

Family Life Booster 6 - Understand the Fears Fathers Face

In order to truly understand someone we need to understand their fears. Often when you see that someone's behaviour is fear driven, you are not as intimidated by them. You understand where the apparent aggression is coming from. You begin to empathize with them and are able to minister to their wounds. We live in a society where men in general and fathers in particular are not allowed to be too afraid. *2 Cor 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.* This is the technology of spiritual strength. We experience God's strength to the degree to which we are willing to acknowledge our weakness. Men have been socialized into internalizing their stress and never talking about it. As a result we have a lot of men today causing harm because they are overcompensating for their fears. Often this silence alienates them from their loved ones. Whatever you resist will persist. It comes out in other ways. It is time for people to realise that there is what's called the fragile nature of the masculine ego. A powerful coaching question I like to ask is, "Of what are you afraid?". In Christian circles many people get into unbiblical coping mechanisms like hyper-faith or meta-physics where they think that stating your fear is a sign of lack of faith or agreeing with the enemy. You greet them and ask them how they are really doing, and they just respond with a faith statement yet you can see many ways in which they are overcompensating for their fear. It is important to understand your emotions, particularly fear. Someone once said that the only fear that babies have when they are born is the fear of loud noises and the fear of falling, all other fears are learnt. It is important to understand that our emotions send messages to us. We need to be able to explore where the fear is coming from and then displace the stinking thinking with God's truth. We can't do this if we are in denial. We must be able to talk about our fears and then let God have the last word. *"I am feeling afraid that my children will abandon me by seeing me as irrelevant in their lives, but I know that God is for me and not against me."* In this message I will unpack some of the major fears father's face today; how they tend to overcompensate as a result of their fear in order to cope; the biblical wisdom they should apply instead; and what those around them can do to minister to the insecurities.

There are literally hundreds of scriptures instructing us not to fear. What a lot of people have not thought through is that many of these were addressed to men in general and fathers in particular. This shows me that fathers were often afraid and God ministered to them in their fear. Look at some of these verses:

Genesis 26:24

That night the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

Gen 46:3

"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

Numbers 21:34

The Lord said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands, along with his whole army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon."

Deut 1:21, 29-31

See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

Deut 20:1

When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you.

Prov 3:24-26

²⁴ *When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.*
²⁵ *Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, ²⁶for the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.*

His strength is perfected in our weakness, but we have to acknowledge our weakness. How can God minister His strength to you if you can't acknowledge your weakness? It is infantile thinking. You can't help your child with their homework if they keep pretending to know what they are doing. Many men today are pretending they have everything under control and this hinders God from ministering to them His strength. When fathers are more open about their fears and vulnerable it becomes easier to talk through it with them. According to the science of likeability we also tend to like them more. If the emotional bond between you and your children is strong they are more likely to follow your principles and obey you. When people look at leaders, they don't want to see perfection, they want to hear, "Me too, me too, me too." They are looking for identification. Your children need to see you fail, not just succeed. Someone said, "The best teacher is failure. The best type of failure to learn from is someone else's." Fathers need to see that there is a difference between emotionalism and emotional self-awareness. As I take you through the fears fathers face today, keep asking yourself what you can do to minister into this, if you are a wife or child. Remember also that these fears have sub-fears that branch out from them.

1. The Fear of failing to provide

What do your kids need from you that only you can give them? Are you focusing on the right things? Do the goal posts keep shifting? Are you trying to keep up with the Joneses? Decide what you think is your basic responsibility as a father with regards to provision. If this is not clear, you will find yourself always feeling guilty and never good enough. The demands will keep coming and because you have a blank slate and no opinion of yourself, you will end up feeling overstretched. There are lot of pressures when it comes to comparison. Perhaps your children are at expensive private schools, surrounded by wealthy people. Their standards are continuously on the rise and you constantly feel like you are failing. They are happy when they get something from you until they see that it is not the right brand. Ask God what He expects of you and let Him be the judge. Children, be careful of developing an entitlement mentality. You are not entitled to expensive birthday presents. This year does not have to be the same as last year. Things change. A fancy holiday last year does not mean a fancy holiday every year. Family members, let your desires be known but make sure you communicate appreciation for the basics that your father is trying to provide. We live in a world largely controlled by mammon. Our daily mood is regulated by whether we have the latest I Phone model, or the size of our house or the speed of our car. In addition to this our wives and kids continuously have new things on their wish lists, many of which we don't see the need for. All of this is happening as you are earning a lot more than you used to. Wealth is "like seawater: the more you drink, the thirstier you become." - philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer

Fathers must learn to be contented achievers. fathers think, "If I just earn a little more, buy a little more for my family, then they will respect me." This is a myth. In fact, it is a misbelief. Often your family is looking for other things. Newsflash - There are many millionaires who are not respected by their children. Yes, when your kids were young, material things made a difference but as they get older they often look at your attempts as frivolous because they now appreciate other types of provision. Even for your wife, the very thing she used to admire is now the thing that she dreads the most because it is what takes you away from the family; your addiction to success. Some men have realised this. For example, one of the men I coach mentioned how his first wife would see him as a hero when he was wealthy, and then as a zero when he was in lack. When he bounced back again, he became a hero again. We hate this as men because we feel the respect and adoration is very conditional, yet we keep chasing after things in order to get our morsels of respect. Are you going to embrace the virtue of contentment or continue to be driven by Mammon? A friend of mine mentioned to

me 10 years ago when he turned forty, that he received the best gift from the Lord. It was the gift of contentment. We need to teach our families this. If not, we will live our lives bound by the fear of lack.

Philippians 4:11-13

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Trust God as your source. Author, Rob Kuban states: *The Bible calls us to allow our convictions, not our circumstances, to govern our sense of contentment. True, biblical contentment is a conviction that Christ's power, purpose and provision is sufficient for every circumstance. We are to learn how to walk through all kinds of adversity believing in and experiencing Christ's sufficiency. We have to choose to rest on God's good promises despite what may be going on in our lives.*

This fear of failing to provide is why a lot of fathers are bound by the fear of becoming incapacitated. Their fear is not to do with themselves, but it is often directly linked to feeling helpless to assist their dependents. *What will happen to my family if I have an accident and I end up with brain damage?* On a practical level this is why it may be wise to take out life assurance for disability or chronic illness. It does not mean you lack faith. It helps with the fear and it is also an acknowledgement that bad things can happen to so-called good people. One of the other things fathers are called to provide is protection. A major fear today that fathers face is the fear that "I cannot protect my family". I cannot protect them from crime, from sexual predators etc. This is a major responsibility that weighs on many fathers today and it is the reason for a lot of immigration. Will I be able to live with myself if something happens to my family? Many fathers blame themselves for this. When it comes to crime, they often forget that they are at higher risk to be attacked than their families. Pray Ps 112 over your household regularly.

Ps 112:6-7

⁶Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. ⁷They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

Do you know what fathers are called to provide? Do you know the difference between what a mother is to give and what a father is to give? One of the fears fathers face is the fear of feminization, where they are judged based on how well they mother not how well they father. This is because we are living in a society that is pushing androgenous values so much that there is a lot of haziness with regards to the unique things fathers and mothers bring. My wife will often say to me when dealing with our children, "My Love, I think this one needs the Father's voice." It is important to know these things so that when a father is absent or passes on you know what to pray for to cover that role. I am reminded of a time when my son asked why I was not coming to watch his football. He was concerned that only his mother was coming and not me. In this discussion I told him that I had to conduct a seminar and his response was, "Can't someone else do that so that you can come and watch me play Soccer." He was communicating something much deeper; I only have one father. He didn't say that

with regards to his mother, he said it with regards to his father. What do your kids need from you that only you as a father can give them? In addition to this, the dynamics of the role you play are also affected by the gender of your child. There are things fathers impart to daughters and things mothers impart to their sons. For example, one of the things a son needs from his father is to see his father loving and respecting his mother. This will set a foundation for him with regards to how he treats the women in his life. Even if there has been a divorce, he needs to see his father show respect to his mother. This is all part of what fathers need to provide. Are you providing God's words for your children? They don't cost money: "I love you, son." "I'm proud of you." "You are amazing." "I know you can do it." "That were amazing skills you displayed in the game today!" "You are a hard worker." "Yes you might have messed up, but I know you'll bounce back, you always do." Giving your children a healthy identity and self-esteem is worth far more than any material gift you can give them. The father is called to provide loving discipline. When you do so you are showing them that their actions have consequences. This is something a father provides.

2. The Fear of becoming insignificant

Are you bound by the fear that you will soon become irrelevant in lives of kids? This is a big fear many fathers have today. When your kids were babies, as a father you might have felt insignificant as you did not know how to connect with them. When it came to feeding you didn't have the apparatus. Then as they grew older you felt like a hero, but now you feel like a zero again because they can see through your proclivities. *Dad is not as invincible as I thought.* Often because we are from a different generation we struggle to connect with and identify with our children's needs. We fail to see that there are a lot of needs that are trans-generational that God uses fathers to meet. Perhaps you are starting to feel insignificant. When your children are young, they see Dad as Superman. They come to you for everything. "Daddy can fix anything." As they get older there tends to be a shift from Daddy to their peers. Sometimes they will compare you with their friends' parents. You can start feeling inadequate because you don't take your kids fishing or camping or on boat trips. Fathers today fear that the woman in their life will compare them with someone else and prefer another. Sometimes the fear of failing to provide stems from unfair comparisons that have been made, perhaps with their father in laws (e.g. All men must be good at DIY). Provision is not just financial but it is also to do with recreational ability, sporting extravaganzas and expeditions. Many fathers today feel inadequate as they are just not wired for some of these things. A sense of significance is central to your self-esteem. It is that feeling of "I matter". My presence is felt when I arrive, and I am missed when I leave. If you have a father at home, make sure they don't feel indifference from you. Often indifference is worse than negative feedback. Notice and welcome them when they come home. If you don't stay with them, communicate to them in a manner that makes them feel like you think about them when they are not there. Fathers fear that they will no longer add value to your life because you know everything. If you are a father and you are feeling that right now, just remember that it might be a sign of your effective fathering. The goal is not for your children to be dependent on you forever. Be secure in who you are in God and be glad that your children can now cope on their own. The fleshly tendency is to force your children to depend on you. Some parents force their advice on their adult children, but it is really their quest for a sense of significance. Make sure the emotional bond between you and your kids is strong so that as they grow older they voluntarily come to you for wisdom. In how you relate to your father, ask yourself, "What future story do I want to tell?" This is regardless of how they have been to me. How was I to them? If you are a wife, what can you do to enable your children to minister a sense of significance to their father. A deep fear linked to this is the fear that they will lose the respect of their children. *I will never be good enough.* Many fathers today escape to places where they feel this admiration. Many fathers today alienate themselves from their families to the degree to which they feel insignificant and non-essential at home. Sadly, this is often based on lies from the enemy. Fathers, it is important to remember that you were chosen to be their dad by God Himself. He knew what He was doing. In the same way that He carefully made them, He

also carefully assigned them to you. Your kids need how you are wired, not your father not your friends but you.

2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

All things includes effective fathering.

3. Fear that they will never forgive me

Many fathers today remain absent and distant physically and emotionally because of the shame of their past. They have a deep-seated belief (in many cases a misbelief) that they will never be given a second chance. They believe that they have been put into a box despite certain changes they have made. Perhaps you feel like your life will never be meaningful because you cannot share your victories with those you love. If you have failed as a father it is important to model apologizing to your children. Humble yourself and apologize for the pain you have caused. Some fathers (and bosses) struggle to apologize so they just act differently and thinking everything will go away. Have the difficult conversation. Jesus' instructions around mending relationships often involved a courageous conversation.

Matthew 5:23-26

²³*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. ²⁵"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

This passage shows us the importance of reconciling quickly and not dragging things out. It won't just happen by itself. Relationships are not rebuilt by themselves outside of a courageous conversation being initiated.

Remember that it often takes time to rebuild trust that has been eroded. This is not because time is powerful. It is not just a matter of time, but it is to do with what you do in that time as an act of restitution. Over time some people become bitter not better. What will you do with the time you now have left? Make a decision to invest time in your children as opposed to just spending time or killing time. Allow them to express their pain without being defensive or label them as disrespectful. Perhaps they have lost respect for you. Try to understand their pain. Ask for forgiveness knowing that you can't demand it. Often when people demand our forgiveness we feel like they are minimizing our pain.

"I can't demand this from you, but I am asking that if you can find space in your heart for me again please do. I know it will be baby steps, but I am willing to do whatever it takes to rebuild our relationship. If you are not ready, I completely understand. I will wait."

Think of what Paul the apostle went through when he got saved. People were still afraid of him, yet he focused on his calling. Even if you are not accepted or forgiven, rest in the fact that God has forgiven you and don't let other people's rejection control your life assignment. This is important to state because many men today will say, "What's the point of trying if they can't see that I have changed." I am sure there were those that never forgave Paul the apostle but you never hear him talking about it. He was so aware of his own brokenness and did not let his narrative become more about those that had not forgiven him. Fathers, don't be proud. Talk to your people and learn to right wrongs. I am challenging fathers today because it is Father's Day. Of course, there are wounds that mothers have inflicted but that's not our focus today. (But if the shoe fits you can also wear it Moms). Perhaps some of you need to say this to your fathers, *"Dad, in the same way that God no longer counts my sin*

against me, I no longer hold anything against you. Jesus was punished for your transgressions just as He was for mine. Who am I to hold them against you? I choose to let go and release you. This does not mean our relationship will be completely normal but I want you to know that I am no longer holding anything against you. It doesn't excuse what you did to me, but I can no longer keep poisoning myself by carrying this burden."