the time they were flirting and joking when I was waxing eloquent delivering teaching that no one listened to. I'm very grateful for that now.

There are many expressions of spiritual fatherhood. Some are more intense, some are less intense; in different seasons of your life there will be different expressions. You can read more about that if you want to. Let's look at twelve practical principles. Again, I'll mention a few of them briefly. These principles are true of how God relates to you individually. Under each one of these twelve, look upwards and say, "Lord, I receive this from You." These twelve represent how moms and dads sow into the children in their home. Again, whether you're male or female, they're the same principles expressing the heart of the Father. These are twelve child-raising principles, but they really flow out of the revelation of God's heart.

If you don't have children at this time, make a note to yourself. Say, "I want to give expression to these kinds of principles in the future if I have children in the days to come." As I've already mentioned, these are twelve principles that you'll express when you're sowing into three or four or five people, or ten or twenty or thirty, whatever the number is.

One more point for those young people, or for those who are called to be Bible teachers. For eight years, almost all of the Bible teaching I did was in a group of ten or less in someone's home. For seven or eight years, the vast majority of my Bible teaching was six, seven, or eight people reading a book together, and me giving comments. When I graduated from reading a book, I really got risky; we pulled out the gospel of John, and we started at chapter one, and we read it together and they asked me questions. I didn't understand what half of it was, but I remember the day I graduated from a Christian book, and we read the Bible together, and I made freelance comments as we went.

Whoa, that was risky! I never knew I would be publically teaching the Bible. That was never on my mind. But here's my point: I wasn't teaching people so that I could one day teach large numbers. That wasn't the point. I was teaching them because it's right, and it's what the Bible says to do. My idea was to go and be a medical doctor. I was accepted to med school. The shock of my life was when the Lord made it clear to me that I needed to turn that down, that He was calling me to a fulltime teaching ministry like this. I turned down the med school. Only then did it dawn on me that I would be a Bible teacher.

My point is, this is what you don't do. There's a man who's called to be a teacher of the Bible. He says, "I'm so frustrated. No one will give me an opportunity." What he means is, "No one will give me a room with 100 people and hand me a microphone and let me go at it." That's what their mindset is. They're waiting for someone to hand them a microphone in a room full of people.

What I tell them is this: "The way I grew up, the ordinary thing to do was to invade the high schools. There are nine college campuses in the city. There are two million people in Kansas City. Go start. Go reach a few. Don't wait for an announcement. Just go recruit three of them, grow it to ten, and see what happens."

COMMIT TO BEING A SPIRITUAL FATHER

I remember when I went to college. Then I'll just mention a few of these principles. I went to the University of Missouri, just down the way here. It's a big university, with 30,000 people. My youth pastor said, "Are you going to do it there?"

I said, "Do what?"

"Do in the University of Missouri what you did here with the high school and junior high."

My eyes got kind of big and I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "Go start a group."

I said, "I don't know if I'll have time." I played on the football team there, and I had studies and all the other things.

He said, "Sure you have time. Don't start that."

I said, "I'm only a freshman."

He said, "So? Where's this coming from, all these excuses?" He had raised up people who had real excuses. They just went and did it.

I said, "Oh, I guess that's what I'm doing."

So I got a one-page piece of paper and handwrote my promo: "Tuesday Night Bible Study, 9:00pm, Tiger Towers building. Come! All are welcome." Then I wrote my name; no one had ever heard of me. I didn't mention that I was a freshman. I didn't tell them that my resume was eight- and ten-member junior high Bible studies. I handwrote this one-page handout, made thousands of copies, and passed it out myself throughout the University of Missouri.

Lo and behold, a few people showed up. It was amazing. They were a little disappointed when I was the one behind the announcement. They said, "Who are you?" But it grew to about 100-200. To me, it was like full-scale revival. The numbers were so big, I was completely freaked out every time. It grew from thirty to forty to fifty; then it grew back to thirty and twenty and back up to sixty. I was sweating bullets every Tuesday night. I had never done that before. I was scared to death. I didn't wait for someone on campus to tell me to start a ministry. My youth pastor made me. I was kind of mad at him for it. When it was going badly, I said, "I told him I didn't have time for this!" But it kept growing till we had between 100 and 200 people. I don't even remember. I know this: it was big enough that I was scared and nervous every single week. I was more frightened of the Bible study than I was of playing college football.

Don't wait for someone to start something. You start it. Start it small. If it's three, go with three. If it grows to five, go with five. If you multiply two groups of ten, then you multiply two groups of ten. Don't worry about the size; just commit to being a spiritual father.

ALL TRAINING MUST BE PERSONAL TRAINING

Paragraph B. Principle number one. All training must be personal training; I don't mean training from a platform, but personal discipling. You'll have those three, five, or ten people you'll invest in on a regular basis for a few months or a few years, but it has to be based in friendship. It's friendship-based training.

INVESTING THE RIGHT CURRENCY IN THE BANK OF THEIR HEARTS

I can't fully develop what I mean by this; I just want to give the briefest statement and then go onto the next one. We have two sons, Luke and Paul. They're both over thirty now. Both of them are now in their early thirties, both married to amazing women who love God. When they were five, six, seven, and eight, we understood that we had to train them. Part of that training was based in relationship, in friendship. Part of that friendship was discovering what the passions of their heart were. I had to invest in them according to their passions.

There's an analogy that I've heard, and I've used it for years: we had to invest the currency in the bank of their heart that their heart received. If you go to the bank and give them a currency that that bank doesn't accept, you're wasting your time.

Some talk about investing time in your children. That's true, but that's not the whole story. Part of that time has to be invested in what those children connect with. Here was the problem: they loved sports. That's good; I love football. I was trained in boxing. They didn't want football and boxing; they wanted soccer. Ugh! In my generation, we didn't play soccer; only the people on the other side of the lake played soccer. I said, "Soccer?"

Then it became worse: they wanted to play baseball! Baseball to me was just as boring as golf. I had no thought of this. I know some of you are great at golf; I don't mean to mess with the sacred cow, but it was miserable to me. Here's the important thing, though: I played with them regularly, daily. I would play soccer with them, and baseball, and then eventually basketball. I found the things that they liked.

They liked camping. I hate camping! I hate it. Truly I hate it. I went on about fifteen camping trips, and the whole time I just bit my tongue. My wife loved it, my boys loved it, and I thought it was horrible. One time I tried to see if I could sneak down to the Holiday Inn. They said, "No way! Tent all the way!"

Fishing. When you fish, you get wet; and then the prize is that you catch something wet. Then the prize of that is that you have to cook it. I would rather buy fish sticks and skip the whole process. Just buy them, eat them, and forget it!

The point is, it isn't enough to invest in them; you have to invest with the currency that the bank of their heart accepts. You have to know them. This is true of investing in discipleship-making, too. We don't only do what they like, because we serve a diet, and part of the diet is some of the vegetables they don't like. Part of the diet they won't like, but we have to invest according to what's in their hearts. I mean, if I had my way, we would have watched the History Channel every afternoon. Imagine my sons at six and seven. "Boys, look at this! Nazi Germany! Can you see the parallels to the Antichrist in Europe at the end of the age?" It would have been a bomb out.

My point is this: some people, in their parenting, will invest quality time, but it isn't the time that connects with their children, and they'll do that in discipleship-making. Even God connects with you according to your passions. He really does. There's a lot to say on that, but I'll move on.

THE NUMBER ONE EMOTIONAL NEED OF THE HUMAN HEART

Principle two is affirmation. In the relationship there has to be a lot of affirmation. It's the number one emotional need of the human heart. This is for parents for the sake of their children, but this is for you before God as well. The number one emotional need of the human heart is acceptance. Instead of the word *acceptance*, I like to use the phrase, "the assurance of being enjoyed." That's a fancier way to say *acceptance*. Our children must know that even in their brokenness and weakness, we enjoy them, even with the negative parts of their personality and all their failures. We enjoy them. That's what God communicates to us, and that's what we must communicate to the people in whom we invest.

TEN AFFIRMATIONS FOR EVERY CORRECTION

We have to give ten affirmations for every one correction. That's not a scientific number, just a sense. Here's what I mean: as you're raising your children or cultivating a marriage relationship or discipling a younger believer, you need to give them ten affirmations for every one time you tell them they're doing something

wrong. It can't be one for one. Ten-for-one isn't an exact number where you have to keep tally: "OK, I have my ten affirmations—now I get to tell you what I really think!" You really hurt the person that way.

There's a terrible joke that I've heard over the years. The man says, "I told my wife I loved her the day we got married, and I'll tell her if that changes, and if it doesn't, just stick with it." That's disastrous. In the expression of fatherhood, affirmation really needs to be a ten-to-one ratio. It can't be fifty-fifty; you'll ruin or offend the heart of that child or that young disciple.

ENVISIONING THEIR DESTINY, PROVOKING THEM TO GREATNESS

Principle three. Part of being a spiritual father is envisioning, calling forth their destiny, and inspiring them to act. God does this to us, all of us, and we do this to our children. We tell them things about their destiny, about their giftings, and about their heart that they can't see themselves. We cry out to the Lord, He gives us a little impression, like a prophetic dream or something, and we get a little glimpse into our destiny and who we are, and it excites us. We tell everyone. That same principle happens in raising physical children or spiritual children.

This is one of the primary prayers I've used over the years. I've asked the Lord, "Show me what You see and what You feel about my two sons. Let me get a glimpse of who they are to you so that I can show them."

I pray that about my wife: "Lord, show me how You see Diane so that I can verbalize it and call her forth to part of her destiny."

Now I've extended it to our two daughters-in-law and our four grandchildren, these four little guys, two guys and two gals. I'm praying, "Lord, let me see who they are so that I can look them in the eyes and tell them who they are." I only know a little, but I know that calling forth is part of fathering. It needs to be an active part of our fathering.

THE NUMBER ONE TEMPTATION ON THE PLANET

Principle four: coaching. That's pretty self-explanatory. We have to give them a small amount of how-tos. We don't need to overdo it, but we stand with them and we give them feedback.

Principle five: encouraging. One of the easiest things to do is to lose perspective of how God sees things, to lose God's perspective. I believe the number one temptation on the planet, the number one temptation, isn't financial or sexual. There are nearly seven billion people on the planet, and nearly all seven billion are afflicted with this temptation: the temptation to quit. Everyone faces it throughout their life. It's the temptation to quit our assignment. As believers, it's the temptation to quit following hard after God, to quit investing in people, to quit risking and pressing for the next frontier. Fathers, whether male or female, we go to our children, physical or spiritual, and we encourage them: we bless them and we tell them God's perspective, and we tell them why they don't need to quit, and why they can forget yesterday's failures and move forward.

Paragraph G. Serving them. This one is very important. When I look at our two sons, as well as the young people we've invested in, it's essential that I'm first committed to their destiny and their greatness in God, not using them as a resource for me. One of the number one signs of authentic fatherhood is that the father is more committed to the success of the sons and daughters than in using them to build their own success. As a parent, this is real. As parents, we might think, "Of course that's what we do for our kids."

What happens easily is that we begin to discipline our children, and we love them, but another element sneaks in, ever so subtly. This isn't our whole motivation, but we begin to discipline them so that we can prove how good our parenting is, so that they don't embarrass us. That creates an energy in the relationship that's wrong. It creates a negativity. Sometimes our children, spiritual and physical, will embarrass us. We have to stay committed to their destiny, not making them a trophy of how good we are as a leader or a parent. It's critical.

I meet young people at IHOP-KC all the time. They want to talk about their life. I'm not committed to keeping them here; they know that. I say, "I'm committed to you, wherever in the earth is better for you. I want you there." That's what I say to our best worship leaders and singers and musicians. If they have a heart to go somewhere else, I want to help them go there. I need to be committed to their greatness, not to them supplying a resource for this place. A servant spirit is critical in our parenting.

THE DANGERS OF AVOIDING CORRECTION

Number seven. Correcting. Some people overcorrect. Some people correct with a wrong spirit. I've already addressed that. I'm talking about an entirely different group here, a group that completely avoids the discomfort of pointing out the blind spots that are ruining the dignity and destiny of someone to whom they're committed. It's a very important part of fatherhood to be in an affirming relationship where we're committed to them in many ways. We take the awkward position when they're three, four, and five, and it's not a problem. I'm talking about what happens as they get a little older, and I'm talking especially about spiritual sons and daughters. I'm talking about right now. I'm talking about taking the risk and discomfort of pointing out blind spots because we care about their success.

In 1 Samuel 2, Eli the high priest wouldn't correct his sons, and God rejected Eli as a leader because he wouldn't take on the issue of correction.

Only some believers struggle with that. Others struggle with overcorrecting or correcting in a wrong spirit, but some just avoid correction altogether. It's a weakness in their parenting, whether spiritual or physical.

Principle number eight: enduring. We need to endure. "Patient endurance" is what the Bible calls it (Rev. 14:12, NIV): being kind with their failures and not giving up on them when they fail; not relating to them based on their failure. There's a time of healing in failure: you put the cast on the leg. This is different. The cast is on the leg, but when that healing time is over and the cast is gone, we don't relate to them with the memory and the stigma of their failure. Not only must we forget it, we need to convince them that we have forgotten it if we want to have a good spiritual parenting relationship with them. Regardless of whether we're investing in our natural children or others, we can't give up on them. It's massive.

CELEBRATING THE VICTORIES AND ADVANCES THAT TOUCH THEIR HEART

Principle nine: celebrating. We have to actively and regularly celebrate the small breakthroughs and victories in their life. They may not seem big to you, but if they're big to the one you're investing in, you need to actively, regularly, and of course genuinely celebrate the victories and advances that touch their heart. You need to be with them celebrating them, not ignoring them. It's a critical part of fatherhood. God does this with us.

THE MAIN SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY IS THE ONE WHO TAKES THE LOWEST PLACE

Principle ten: providing. That's obvious.

Principle eleven: taking initiative in reconciliation. This is very important. Let's say you're a godly man and a leader in the marketplace. The main spiritual authority in the home and in the marketplace, the one with the most authority in the Spirit, is the one who takes the initiative to humble him- or herself to bring reconciliation if there's strife in the relationship.

Let's say you get with a group of people, and you say, "Who is the head of the home?" The man puts up his hand really fast.

"Who is the main authority in the marketplace assignment?" The man puts up his hand really fast.

"Who is the main authority in the ministry?" He puts up his hand.

"Good. Now that you've identified yourself, whenever there's a conflict with a spiritual son or daughter, you need to be the one who takes the initiative to humble yourself first."

Maybe you're only 10 percent responsible; search it out. Say, "Lord, show me the 10 percent where I messed up." If you exaggerate it to 20 percent, the Lord will forgive you. You go to that spiritual son or daughter, or that spiritual son or daughter, and you bring that offering of your 10 percent, your error, and you humble yourself. That's how spiritual authority works. That's how spiritual fatherhood works. Jesus, the innocent One, became the guilty One that you and I, the guilty ones, could become innocent. I tell husbands and wives, this is a principle to which I've been committed for the whole forty years of our marriage. I haven't done it perfectly, but it's something I care about a lot, and I confess with my mouth to my wife that I'm committed to this. When we have a conflict, I must always take the first step and initiative to humble myself to her, even if she was more responsible in one situation or another. It doesn't matter. That's what a spiritual authority does.

One man says, "I'm going to wait until that woman comes to her senses. If she comes to the door, I'm ready to talk, but I don't want to talk until she comes to me admitting what she did." That's a completely non-biblical stance as a husband. It's Father's Day, so I thought I would give you a Father's Day message.

Finally, number twelve. We stand with them in difficulties. They have to know they're not alone. They have to know we're with them until the end, in the financial crisis, the failure, the attacks, the setbacks, the difficulties. We have to be with them till the end.

The Lord says to us, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Our children, physical and spiritual, must know the same thing as spiritual fathers. You may be sixteen saying this to a twelve-year-old. You may not be in that twelve-year-old's life for a very long time, but you might be for a few more years. Again, forty years later, some of them are still here in the area and part of the ministry here, from the high school and junior high days. You don't know.

Amen. Let's stand.

MINISTRY TIME

Spiritual fathers. Committing to be a spiritual father. I want to give us a moment. I want us to respond to the Lord. I could apply this to all three of them, whether to God or to our families or to our spiritual sons and daughters. I want to talk about the spiritual sons and daughters just for a moment.

Close your eyes so that you're undistracted for a moment, talking to the Lord. Say, "Holy Spirit, I want to be a spiritual father." Whether you're male or female, young or old, say, "I want to do this. I'm saying yes. I'll find those three or four or five people. I will go after it. I don't know where they are; they're in the city somewhere. I will go and find them."

You're saying yes to the Lord: "I want to do this. I want to make disciples." If you're making that decision in a strong way for the first time and you would like prayer, I want you to come down to the front here. It's a company of radical, young believers, maybe fourteen, sixteen, and seventeen. You're saying, "I want to do this for the twelve-year-olds. I want to be a spiritual father. I'm starting now. I'm going to do what you did."

That's a new decision. You'll go to your junior high. Maybe you're in high school, and they're in the junior high. You'll go find some. You'll go disciple them somehow. Get that book, whichever book you want, and have discussions with them. If that's you and you say, "I want to make that new decision," I want you to come down here if you want to come and want prayer. Go ahead and come forward if you're making that decision today. The Lord has surprises for you.

Sixteen-year olds, don't wait until you're forty. Start now. Stand on these lines, if you would. Become a spiritual mom and dad, even now. You might be seventy or eighty. It's not too late. The Holy Spirit didn't retire. He lives inside of you. He has plans for you.

Lord, here we are. We say yes to You. We say yes in our homes; we want to walk out these principles in our homes. All over the room, just say yes to the Lord. "I want to be a mom or a dad who operates in these twelve principles with my children, with my spiritual and physical children." All over the room we're saying, "Lord, I want You to show Yourself to me in these twelve ways."

I want to ask people in the room, if you've already made this commitment years ago to be a spiritual mom or dad, to come up and pray for people for a few moments. Take three or four minutes. This is for anyone in the room who says, "I've done this; I'm committed to be a spiritual dad," whether you're male or female. Beloved, this will change your life. This will change the lives of thousands of people over the next thirty, forty, and fifty years. They will touch people who will touch people who will touch people, and it will continue to mushroom.

"Lord, here we are. I want to know Your heart, Father. I want to express Your heart to my children, whether spiritual or physical."

Beloved, it isn't too late to start now. Maybe your children are in their twenties. You can start now. Yes, Lord. We love You, Jesus.