

Turning Boys to Men & Fathers to Dads

Father's Day Service at the Merrillville High School Football Stadium

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Steve DeWitt

As I look across these stands, my heart is filled with gratitude to God for you and for the privilege I have had these many years to pastor this church. Some of the old timers can remember while we built our church facility in 1999, we came to Merrillville High School every Sunday for 72 Sundays while we built our facility on Broadway. If someone would have told me then that we would have a future Sunday at the stadium where we would fill the home stands, I don't know that any of us would have believed it.

Yet here we are on a beautiful day, having some fun as a church family. This is great. I'd like to thank all the volunteers, set-up crew, staff coordinators, and others who worked to pull this off today.

We are having a shorter than normal service today, which means that I have a shorter than normal message. Given that it's Father's Day, I want us to talk about how fathers become dads and boys become men.

Men and dads are in short supply in America. There are a lot of males who never become men and lots of fathers who never become dads. Let's begin by defining our terms.

What is a Boy?

A boy is a male. It was the first thing that defined him. Everyone asks, "Boy or Girl?" "Boy!" "Yea!" A boy will be a male all his life. What is a tragedy is when a boy stays a boy all his life. A boy is a male, but there is a huge difference between being a male and being a man. A man willingly embraces the responsibilities of manhood as God defines it.

What do I mean? I mean that biblically, manhood has to do with how I relate – how I relate to God, to other men, and to women. A real man *relates to God* with worship and obedience. A real man *relates to other men* like Jesus related to them, with friendship and camaraderie. Real men have a capacity to go deep in friendship with other men. The Bible describes it in Proverbs 27:17 as an *iron sharpening iron* relationship. A real man *relates to women* with tender masculinity and to his wife with biblical husbandry. This has to do with honoring and protecting women. For centuries, men have fought for the protection of women and children. If the ship is going down, it's women and children in the lifeboats first. Women are treasured and honored by real men and there is something in all of us that says this is good and right.

We could say it this way, a biblical man is a man who has God at the center of his life. With God at the center of his life, his roles and relationships are shaped by his God-centeredness. He refuses to be influenced by a culture that wants to feminize men. Real men want to be men and embrace God's design for manhood. What is that design?

God's Design for Manhood

Biblical manhood can be summarized as two things: to be a *leader* and to be a *lover*. A man is called to lead in his marriage and his home. But this leadership is shaped by the second call which is to love. Love is what keeps a man from domineering or oppressing and from

being absent in the relationship. *Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.* (Ephesians 5:25) Is Christ the leader of the church? Absolutely. How does He lead? With sacrificial love for us. He is a leader and a lover.

Real men embrace the example of Christ and seek to fulfill it in the home. Lead and love. Strength and tenderness. This is the real man. This is manhood as Jesus modeled it. Jesus is the most masculine man who ever lived. Men were drawn to him. In his inner circle he had blue collar fishermen, a finance guy, and a revolutionary. They all found something compelling in Jesus. Manliness. When He asked them to follow Him, they willingly did.

In my brief time here today, I want to challenge all the males here to be men and all the fathers to be dads. This is what we need, we need men!

How do boys become men?

Boys become men. How will this happen? How do boys become men? They don't become men by themselves. Naturally, boys are the opposite of the biblical definition of men. Rather than selfless leaders, boys are naturally selfish. They seek to dominate instead of serve. Pile up snow and soon boys are fighting to be king of the mountain. Bring cheerleaders on the field and boys quickly reduce them to sexual objects to be leered at and conquered. So boys naturally relate to other men as competitors and women as trophies or toys. This is the opposite of biblical leading and loving.

Boys become men by having real men as heroes. Ask any man the influences in his life and high on the list will be another man he looked up to. He could be an older friend, a teacher, a coach, or maybe the über-cool Senior Pastor at his church. All boys look for somebody to look up to. God made boys this way AND God's design was for there to be an every-day example of what real manhood looks like. An in-house example of how a man should treat a woman. A daily example of how a man relates to other men and how he relates to his God. Boys become men by being around a real man to admire and the number one candidate in his heart is his father. Remember, I am challenging boys to be men and fathers to be dads.

How do fathers become dads?

Fathers, there is a difference between being a father and being a dad. Being a Father is no great accomplishment. Any male can do it. It is a biological function. Being a dad is a life-long achievement.

A dad is a boy who has become a biblical man and who models for his son and daughter godly leading and loving. That's a dad. Fathers, are you a father or are you a dad?

I remember growing up, my dad would never let us kids call him father. He made it clear that we were to call him dad. This might have been because his dad died when he was 4 and he never really had anybody to call "Dad." I think I understand now. Daddy means leader and daddy means lover.

Here's how the Bible says that, *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4)

Bring them up. Nurture them. Invest in them. Teach them. Live your faith before them. These are all the ways a dad profoundly influences his son and his son becomes a man who wants to lead and love in his own life.

I have never been a dad. My only experience with this is being the son of a man who I consider to be a great dad. Let me give you two examples from my life of what I am talking about. I remember when I was in high school playing football and basketball on the school teams. I am ashamed to say that at that point, I was a little embarrassed by my dad. You see, my dad not only made it to most of the games, but it wasn't unusual for me to look along the sidelines during practice and see my dad peeking around the corner watching. Not only did I see it, my teammates did too. They apparently didn't like it. They mocked me for it. This was embarrassing to me as a teenager. But I never had to wonder if my dad was interested in me or what I was doing. He had a professional and demanding job. Still, there he was peeking around the corner. I was embarrassed, but deep down I think I liked it. *Look, my dad cares about me. I am pretty sure he loves me.* Now I can see why my teammates didn't particularly like it. They didn't like it because it was a reminder that most of their dads didn't come to practices or even games. Their dads had other priorities. Their dads were fathers. Other things were higher on the list. An absent dad says a lot too.

The other example is one I often tell. I don't know that there has been a night in my life when I looked into my parents' room as we're getting ready for bed where I haven't seen my dad on his knees praying – week in and week out, year in and year out – Forty-one years now. Let me ask you, *What do you think the impression is on the heart of a boy looking for a hero, finding one in his dad, and seeing his hero bowing his head before his God?* My dad is no super-saint. He wasn't grandstanding. He was just doing what normal Christians do; praying. But for a son, the sight of your dad on his knees every night is profound. It implants something in your heart about what really matters in life.

Fathers, the most important thing for you to do to raise your kids is for you to simply be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ and for them to see that. Bring your kids along to the Saturday morning work day, let them see you at prayer meeting, let them observe you serving your family, leading in Bible reading, giving money to God's work, caring for those in need. Not just making out with mom, but serving and deferring to her. Guys, this isn't rocket science. Biblical dads love God and simply live it out in front of their kids. As boys see biblical manhood, even imperfectly, it rubs off on them, and they aspire to be like their dad, a godly leader and lover. And then they in turn, rub off on your grandchildren and now your life is having generational impact. Dads, when you are on your deathbed, what thought could be better than that?

Malachi 4:6 says it well. These are the last words of the entire Old Testament. They describe what happens when God gets control of a family:

And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers... (Malachi 4:6)

When humanity breaks down, fathers don't love their kids and kids don't love their fathers. But when the gospel of Jesus Christ takes root in the heart of a father and the heart of a son, fathers become dads and sons become men. Generational leaders and lovers.

How will we be able to gauge the success of our church ministry? One way will be to look at the males in the church. Are they boys or are they men? We could look at the families. Are there fathers or are there dads? Do they lead? Do they love? Are the sons developing the strength of character to lead and the heart for God to love? And is the direction of their life toward the things of God and serving Him with their lives?

This is manhood in the kingdom of God. It is pure masculinity. It is faith with hair on its chest. Men who lead and men who love. May God work in our church and in our families and may He make all our boys, men, and all our fathers, dads.

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