

Father's Day Growth Challenge

Intro: I love watching things grow. It's one of the reasons I enjoy this time of the year so much. It is a growth season. I take a lot of pleasure walking around my yard watching the growth of the plants / shrubs / flowers / bulbs poking through the ground – etc... Years ago I learned this very simple truth: Healthy things grow. It is true with plants / in business / in churches / in communities / and with individuals. Stagnation is death. In order to be healthy, we all need to keep growing. This being Father's day I want to give the men a growth challenge.

- I want to encourage men today to grow in three key areas. Why these specific areas? So you can be healthy. I also believe many men avoid these 3 areas of growth. If you will give yourself to grow in these areas, they result in tremendous blessing to you and to all those around you.

1. Grow in Relational Understanding

*I Peter 3:7 "In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. **Treat your wife with understanding** as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered."* (NLT) Treating our wives with understanding is a direct responsibility God gives to husbands. *Prov. 16:22 "Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it..."* (NASB) The more understanding you have relationally the more life you breathe into that relationship. Taking the time to understand someone else is one of the most powerful relational gifts you can give.

- When someone feels understood, they feel valued / loved / they feel connected. Men, don't we want our wives and children to feel this way?

Men, we have a responsibility to grow in our relational understanding. What do I mean? We grow in our understanding how relationships work. We choose to understand our wives and our kids. This is not a feminine quality.

- Reject the lie that men are not relational
I hear this lie a lot from men or their wives. "I'm just not very relational." Bologna! Everyone is relational because God created every person a relational being. Men just usually do relationships different then women.
 - Men bond shoulder to shoulder while women tend to bond face to face. (explain)
Men relate typically through activity rather than through conversation.
 - Men are just as relational as women...it just looks different.
- Pursue relational understanding
 - This means we need to understand the relational needs of our wives and kids. If you are going to live with your wife in an understanding way, it means you

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understand she does relationships different than you. It means you choose to meet her relational needs in the way that connects with her heart.

- I know every man can do this. How do I know? (All the hunters out there) I see some men who have studied the behavior of animals more than their own families so they can be successful at hunting. They know how the animal is going to behave in a variety of different conditions and yet have no clue why their spouse acts the way she does.
- In fact, I know some men who can talk to animals more proficiently than to their wives.
- Relational growth must become a pursuit. It's not something that just happens. It must become a priority. WHY?
- God created you as a relational being. It's your design.
- The fulfillment of your deepest need is relational
- The greatest need of your family is relational
- The greatest command from God is relational
- The greatest pain you can experience is relational
- The greatest regret you can have is relational
- The greatest success you can experience is relational
 - This is why for years I have said if we fail relationship, we fail life. How do we pursue relational understanding?
 - Pray for relational wisdom daily (James 1)
 - Humble yourself and learn from others (relational mentor)
 - Move towards relationships not away (stop retreating from relationships)
You can't learn and practice relational skills by avoiding them.

2. Grow in Spiritual Leadership

Eph. 5:23 "For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church..." (NLT)

- God has entrusted to husbands a spiritual leadership role in their families. This has nothing to do with control or superiority. This doesn't mean wives do not have a spiritual responsibility either. BUT, God is going to hold the husbands accountable in a different way. The spiritual climate of your house is on the men.

Eph. 6:4 "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord." (NLT)

Father's have a responsibility to be highly engaged instructing their children in what it looks like to follow Jesus in this life.

So, what does this look like to embrace and grow in a spiritual leadership role?

- Accept it
Men, this is our role. It is a responsibility that has been handed to us by God Himself. It is not something to pass off to our wives.

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- Statistically, if the mom is the driving spiritual influencer in the family, the majority of children do not continue attending church as adults. If the Father is the spiritual influencer, the majority of children continue as adults.
 - Please don't reject this leadership role God has entrusted to you. I know you feel inadequate for the job. BUT, growth begins by accepting the responsibility you have been entrusted with.
- Work with your wife in it
This role has nothing to do with control and everything to do with partnership. The word of God tells us that our wives are equal partners of God's gift of new life. You're not in this alone. We accept this role and fulfill it in partnership with our wives. HOW?
 - Discuss how spiritual leadership is going to look in your family. Come up with a strategy together.
 - Pray together
 - Pray with your kids
 - Bible stories before bed
 - Read devotions together as a couple (Read separately and discuss it)
 - Engage in spiritual discussions (Sunday afternoon is a great time)
 - Serve together in a ministry
 - Make church attendance a priority not if it fits in the schedule.
 - Take our kids to Children's Ministry / Sundays / TNT night 252
 - Let your kids see you invite others to church

Together make spiritual development the culture of your family.

- Model it
For any leadership to be successful, it has to be authentic. It has to be real. Spiritual leadership that is not real actually does more damage than having none at all. Spiritual leadership that is not real is legalistic / religious / it's about rules and control and it will destroy relationships.
 - This is the number one reason our faith does not transfer to the next generation. We never modeled a compelling faith to our children. We instead modeled religion. Did our children see Jesus transform mom and dad?
 - The best thing we give our children spiritually is not bible stories at bed time but a living breathing bible story in front of them daily. Is Jesus real in your home / your marriage / the stress / the crisis / money. Do our kids see us trying to follow Jesus in the messiness of life?
 - Are we modeling that following Jesus is the greatest adventure there is or are we simply modeling a religious ritual?

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- Men, can I challenge you to have a faith that inspires your family. Model something that is undeniable.

3. Grow in Internal Strength

Josh. 1:9 “This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (NLT)

I Cor. 16:13 “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” (NASB)

I want to talk about the issue of strength, but not physical strength. I want to talk about internal strength. I know I touched on this a bit last week but I want to add some additional perspective.

- Strength over your emotions

God created us with emotions but our emotions can't dictate our lives. We either rule our emotions or they will rule us. There are 2 very primary emotions we must have strength over. What are they? Anger and Fear. Why these two?

- These 2 emotions are probably the most prominent in men. They are more than likely the ones that influence men the most. Men are pretty simple creatures emotionally. We are either going to fight or we are going to withdraw.
- Neuroscience refers to this as our fight or flight mechanisms.
 - We've all experienced these emotions. (Driving a car –explain. Someone scares you – explain.
 - If we are not careful, we can be reacting to people out of this fight or flight mechanism inside us. Why is this a big deal?
 - Describe the neuroscience behind fight and flight. (Share)
 - Not being able to develop internal strength to control fight and flight shuts down higher brain functions. When you are fighting with your wife and kids your higher brain functions are no longer in control.
 - Our jobs / stress / conflict / can keep our bodies in a continual state of fight and flight. This is what chronic stress does. It is damaging physically, emotionally and relationally. It impacts higher brain functions. This is why when you're really stressed you can't think clearly.
 - If we do not develop strength over these emotions they will destroy our relationships. Some of you struggle with the fight issue. Your wife and kids see you angry a lot. Some of you struggle with flight. You avoid and retreat from things you need to deal with because of fear. HOW do we grow?
 - Be aware of what is taking place emotionally – You must become aware when your higher brain functions shut down. Anger and fear clouds rational thinking. Be aware of what is taking place in your brain.
 - Think to get out of fight and flight. Thinking changes the chemicals being released in your brain. There is a reason God's word tells us to think on the things above. The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. You must engage your higher brain functions again. Thinking does this.

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- **Illustrate:** Share when someone broke into our house.
 - Talk with God about your emotions – Great way to calm down by the way.
 - Choose a response rather than giving up control to your emotions. Don't respond to others when you are in fight or flight. Calm down and then choose a response.
- Men, if you want greater influence in your family, at work, or even at church you must develop strength over your emotions. (Emotional Maturity) If you want your wife and kids to respect you more, then demonstrate strength over your emotions.

- Strength in your character

What is this? Will you do what is right even when it is not convenient? Will you do what is right even though it may not benefit you? Will you follow God's word even if you lose approval from others? All these issues are character statements. Do your wife and kids see you as a man of godly character?

How do we grow in character? It's all about exposure.

- Exposure to the source of character (Jesus and His word)
We must be transformed. This only happens through exposure. If we are not spending time with Jesus and in His word godly character is impossible.
- Exposure to other men of character
If you're not hanging out with other men who are growing in their character, it makes it pretty tough for you to live it. We do not follow Jesus alone. We need the encouragement of others in order to grow.
- Exposure to the choices of character
We are faced with character decisions every day. Do I yell at the guy on the freeway / do I gossip about my co-worker / do I waste time at work looking at Facebook on company time / Do I serve the needs of my wife and kids or ignore them /
 - When we begin to make more and more choices that reflect godly character, we are growing. When our awareness grows that we are being faced with character decisions, we are moving forward.
 - Some of you are facing character decisions right now. (Work issues / Integrity / Relational / Money / Honesty / Morality / The choices you make are either going to strengthen your character or erode it.
 - Your wife and kids needs you to be a man of character. (Not perfect) Jesus is calling you to be a man of character. What choices do you need to make this week to grow? Make a choice that grows you into a stronger man not a weaker one.

All healthy things grow. Men, one of the greatest gifts you can give to the people around you is to be man who is growing. Don't be stagnant. Choose a lifestyle of growth.

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