

“Becoming a Difference Maker—Father’s Day 2006”

This is a unique Father’s Day for me. Because for the first time I’m not just a father of one child, but this is the first time, I’ve been the father of two! Here’s a picture of my two dear-darling-angels **[PICTURE: Zoe and Abby]**. I’m so proud and honored and blessed to be a Daddy to these two blessing.

But let’s face it, before you have kids of your own, you have no clue as to what it means. Honestly, those of us who have kids, get a secret chuckle, sometimes an outright belly-laugh, when we hear you young couples talk about what you think it will be like to be mommy’s and daddy’s. “Oh I can’t wait to have a baby, they’re so cute, I want 10.” They are cute...at times. But a lot of the times, they’re crying, they’re spitting up, they’re pooping their pants, sometimes all three at once...sometimes all over you. And there’s nothing cute about that!

God made babies cute for a reason, so that cuteness would help young parents overlook and survive all the other stuff that babies do. And, listen, what babies do is nothing compared to what kids do as toddlers, as grade-schoolers, and let’s not even talk about the teen years—that’s when parents wish for those bygone days when the worst was their crying, spitting-up and pooping in their pants.

Parents, and especially fathers, it takes a lot of old-fashioned work to be a dynamic dad or a fantastic father. It really does. “What kind of work does it take?” you ask. It’s something called the identification process. If you’re going to become a great father, you have to work at something called the identification process, and it is a two-fold process. Before we get into that, Dad’s, this is meant to be a guilt-free day for you. Far too often on Father’s Day, dads come to church and get the big guilt trip. “You’re not being good enough, God is counting on you and you’ve blown it, you’ve probably messed up your kids beyond hope, so shame on you! Don’t save up for your kids college fund, save up for their counseling fund, because you’ve really messed them up!” NO! Not anymore, and certainly not here. Today is a day to get jazzed up, juiced up, pumped up, and ready to do a few small things that will help you in big ways to be a great dad. Take what you want from this message today and leave the rest behind guilt-free. Take what you want, leave the rest behind and do not feel guilty about the past. Take a step toward being a better dad today.

So, if we want to be better dads, it helps to identify our children’s needs, and to identify our children’s gifts. It’s the dynamic duo of fatherhood. Identify their needs and identify their gifts. If we can do that consistently over the span of our fatherhood, then our children will truly become people who can rock this world in a unique and powerful way. And listen, it doesn’t matter how young or old your kids are, this stuff applies.

So follow along in your outline and let’s look at all the letters in the word “needs,” because each of these letters represents five felt needs that every child has. I don’t care if the child is 2, 12, or 22. Five felt needs that our kids have that we can get in on.

[SLIDE: “Nurture”] “N” stands for “nurture.” We all have a need to be nurtured. A poll was taken of children and they were asked, “What’s the most important thing your father can do?” They said, “Love me. Show me affection.” I wasn’t really sure about this so I asked my daughter Zoe this question. “Zoe, what’s the most important thing I can do for you?” She said, “Take care of me. Love me. Feed me. Take care of me when I’m sick. Exchange gifts with me at Christmas and birthdays. That’s the most important thing that you do for me, Daddy.”

We have this need for love and tenderness, don’t we? To be nurtured. And children not only long to be nurtured, but they also long to see their fathers love their moms, their spouse. So not only is it important to show love and affection to your kids, but also to your wife. Love your wife.

Janet and I show appropriate affection in front of the girls. We hug, we hold each other, and we kiss. Zoe thinks it’s the grossest thing, but that gives kids security. When you show affection to each other and also to them that is one way to nurture them. One of the most significant places in scripture is when Jesus said, **[SLIDE...]** “**Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.** ³⁵ **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another**” **John 13:34-35, NRSV.**

Another way to nurture kids is to listen to them. A teenager once said, “When I think about my father, I see a giant mouth...but I want to see a giant ear. I want Dad to relax, to chill, and listen to me.” Listen to me. The book of Proverbs says, **[SLIDE...]** “**Let the wise listen and add to their learning**” **(Proverbs 1:5, NIV).**

Fathers, what kind of listeners are you? Now this is supposed to be a guilt-free Father's Day. So don't sit here and feel guilty if you haven't been a good listener. Just be a better one. Picture yourself as big ear, instead of a big mouth! Listen and remember this, if your kid is talking, it's never trivial stuff they're talking about. If words are coming out of their mouths, it's important to them, so, even if it seems trivial to you, even if it seems irrelevant and unimportant in the grand scheme of life, guess what? It's important to them which makes it important to the grand scheme of life. One of the most powerful ways you show that a person is important to you is by listening attentively to what they have to say. So listen with your ears, listen with your eyes, listen with your heart. These are a couple of ways to nurture. There are a lot more, so find them.

[SLIDE: "Encouragement"] The first "E" stands for "encouragement." Kids, no matter their age, have a real need for encouragement. Fathers, this is where we get to be our children's biggest cheerleaders. "Go! Go!" They know when they see Dad he is going to cheer for them. Zoe played soccer for the first time this year and I took our video camera to the games. And the footage I took was terrible. You couldn't hardly see any of the game because I'm so excited about what's going on I forget to point the camera in the direction of the game. Lots of great footage of the grass, the heads of people on the sidelines. Terrible! But I'm proud of that footage because I was so caught up in the game and cheering my kid that keeping the camera pointed in the right direction was not important. Cheering was what was most important. And fathers, sometimes, many times, your children will blow it. They'll fumble the ball. They'll mess up. And when they do, we're still their biggest fans.

Because the world, other kids, some adults, some teachers, life in general is going to tear your kids down. So, dad's, let's be one's who build up. The Bible says time and time again, **[SLIDE...]** **"Encourage one another and build each other up" (1Thessalonians 5:11, NIV)**. Words are so powerful, so powerful. And those little self-esteems that God wants to help us form are so delicate we've got to be careful.

Here's another Zoe story. A couple of weeks ago Zoe is screaming in her room. It's a blood curdling scream—the kind when you hear you know something's really wrong. My adrenaline is pumping, my heart's racing as I sprint to her room. I go through the door and expect to see broken bones and pools of blood...but nothing. I'm like, "What's wrong Zoe, what's wrong!" She's like screaming, "Spider! There's a spider." And she's screaming her head off. I'm like, "Where, where is it?" It's got to be huge...the size of a hub cap. She's pointing. I'm looking. I can't see it, she does and is still pointing. Finally I see it. It's about the size of a thumbtack. Now my first reaction was to say something not so encouraging. Instead, by the grace of God, I held my tongue and went to plan B. I had a little lesson right there for Zoe on how to kill spiders. The proper way to hold the shoe in your hand, and just how many whacks to make just to be sure it's dead. Now she's like a spider-killin' vigilante! We've got to mold kids without breaking their spirits. That's difficult to do, but make sure you have that positive reinforcement.

Ed Young says that the first real mirrors our children look into are the mirrors of our eyes, dads. And when they look into our eyes, if we reflect back looks of affirmation, looks of love, looks of significance, looks that you're worth something, then children will come to that conclusion, "Hey, I'm worth something. Hey, I'm ready to tackle the world!" Nourishment. Nurturing. We want encouragement.

[SLIDE: "Example"] The next "E" stands for "example." Example. We want nurturing, we want encouragement, we also want an example. Kids need good female examples and role models in their lives, and it's also very important that kids have good male role models in their lives. And the Bible says, fathers, that we should lead by example rather than edict. This means that what we do outweighs what we say. What would happen, dads, if you walked up to your children, and said, "Son, daughter, love your mom like I love your mom. Pray like I pray. Lead like I lead. Forgive one another like I forgive. Use the language I use. Love God like I love God." What would happen in your families, fathers, if you took a lead role and began to live it out? A revolution. Example.

[SLIDE: "Discipline"] "D" stands for "discipline." We've got nurture. We've got encouragement. We've got example. Now the "D" word, discipline, and we don't want to talk about it, but it's a need in our kids. You're saying, "What? That's a felt need?" Yes, we have a need for discipline. We want it. We're designed to

live with boundaries. We really are, and if we don't have boundaries, children will push and push and push because the need boundaries. Boundaries give them a sense of safety and love. They want to find a wall, they want to find a line, so mom and dad will say, "That's enough. Stay within these boundaries." Do that.

Every child I know at one time or another sits there in his or her playpen. They cross their arms defiantly, and they look from side to side; and they say, "Hey, I'm going to take over this joint!" Moms, dads, you'd better be ready.

We need to discipline, though, in love. Think about our heavenly Father. The Bible says He disciplines us for our good. It says, **[SLIDE...]** "The Lord disciplines those he loves...Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:5-11, NIV).

We've got to have discipline. And this is where consistency is so important. You draw boundaries that are fair and you let your kids know that there are consequences for crossing those lines. And then, and this is key, you stick to the consequences. Nothing undermines a family, a relationship, faster than saying, "If you do this, then I will do this" and not sticking to it.

Here's what the Bible says concerning discipline, Ephesians 6:4. It says, **[SLIDE...]** "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, NRSV). Discipline and instruction of the Lord.

God's telling us in his word that fathers are instruments of discipline, that God uses fathers as tools to form daughters and sons into God's image. So, dads, think about it. What an important role! We are tools in God's toolbox, and God will use fathers to chip away the excess, the things that keep us from really being the kind of person God wants us to be.

[SLIDE: "Spirituality"] "S" stands for "spirituality." We have a need for a spiritual leader. We really do. And dads, God wants to use you to model, to teach, to mark your children in the most important way possible, which is to mark them with Christ. Again, this is a guilt-free Father's Day, so if you haven't taken this seriously, don't feel guilty today, instead, decide. Decide to grow in your faith so that you can help your kids grow in theirs. Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, just let your kids see you on that journey to get to know the God who made you, to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, to get to know him personally. The fact is, Dads, your kids have spiritual needs, and they are going to look to you to help them meet those needs, so choose to be on your own spiritual journey so that you have something to offer them.

These are 5 felt needs kids have.

The second part of the identification process: We have to identify our children's gifts. G-I-F-T-S, and those letters mean something, too. **[SLIDE: "God-given"]** "G" stands for "God-given." When you see your children, dads, think about a **[PICTURE: wrapped present]** present from God. Think about a giant card that says "To Dad, From God". Kids are given to us by God and God's using us as instruments to mold and shape children. He also uses us to call forth their uniqueness, their gifts. God-given—you've got to remember that, especially in those days when our children are having trouble and we're maybe in an argument. Stop and say, "Lord, I know he or she is God-given, but give me the strength."

[SLIDE: "Investment"] "I" represents the word "investment." If I am going to draw forth the uniqueness, the gifts of my children, I've got to invest large blocks of time in their lives. I have to. I've got to invest my life. I've got to invest energy. We'll always have many things that will court us to try and invest in them, but we can't let any of those things keep us from investing in our kids. Let me tell you a little something about this investment. The payoffs will occur later in life, but the payoff and the windfall are coming if you're serious about this.

Quite a few years ago I took part in a wedding of the daughter of two very good friends. The Bride and Groom came from super families. These families were not perfect, just families who try to live for the Lord Jesus Christ; and I loved the look in the father's eyes as he gave away the bride, his daughter. I loved the look in the eyes of the father of the groom. You could see the tears, the emotion. But let me tell you what else you could see. "What an investment! What a payback! What a windfall!" Why? Because they saw all the years,

all the sacrifice, all the energy, all the effort, and they've seen now how God has used them to mold them and make them into great people; and they're a great couple. Why? Partly because they had two dynamic dads. Who invested in them.

[SLIDE: "Focus"] The "F" in GIFT stands for "focus." One of my favorite verses of Scripture, Proverbs 22:6, reads this way. It says, **[SLIDE...]"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn from it"(Proverbs 22:6).** See the word "train"? That's the word "focus."

It's really chic and vogue to have a personal trainer. All the beautiful people in Hollywood have personal trainers. You can get a personal trainer here in Joplin. Personal trainers take time with an individual. They will give them the workout—weights, aerobics, diet—and they are focused on the individual. They have your best interest in mind.

Dads, here's the picture. We train our children, we are focused on them, we build things in them, and we train them not the way we think they should go, but the way God has wired them up. You see, God has given a unique bend to every child, and dads, where we have a tough time is this. Let's say we're into sports and junior is into piano. Oftentimes, we'll say, "Get off the piano bench and get out here on the field and let's throw some passes, okay?" when he wants to play at the piano. That's a recipe for resentment. Instead, discover how God has bent them. If you're wondering about it, pray. God will show you their unique personalities and gifts. Train them and help them along the way as you cheer for them, as you focus on them.

[SLIDE: "Time"] "T" in GIFT stands for "time." I'm not talking about quality time. That's a phrase coined after the classic book, *The One-Minute Manager*. I'm talking about large quantities of time. Because the best time spent with my children happens when you're just hanging out. With Zoe, that's when the conversations happen, the experiences unfold, the ideas come popping up, the memories are made, the laughter spills out, the bonds are strengthened. You can't orchestrate that, you just have to be there when it happens and that takes more than quality time, it takes quantities of time.

[SLIDE: "Significance"] The final letter, "S," in GIFTS stands for "significance." If you understand that kids are God-given, you put the investment in their gifts. You focus, you give the time, then the significance factor will happen. They will feel significant, you will see your significance, and it will work. Then you'll look back on your lives, dads, and you'll get into this identification process concerning the needs, concerning the gifts, and great and wonderful things begin to happen. You are being used by God. Think about it. Apply it because it's tough. It takes a lot of work.

One final word of encouragement dads: God has chosen you. And I don't mean that in some esoteric way. Jesus has called you and he believes in you and he believes that you can actually be like him. When we look at Jesus in the Bible he occasionally gets frustrated with his disciples, but why? Because they're incapable? No, because of how capable they are. He believes in them. And it isn't their failure that's the problem; it's their greatness. They don't realize what they're capable of. And the same is true of you.

You see, God has an incredibly high view of people. God believes that people are capable of amazing things; that you are capable of amazing things. Jesus believes in you. God has faith in you. Jesus even said this to his disciples and through them to you, **[SLIDE...]"You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16NIV).**

Yes you're going to fail at times, but God isn't expecting you to beat yourself up over all the things you're not doing or the things you're doing poorly; the issue is you and me learning who the person is that God keeps insisting you already are! Shame has no place whatsoever in the Christian experience. It goes against all that Jesus is for.

So if you are a Christian father let go of the shame and guilt. Somewhere in you is the you you were made to be. Christians, Christian fathers, are people learning who they are in Christ—forgiven, loved, powerful, period. We are simply growing into our new identity.

Fathers, God wants to use you in a dynamic way, Mothers too, all people in fact. Trust that God really does believe in you already, now live into being the person he already knows you are. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want you to hear one more word of encouragement through song. It's simply called *Fathers*...

I thank Rev. Ed Young, lead pastor of Fellowship Church, for his insight and resources for this message. I also thank Rob Bell for his amazing book Velvet Elvis; Repainting the Christian Faith, for his insights on who we are and who we can become.