Tim Lundy: Well today, gentlemen, we have the opportunity to talk about one of the most important topics, not only in this session but really in our lives. As a man, you really can't determine what you're going to be as a man and also as a father until you really wrestle with this. In fact, as you look at your notes, it says it right there at the beginning, why is dad so important? Have you ever asked yourself that? It's interesting. So many people I've talked to, whether it's through counseling, whether it's through struggles, how many times it comes back to issues with dad.

And for many of us as we've been walking through the stories of the last few weeks, man, dad has been a key role in that. If you look in your notes there, I love the way that first point puts it, dad is destiny. Dad is destiny, there's no way around it. There was a movement several years ago to kind of erase the impact and influence of men, diminish it. The problem is all the studies that came back actually emphasize that much more dad's destiny. And if you look at it, I love the quote by president Obama there.

He says, upon all the rocks on which we build our lives, family's the most important and we're called to recognize and honor how critical every father is to that foundation. The father is the basis of that. But then while we say dad is destiny, and we talk about the studies, you look at what's happening with fatherhood still in our country. When you look at how many people grow up in a fatherless home, it's estimated in our country today, 40% of homes are fatherless. Dad's not there. Now, you may look at that and go, "Well, but dad's in their lives in different ways." Of those homes, 40% of the kids in fatherless homes didn't see dad last year. Let that sink in.

50% of those kids have never set a foot in dad's house. So it's beyond just, "We're trying to figure out how to parent in two different households." I know that happens. Happens in life, maybe it happens in your life. But we're talking about an epidemic that is impacting our nation, impacting the next generation. And when you remove dad, as we talked about that weight that you need in life, that ballast, it removes it out of our sons and our daughters. Look at point B, the positive presence of dad in a family shapes in many ways.

For a son, it's a healthy masculinity. For a daughter, it's a healthy femininity. It helps them determine who am I as a man, but it also is one of the most determining factors for daughters, but just figuring out who they are is girls. Because kids naturally make dad the hero. If you've got little kids at home, especially, sometimes you'll talk to a young mom, she's been with the kids all day, he's gone. He walks in the door and it's just everybody's excited. Daddy, the hero's home and she's kind of looking like, "Try being here all day."

It's just naturally in a kid's heart. A kid wants to, if he's a son, they want to be the glory in their father. I remember when the boys were little. Drew came to me, he was about three or four years old and he came and goes, "Dad, I've decided I want to be a pastor." I was like, "Great." He goes, "So what do pastors do?" It's not a lot of people ask that question. Now a few years later when he's about seven years old, he came in and he goes, "Dad, I got really bad news." I said, "What?" And he goes, "I don't think I'm going to be a pastor."

I was like, "All right. I'll deal with the heartbreak son. So what do you want to do?" He goes, "Well, I'm determined I'm going to play in the NFL." Okay. He goes, "But I'm really worried." I said, "What are you worried about?" And he goes, "I am really worried the Raiders are going to draft me." I was like, "Out of all the teams? We'll cover that when we come to it if you get drafted by the Raiders." Now as they've grown over the years, you kind of watch them change in the course of their life. Here's the one constant though. They keep coming back to dad in different ways as a marker. They keep coming back to me. Sometimes they measure against you, sometimes they just need from you. But fathers and sons are shaped.

I love how David Blankenhorn puts it. He says, as a father, the good family man is not perfect, but he's good enough to be irreplaceable. No matter who he is, he's irreplaceable. He's a father on the premises. He knows that nothing can substitute for him, nothing. He would never consider himself not that important to his children. He is in fact essential. He's essential to the formulation of who they are and without that, without that, what happens in a young girl's life as she's trying to figure out who she is as a woman, what happens in a young man's life?

It's interesting in nature. I saw a study they did of these young elephants that within the elephant family, the male elephants had been poached. Poachers had come and killed all the adult males. So then they had all these adolescent elephant males growing up without that male influence and they were surprised at the rage that built up. That these young adolescent elephants just didn't know how to act. They would go down to the watering hole and instead of just participating, they had all this pent up anger and they started goring rhinos.

They started goring other animals because there was no one there to show them this is what it means to be a man, to be male. You know how they actually rehabilitated them? They brought in some males. And when they started doing life with them, suddenly it started clicking, this is how you function. Guys, what's true in the animal world is even more true in the adult world. I'll just stop at this moment. You are irreplaceable in the home. I would say it, as men in society as dads, if you have the privilege of being a dad, no matter your age, no matter the age of your kids, you are irreplaceable in there.

I love how the old Testament ends. And you think of all the things that God could say at the very end of the old Testament, the old Testament was written and then there was about 400 years where there was no new prophecy and the very last thing that God says, and he points to the fact that he's going to send his son, he's going to actually redeem the land and redeem the world, and he makes this promise. If you look at it, you can see that verse there in Malachi. He says, when he comes, he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.

The last promise God makes, and when he's talking about how he's going to change the planet, he's going to change the world. He's got this big plan that he's going to do and the promise he makes. Notice the last thing he emphasizes, and when this happens, you know how you're going to see it? Dads start turning back to their kids and kids turn to their dads. That's how important it is to God by the way. That's one of the core planks that he says, "Hey, in my program, this is what it looks like. It looks like get dad stepping in and stepping up and kids being able to turn and rely on their dads."

So how do we do that? How do we do that in our own life? Today we want to look at it on two sides of it. In fact, if you look in your notes, I want to just take just a minute and make it personal. And think about it, both our relationship with our dad, but also relationship with our sons and our children. And so look at those two questions there and I want you to do this quick. Whatever comes to your mind, quick, take your pen out and ask this first question and answer it. What one or two words or phrases comes to mind when you think about your dad?

I mean, when you think about your dad, just write immediately what comes to mind.What word, what phrase? And then what words would you want your children to say about you 20 years from now? Now this is a good one to camp out in for a little while, but I want you to just hit it, hit it real quick. One or two words that you go, "Man, my kids 20 years from now and they're talking about me, they're writing a session just like this. What do I want them to say?" Even if you don't have kids, what would you want them if you have kids one day?

So it's helpful to think about both ends of the spectrum. We want to address both of these. To do that first of all, let's let's look at the three types of dads. There's kind of three types of dads out there. The first one is, and we've been talking about this, the problematic dad. Our society has an increasing number of men who are clueless about fatherhood and what children need in a dad. There's a growing level of cluelessness. Because it kind of goes hand in hand. When you diminish the role of men and you diminish what manhood is and you redefine it as just completely toxic.

Then when you come and look at the roles of men, you start diminishing that and you take that away and there's a growing level of cluelessness of, "How do I do this and what do I do in it?" Look at that second point there. Absence, neglect, irresponsibility and just parenting ignorance. Just not knowing what to do, unleashes pain, disfunction and hurtful behavior, long lasting psychological wounds onto their children. And over half the fathers in America today could be labeled problematic if you want to put them in this category. And we've talked about, looked at the things that produces, in a son or daughter's life, the anger that they may not even realize they have.

I remember when I was a teenager, I was down the street. I was visiting this guy, he didn't live on our street, his grandmother did and he'd come see her every so often. And we were standing out in front of his grandmother's house. And this guy, John and his grandmother had all these white rocks that were in all the beds all the way around the house. And we're just standing there and he started picking up these rocks and I did it too. And we just took them and we throw them over the house as high as we could. Just dumb 13 year old boys. And suddenly the next door neighbor on the other side came walking around, Mr. Wentworth.

And Mr. Wentworth had a little bit of a temper. I mean, now as an adult, I understand it more as his wife was dying of cancer and he was processing it with alcohol. So about every night he would drink more and more. And by this point when he came walking around, he was pretty lit. He'd been drinking quite a bit. He came walking around holding one of those white rocks and he looked at us, he goes, "This just came through my window. You boys have any idea how this might've just come through my window?" And we both looked at him and said, "Nope, no idea at all." I mean, we're standing on a bed of these white rocks and that got him even more mad.

So he goes, "You're telling me you don't know how this white rock came through my window?" And John looks up at him and just cool as a cucumber, "Because you know, there was a guy walking down the street a few minutes ago, maybe he walked over and threw it to your window." And that set Mr. Wentworth off. I mean, he just started raging. And I'll never forget, he got in my face, he got in John's face and he goes, "I'm the toughest guy on the street. You don't want to mess with me." And he looked at me, he goes, "I'll kick your dad's ass and I'll kick your dad's ass." And it scared me.

I kind of stepped back and I looked over at John and he wasn't scared, he was angry. I'll never forget. He got right in Mr. Wentworth's face and he goes, "If you can find my dad, kick his ass for me too." And he stormed in the house. Mr. Wentworth didn't know what to do with that. See, he's angry about a broken window, but you know what he had tapped into? A kid with a broken soul. Because dad, for whatever reason, wasn't there. And that rage, that pent up anger, it doesn't take much to see it rise up. And some of you have experienced that, some of you have seen it.

Some of it it's the people you're trying to manage and you can't figure out, "Why is he angry all the time? Why does she fight back so hard all the time?" Probably problematic dad somewhere in there. Sometimes it's anger, sometimes it's addiction. Sometimes it's just that hole in the soul. You know one of the key ways I've seen it show up? I'd see it in my life, I've had to identify as insecurity. That you feel insecure moments, the insecurity of not having that ballast that was there.

The author, Donald Miller, bestselling author, he writes about his own insecurity. He said, if you think about it, God gives a father a special instinct that makes him love his kid more than anything in the world. And I suppose that same instinct was floating around in my father's brain too. But for whatever reason, he took a look at me and he split. Even the instinct God gave him wasn't strong enough to make my dad stay. And that has made me feel at times that there is this detestable person living within my skin who makes people feel as though they must carry me on their back.

Walking to the park one night, I realized that I was operating out of a feeling of inferiority. Deep inside I believed life was for other people, joy for other people, responsibility for others and so on and so on. In life there were people who are meant to live and people who were accidentally born, elected to plod the globe as the despised. And hear this. He says, these thoughts are illogical, I know that. There isn't proof that a guy who grows up in a family with a good dad is any better than a guy who grows up in a family with a bad dad. Still, a logical argument isn't able to change the heart.

My mind knew there was nothing wrong with me, that the problem was the message my father handed down, but this knowledge didn't make me feel any more secure. And for years, all I could do in the healing process was recognize that I felt inferior and I kept telling myself this is a lie. See, we got a lot of kids and a whole generation growing up telling themselves lies, if we don't break the cycle. Now to do that. Okay. How do you move out of problematic dad? Well, I would say the next category is the good dad.

And you look at it, many dads want the best for their children and they seek to give it. I would say most dads do. They want the best for their kids, but sometimes however, a good dad's effort fails to get good results. I mean, they're a good dad. Many of you described your life story and you told it to each other. You've said those words. My dad was a good guy, he was a good dad. But then you're going, "Wait, why am I struggling with these same problems? Why do I feel this way?" And that's that part where you go, "It's got to be more than just wanting to be a good dad."

Look at your notes there. Often it's because this dad lacked understanding. His words and actions, however sincere, may still fail to connect rightly with his child's heart and emotions. They miss critical needs this child has in terms of affirmation, direction, gender understanding, spiritual insight or life skills. As much as he tries to be a good dad, these misses can, and here's a keyword you might want to underline, unintentionally hurt his child and bring on negative reactions, shortcomings and problems. It was unintentional. It was never the intention of the good dad to hurt in this way.

The good dad who in his parenting, he parents all his children exactly the same. Because it worked for this one, and so of course it will work for that one. Not realizing, "Wait, they're all such different people." And what is actually putting weight in this child's life is keeping this child from really feeling it. The good dad in an effort to try to give the child or make the child what they weren't and what they didn't have, they ride them too hard. They push too much. They're always coaching, they're always challenging, and the child doesn't feel how much they're loved.

The good dad who just in an effort to try to provide for their family just works too much, doesn't spend time with them. It's one of the key misses. Now years ago, the famous biographer Boswell, he wrote about his own life, he kept a diary of his life. And one of the days he would write about the most, he wrote about a day from his childhood when his father took the day off and took him fishing and talked about all the things that he learned, the time with his dad, how instrumental that one day was in his life. Someone found his dad's diary. His dad kept a diary too and they matched the date. You know what his dad wrote on that day? His dad wrote, missed work, took my son fishing, just a day wasted.

Because I mean, I didn't work today. I didn't really get anything done. Not realizing, "Man, this was one of the most instrumental days." And that's the reality. I don't blame the dad too much. We're not going to always know what's instrumental but the time is, the investment is. Look at that point. The good dad needs more than good effort, he needs smart effort. He needs smart effort. And so that's where we move to the last category, the smart dad. For all of us, it's not just working harder, it's working smarter in this area.

Three things a smart dad has that the other dads don't. One, he's acquired from various sources: the Bible, books, video, seminars, other successful dads. It doesn't matter the source, if you start with the core truth... Now, I'd say the first core truth of the Bible and then you build out from there, sound understanding of what his children need most from him as dad. He gets help, he's constantly wanting to get better. And I want to applaud you. I want to applaud those of you who are here, those of you who are watching this.

Just by committing to this, just being here every week, this is a smart choice. I'm going to tell you, I've got a personal commitment in my life. This will always be a part of what I do. So somebody asks me, "I mean, do you like working with men?" I go, "I love it." You know why? I need it. I always will make it a commitment that I need other guys. I need us talking about stuff that matters. I need us being together. I need to go through this because every time I do a go, "I need to do that." It helps me. And so part of it is just putting yourself in a context that you go, "Yeah, I want to learn and I want to keep learning and I never want to stop the rest of my life because this area of my life is so important to me." And I hope it's as important to you.

Your commitment of being a part of this, man this is a smart move. With that as well, he's developed an intentional dad plan for meeting those needs. Every smart dad needs a dad plan. And in that you look, it's a big picture plan that covers the years his kids are at home, especially if you've got kids in the house, it's the plan of action. I would say you can develop a dad plan for adult children as well. It's going to look a little bit different, but it's so critical if you've got kids at home. It's a plan with practical specifics, key dates and measurable results. It's strategic. I mean, we do this at our work all the time, don't we?

I bet for all of us at work, you have strategic measureables that you're going, "Yeah, we need to hit this." Do you apply the same energy toward being a dad? It's a plan that is best written out and periodically reviewed. Now in your notes, if you look here, here's a sample dad plan. Here's a simple sample dad plan. And we're not going to go through all of this in detail because a lot that you see in this dad plan, we're going to teach over the course of this time together. We'll hit it in other sessions. But here's what I want you to notice.

Look at the categories that are laid out there. You got the categories of, here are the things that my son or daughter needs to see. If you look across the top, the ages are written. So from the ages of 1 to 21, and then there's a marker there for all the years that they really need to see or experience each of the categories. So the first category, here's the things my son or daughter needs to see, they need to see dad's character and spiritual life. And this really gets important starting age five because they're starting to connect some dots, especially through age 18.

It's not just what you say to them, it's what they see you doing. They need to see dad loving mom and you see that, that's all the way from one on. Few things give a child more security than when they see dad loving mom in real, tangible ways. It just puts a deposit in their life. They need to receive, now look at this, affirming encouragement. And here's that checkpoint where you have to ask yourself, "Do I coach my kids all the time or do I encourage them?" Am I constantly correcting and trying to make them better, or do I stop back and just go, "Man, let me encourage where they're doing this well."

They need specific manhood and womanhood instruction. And you can look at the years where that is critical, where you're teaching them and you go, "Well, I don't know how to teach my daughter about being a woman." Yeah, you do. Take her on a date. Show her how guys should treat her. Don't assume she knows. Show her the kind of guys she should be looking for. Talk to her about it. I mean, that shapes who she is as a woman. They need to see and receive Jesus in his or her life. They want to talk to you spiritually.

And I know for some of you, you go, "They'll ask questions. I don't know. I'll just take them to the pastor." That's fine. The problem is the pastor, the youth pastor or whoever, they don't have nearly the influence you do in their life. And you don't have to become some Bible scholar overnight, just having the conversation with them. They ask a question and you were to look at him and go, "Yeah, I have that same question too." You'd be amazed what that means to your child, that they can actually ask their questions and talk about things and you talk to them about, "Let me talk to you about my spiritual journey as well."

They need to experience special one-on-one times. And this is important. If you're dad like me and you have a bunch of kids, you can look up and you go, "Wait, when's the last time that one got individual time with me?" And even as I was preparing for this, I pulled it back out again and I go, "I've got to get my calendar out." If I don't calendar it, the one-on-one times don't happen. They just don't. And so it forces me to get intentional again with it. And then you see manhood ceremonies, especially for a son these key years. There's marker years with that.

If you're curious about that, if you look in the footnotes, Robert Lewis who developed this material also wrote a book, Raising a Modern-Day Knight and he describes in it those ceremonies and what he did specifically with his sons. It's a great resource for that. The final part, they need to hear constantly, I love you, I love you in ways they can hear it. They need to hear, I'm proud of you, especially in the teenage years. And starting in the teenage years and beyond and I would say these go beyond, I admire you. What do you admire in their life?

Now, is this the perfect plan? No, but it's a plan. And you may look at it, "No, I want to adjust some categories. I want to add some things to it." That's great. Here's all I would say and if you see it in your notes, a smart dad is committed to dad plan follow through. The key is follow through, get the plan and work the plan. Actually work it. He knows follow through best happens when his plan includes other dads who are as committed with him. You get some dads and you go, "Hey, let's work on our plans together." Because part of that is, Where can we intersect? Where can we do some of these things together?"

He knows a plan can't guarantee a great outcome with his children, but it will significantly increase that possibility. There's no guarantees. Because you're raising children who become adults and they'll make choices in life. But boy, you raise your possibilities and you don't want their struggles to be based on your gaps and so just helps you with that. He regularly calls on God to help him be the best dad he can be, but when he fails his children and he will, you will, I do, he asks God for grace to make up for his dad mistakes. He asks for grace.

I mean, the two things that as dads we should be talking to God about all the time, is God would you help me do this? And God, would you give me grace where I've not done it well? You know what guys? God loves to give both. Can I remind you how God defines himself? God the father. It's not just this kind of throw away title. He actually understands. If there is anybody who's for you in this, it's God, who is a father. If there's anybody that understands and is willing to forgive and give grace and help, it's God.

When's the last time you asked him to help you with this? Literally just go, "God, could you help me do this? Could you help me with my plan? Could you help me work the plan? Could you help me overcome the gaps I've already created?" If you look in that box, that quote, healthy well adjusted sons and daughters don't just happen. Smart dads joined to God make it happen. Smart dads make it happen. It's not going to just happen. Now as we look at that, I want to address on two sides just some advice.

One, helpful advice to fathers with parenting challenges. As dads, maybe you're here and you're going, "Okay, Tim, I hear this but I'm facing some unique challenges." Here's the first one. If you're a dad disconnected personally and emotionally from your son or daughter, know that it's never too late to close this gap, no matter how old they are. It is never too late. Invariably, when you teach on this, I don't care how old your kids are. As dads will immediately go to that place of, "Crowd, I've already blown it. Man, I already missed those years. They're already teenagers."

And invariably, whenever I've taught through material like this, it never fails. I get older dads who come up and they always say this, "Man, I wish I'd known this 30 years ago. I wish somebody had taught me this 40 years ago." And here's what I say to them, and here's what I'd say to you if you're saying that to yourself today. It's not too late. It's not too late to close the gap. Maybe you feel a real gap with your kids right now. If that's you, no matter their age, look at the first thing. I'm asking you to be courageous and you request a meeting.

You call them, you set it up, you grab your teenager, "Hey, we're going to breakfast." You request it, you initiating that. And when you do that, declare your love, express genuine sorrow over the separation. Own it. Tell them, "Hey, you know what? I'm learning some things and I'm recognizing I probably have created some things in your life. We're further away than I'd like to be." And just own it. Make it completely about what you want in that and ask for forgiveness where necessary in order to explore some ways forward. This takes courage to do.

It takes courage because some of you go, "Man, you don't realize how far that gap is." Or some of you go, "Well, we've just kind of settled into the routine and it's just working for us." But you know in your heart you want more. And I'd encourage you that next point, reconnecting may require a series of meetings. It's not a onetime deal. Be open to it. Resist pressing for immediate reconciliation if your son or daughter's not ready. And they probably won't be, especially if the gap's been pretty far and long.

What you're wanting to accomplish in the one they may not be ready. And so that's where it takes courage to keep moving into it. Because part of it may be for a number of years they saw you moving away and so now it's a prove-it time of, do you really mean what you're saying? Are you going to keep moving in my life? Because they don't want to set their heart up to really believe you're going to be there again. And so show them. Show them you mean it in that.

There's one dad, he was about 60 years old and as he heard this material and it was like a knife wound to his heart and he goes, "I was an attorney, I was building a practice. I just wasn't there over the years. Now my son is in his medical residency. He lives out of state. We just have this huge gap." And he was challenged, do this, do this. And he called his son, his son kind of put him off a little bit, "I don't know dad. I'm busy dad. I don't know." Until finally he just declared, "I'm coming. We're going to spend the day together. I just want one day." Got on a plane, he flew down there, took his son, started out with a great lunch, took him out to one of the nicest restaurants.

And over the lunch, he just kind of walked through that. He goes, "I wasn't there, I'm sorry. I'm going to ask you to forgive me." And then as they continued the day together, he then turned it toward things that he saw in his son, things that he's proud of in him. They ended the day, he got back on the plane. And while he was flying, the son called mom and he said, "I just spent the day with dad." He said, "Mom, it was the finest day of my life." And a gap that had been so far now is reduced. It wasn't erased, it was reduced. And the dad stuck with it to the point that they had the kind of relationship they both had always dreamed of. But that takes courage.

One of my favorite things in teaching through material like this, sometimes it happens immediately. Sometimes I'll get an email. Sometimes it's years later, but I get a letter from a dad who said, "I finally did it. I initiated with my daughter and we had the conversation I've been wanting to have. I stepped into my son's life." And it's that letter of, I didn't believe it could be true, but the gap has been reduced. It's never too late guys. It's never too late.

Now with that as well, here's another challenge. If you're a single dad, maybe through divorce or death or maybe you're a dad in a blended family, don't guess, don't guess at your situation. Seek outside help, wisdom to build a sound parenting strategy for going forward. You're facing something unique, so don't guess at it. Don't just assume you know in that, read books, expand your horizons. Talk to successful single and blended family dads. Look around, who's doing this well? They may not think they're doing it well, but you go, "Man, he's got more answers than I do."

And take him out to lunch. Go, "Hey, talk to me about your challenges." Let their experiences mentor you. And here's the key thing. Again, humble yourself and ask forgiveness where necessary. Maybe right now you're dealing, you have two households, your kids were hurt through the divorce. You'd be shocked what a little humility will do in a kid's life when it comes from dad. When instead of trying to justify, instead of trying to prove, instead of trying to just wow them. Every time I'm with them, we're going to have the most fun experience in that.

You just let down your guard a little bit and be humble with them and ask for forgiveness and tell them you're committing to try to be better at this and build what's not there. And you learn from it. It's never too late and it's never too damaged. It really isn't. Those are the lies we tell ourselves. We tell ourselves, "I've done too much," and we allow our guilt to drive us or we allow our fear to drive us. Don't step into it. Now here's the flip side of it. What if you're the son with the dad wound? What if you're the son that experienced it and you still struggle with that?

Let me give you just a few points. One, approach your dad wound responsibly, approach it responsibly. We've seen the irresponsible ways of doing that when you just blame or you deny or you try to medicate. And depending on the wound, if it's been there and it's an infected... you ever had a place where you get an infection or just even a sore and when it gets infected with that, you don't even want to touch near it? It just hurts so much. If you have that, if every time this issue of dad comes up and even these sessions as we're touching a little bit, you're feeling it, that's probably a good indicator there's still some infection there.

So you've got to approach it responsibly. Here's one of the ways I think that will help you. Find out what your dad's story was with his dad. Do you know your dad's story with his dad? Often knowing your dad's story helps with understanding how he wounded you. Sometimes just understanding where he came from. It was helpful for me. My dad had a lot of brokenness in his life and it acted out in different ways. But when I flew out to LA and I saw some of the places he grew up and when I heard more about how his father would go on alcoholic binges and the anger that was taken out on that household, when I found out that some of my dad's older siblings left home and one of which renounced the family name because he had been so wounded by dad.

When I saw those things I went, "Okay, helps me understand my dad a little bit more." That maybe he was trying to do the best he could. It's probably true about your dad too. Doesn't mean that he didn't do damage but sometimes it was the best they knew. And knowing that helps. It helps to admit the truth about your wound. Admit not just how dad hurt you, but also what you lost as a son by him not being the dad you wanted him to be. Not just recognizing what he did, sometimes though it's good to grieve what was lost. Not so that you stay there, not so you live in it, but if you grieve it, it allows you to start taking steps in moving forward and leaving it too.

That this doesn't have to define my life. Now I don't have to keep telling myself it was no big deal. Now, a few years ago, I did a wedding for a young man and his dad walked out when he was 11. Just walked out, walked out the family, went through financial struggles, all the things with it. It was interesting as we were talking about the wedding, he brought it up a couple of times on his own. He said, "No, my dad won't be there. My dad's never been there, but it's okay. It's good. I've worked through it. That does not bother me. Doesn't bother me."

And the next session we're coming together and dad came up, "Yeah, you remember my dad's not going to be there. Not going to be there, but that doesn't bother me. No impact on me." And finally one of the sessions, I just stopped him. And I said, "I'll be honest. Just hearing your story bothers me. But I can't tell you how sad it makes me knowing what you lost and what your going to lose again on your wedding day, of just not having dad there." He started balling and part of it was connected. As we got a little deeper into it, he was scared to death he was going to be a lousy dad.

One of my favorite parts of the wedding, as we're doing that ceremony and start casting vision about the future, to be able to look at him as an older man in his life and look him in the eye and tell him, "I think you're going to be a great husband. But even more than that, I think you're going to be an awesome dad." And to watch what that meant in his soul. Because he was finally starting to admit, "Okay, this does hurt, but it doesn't have to define me." That doesn't have to define you, but to do that you're going to have to choose to forgive your dad. You've got to forgive him whether he deserves it or not.

See, forgiveness as you go on, I'm not carrying this anymore, so I'm choosing to give to you what you may not deserve, but I'm going to give it anyway because I can't keep the baggage. It's recognizing that you wanted him to be a hero, he was just a man. Even the best of dads were just men. A good friend of mine was in a group session following a session just like this, and his adult son was with him. They have a great relationship. And they were just talking about the years growing up. Because my friend, because of his business, he traveled a lot.

They kind of laughed because he and his son had this joke. His son would always tell him, "You're really in the CIA, aren't you? You're a spy." And they were sitting around the circle talking about that and kind of laughed, "I remember when you always thought I was a spy." And his son finally spoke up and he goes, "That's what I told myself as a boy because it was easier to tell myself you were going to save the world than to admit you were just leaving again." And in that moment my friend looked at him and said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for not being there at times I wanted to be."

And even in this great relationship, because hear me, you have a great relationship, there was new forgiveness. I'm telling you, it will free you if you'll forgive in a way that you can't fathom, and bring healing. And you may look at it and you go, "My dad's gone. My dad's not there." Here's what I'd encourage you, choose to release your dad to God. Maybe they did horrific things. Maybe they did things that even as you forgive, there's a part of you that goes, "But what they did was so wrong." Then release them to God. Go, "God, you're a just God. This is a big universe. I'm going to trust that with you. I'm tired of being the hammer of justice in my heart all the time, so I release it and I want freedom in it."

I'd encourage you if dad is still around, just like I told dad's the same way. Take the initiative with your dad. Don't wait for him to come to you. Instead, courageously step forward and seek reconciliation with him while you can. You initiate. You initiate, don't wait for him. I had a friend, he was part of a leadership team. We were going through a study like this together and his dad lived up in Cincinnati. And so as he went through this, he thought, "You know what? I want this." Called his dad, "Hey dad, I want to spend some time with you. I want to get together."

His dad kept putting him off. He called him, he said, "Hey dad, you've never met your grandchildren." Dad was busy. But dad, I'm coming to see you. And he finally forced the issue, drove up, spent the day with his dad and he shared his hurts, but he also shared his forgiveness. His dad finally admitted to him at the end of the time because they had a reconciliation that was great and it began their journey together. Know what his dad told him? I wasn't really busy, I was just scared to death. I just didn't know how to do this, but I've wanted it for so long.

Courageously ask your dad to bless you. If you never heard him say I love you or I'm proud of you, then go to him and courageously ask for those blessings. Ask for it, literally by name. Say, "Dad, I just need to hear it from you. I need to hear you say I love you." And they probably say something like, "Well of course I love you." Then go, "No, no. I need to hear it and I need your blessing. Just your blessing on my life." And you got to remember a lot of dads, if they've never been through something like this, they don't realize the gap that's there. But once they're taught about it, once they're told about it, you'd be amazed when they speak into it and they go, "Man, let me tell you what I'm proud of." But it takes courage to ask for that.

And point D, reclaim the relationship you missed with your dad by becoming a smart dad that blesses your children. So maybe your dad's gone, maybe you can't get the blessing. That's my life. I've never heard the blessing from my dad. Never had that. So you know what I chose to do? Okay, I'm reclaiming that and I want my kids to have that, and I'm starting a new family legacy. And when I feel the wound of what is lost, it motivates me that much more to go, "Okay, I'm stepping in that much more." I'm reclaiming it instead of just being stuck by it, and I'd encourage you to do the same.

Final thing, and this is one of the important things to have in a community like this here. If you know a man who never knew his dad or a man who was rejected by his dad, consider asking some men he admires to join you in coming together and speaking a special blessing of affirmation and admiration over his life. Sometimes it takes some other guys around him. Sometimes it's guys rallying to a guy that you look at and you go, "Man, that guy needs that." Be that. All these steps I've told you, they take courage.

It takes courage in the stuff we don't normally do as men. It takes an awareness to go, "I'm not going to miss the moments. I'm not going to sit passively. I'm not going to just fly blindly and hope good intentions cover it." Because the moments come quick and it's in those moments, both as a son and as a dad, this kind of awareness and stepping into it makes all the difference. Now I read the story of a woman. She was older than her younger brother Jim, and she watched her dad with Jim. And her dad was a craftsman, he had a number of tools. He did it as a hobby.

And down in the basement he had all these tools, some of which had been passed down through the family. And as a seven year old, her brother Jim loved to go down and he started building things with the tools and playing with the tools. One day dad came down and he saw all the tools kind of scattered and it made him really nervous because he's like, "These are the expensive tools." So he said, "All right Jim, we're going to do a special project. We're building a box for the tools." Jim got real excited, didn't really know the implications of it.

And so together they worked on this box and the cabinet with it and all the doors and they finally finished it and then dad went over and took the really special tools and put them all in it. And then the realization hit Jim as he watched his dad close the doors and put a padlock on it. And suddenly the seven year old boy's face fell. The realization in that moment. And he looked up at dad, he said, "Dad, who has the key?" And in a moment, instead of it being a miss, dad suddenly realized, "Wait, there's something more important here than tools."

So he got down on a knee and he goes, "Jim, there's only two keys in the whole world. Now I have one, and here's yours. This is ours together." Instead of a moment missed, it's a moment of a lifetime. Guys, maybe you miss a moment. Maybe you caused this moment. It's not too late. The practical application on both sides of the equation, both as sons and as fathers can make an unbelievable difference in your life, in your son's life, in the lives of the men around us.