

# “Warrior Dads”

Ephesians 5:25-30, 6:4, 10-17 <sup>1</sup>

Pastor James Ryle told this story at a Promise Keepers event some years ago: “My Dad was sent to prison when I was two years old. At the age of seven, I was sent to an orphanage. When I was nineteen, I had a car wreck that killed one of my friends. I sold drugs to pay for the legal fees related to that accident, was arrested, and ended up in prison.

“While I was in prison, I came to know Jesus as my Savior, and years later, God called me into the ministry. Eventually, I found my Dad, and we got together in order to be reconciled with each other. When our conversation turned to our experiences in prison, my Dad asked me what prison I’d been in. When I told him, Dad said, with some shock, ‘I helped to build that prison.’ We both realized with sadness that I had spent many years of my life in a prison that my father built.”<sup>2</sup>

As Stephen Freed’s Dad slowly deteriorated from a painful and incurable disease, Stephen asked his fifteen year-old daughter, “Elizabeth, what will you do if I end up like Granddaddy someday?”

Elizabeth thought for a moment before she answered, “I don’t know, Dad . . . but I’m watching you to find out.”<sup>3</sup>

Guys, these two stories highlight the fact that how we live our lives today is building either a home or a prison in which our children will spend significant portions of their lives. They’re watching us to learn how to live and to learn what’s really important in life, and what they learn will either bind them or set them free.

On this Father’s Day morning, I want to suggest two ways in which we can build well for our kids. The first thing we can do is to love their mother; the second is to become a Spiritual Warrior.

**Love Their Mother.** One of the first things I remember noticing in the kitchen at Jill’s house when we were dating was a sign that her Dad had hung on the wall behind his chair at the table. The sign said, “The best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.”

The first text we read this morning has to do with “loving their mother.” Hear those words again: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself*” (Ephesians 5:25-28).

These words are generally quoted with the intent to “put women in their place,” requiring them to submit to their husbands, and there is a submission involved here, but it is a mutual submission. Husbands and wives are told to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21), and we husbands conveniently overlook the fact that in this passage, only 56 words give instructions to wives, but 175 words give instructions to us. That’s three-to-one.

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on June 17, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> James Ryle, *Leadership*, vol. 16, no. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Freed, *Christian Reader*, vol. 35, no. 2.

Guys, I think Paul may actually have viewed us as slow learners, so he made his point in several ways. Paul told us to love and cherish our wives in the same way that Jesus loves his Bride, the Church. That means doing everything we can to nurture and to encourage our soul mate toward the very character of Jesus himself.

Jill and I have had a quotation from my friend, Ernie White, on our refrigerator for years that makes this very point: “Love is the overwhelming desire and the persistent effort of two people to create for each other the conditions in which each may become the person God intended each to be.”

**Become a Spiritual Warrior.** There’s a lot more to be said about loving our wives, but my primary focus this morning is going to be on the second way we can build strong lives for our children, and that is to become a Spiritual Warrior. While we don’t often use the term “warrior” in church, the Bible tells us that “*The LORD is a warrior; the LORD [Yahweh] is his name!*” (Exodus 15:3); and the Bible has quite a bit to say about warriors.<sup>4</sup>

There are several things about being warriors I want us to consider this morning. You’ve probably heard of the Greek word, *paraclete* (παρακλητος). The word is familiar to Christians because it’s the word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16), and in that context it means “advocate,” “comforter,” or “counselor.”

But παρακλητος was also a warrior’s word. Greek soldiers of that day went into battle in pairs, like today’s “battle buddies,” so that when the enemy attacked, the two men could draw together back-to-back, covering each other’s blind side. They literally “had each other’s back,” as we say today. The word for this battle buddy was παρακλητος.<sup>5</sup> In fact, one of the primary companies that supplies battle armor for our soldiers today is [www.paracletearmor.com](http://www.paracletearmor.com).

Guys, like those paracletes, those battle buddies, you and I have the privilege and the responsibility of guarding each other’s lives, physically, morally, emotionally, and spiritually; but on Father’s Day, we surely need to focus our consideration on the protection of our families with which God charges us. That protection takes many forms.

The most common form of family protection today is the provision of food, clothing, and shelter. Such protection includes making a living in some fashion as well as ensuring your family’s safety and well-being through education, good medical and dental care, and appropriate kinds of property, health, and life insurance. Long ago, of course, protection of frontier families also required protection against hostile humans and wild animals, which required skill in the use of a hunting rifle.

I haven’t learned how it is here, yet, but a number of the men in our congregation in Bristol were hunters, and I also like to shoot, though I’m not much on hunting. But whether or not you’re fond of guns, bullets, and gunpowder, I suggest to you that every one of us Dads needs to be a warrior whose primary life focus is on loving our wives and protecting our children . . . in ways about which you may not have thought very much.

Colossians 3:5 tells us to “*put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*” The phrase “put to death” is something warriors and frontiersmen do. It occurs 103 times in the Bible, sometimes talking about people who are judged and executed for their sin, and sometimes talking about disciplines of personal holiness, as Paul was doing in Colossians. “Putting something to death” is just as violent as it sounds.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see 2 Samuel 23:8-39.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Dalbey, “Healing the Masculine Soul,” *Leadership*, vol. 15, no. 2.

We city dwellers have become far removed from the death that is always required if we are to eat meat. I've told some of you about Elkana and David's slaughter of a goat in our back yard in Bristol with my hunting knife. That was as humane a "putting to death" as can be imagined with a knife, but it was still violent.

Guys, you and I need to be as intentional in putting to death the sinful, earthly things that lurk within us as David and Elkana were in killing that goat. The Bible tells us that *"each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death"* (James 1:14-15).

Paul's warning in Colossians 3:5 has to do with the two main areas in which most men struggle—the purity of our thought life and the extent to which we allow material things to become more important than God intends for them to be. Warrior Dads are men who are willing to take decisive action to put to death, with God's help, the evil desires that lead us into sin.

That's what Jesus was talking about when He said, *"If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell"* (Matthew 5:29-30). Jesus wasn't talking about literal actions, but He was making a strong point about "putting to death" evil desires that attack us within.

Any warrior has to fight and win the internal battles first. My friend, Louis Slate, is a retired Master Chief Navy Seal. Louis once let me read a huge book about the training of Navy Seals, and one of the central points of that unbelievably torturous training is to develop warriors who win the internal battles with self, motivation, fear, and pain before they turn their attention to enemies without.

But of course there are enemies without as well as enemies within. There are many such enemies ranged against us. They're extremely dangerous, and most of them wear camouflage. While ordinary wars are sometimes won on epic fields of battle, the most important battles are often waged quietly, by infiltrating the enemy's camp with spies and double-agents who deceive the enemy warriors about the true nature of the threat. It's like that in the spiritual life, too.

There's an interesting verse in the Song of Songs, of all places, that offers important insight to spiritual warriors. The verse is Song of Songs 2:15 – *"Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom."* I'll bet you're not familiar with that verse, but it's actually quite important.

Great enterprises almost always start small. A friend once sent me an email that had pictures of unbelievable bridges across great chasms in China. Such impassable chasms are often bridged by first shooting thin lines across to which thicker lines are later attached, then thicker ones still, until the first heavy cable goes across. God's great invasion of Satan's territory here on earth began long ago with a baby in a manger. And the *"sin that so easily entangles"* starts small, too (Hebrews 12:1). That's why we begin with the battle within.

But external enemies also start small. That's what Solomon was talking about when he urged the catching of all those *"little foxes"* before they *"ruin the vineyards."* Solomon was talking specifically about all the little things that begin to accumulate in a marriage to poison the love between husband and wife, things that warriors have the courage to "put to death"

before their damage is done. There's much that could be said on that subject, but I want to focus our thought today on our children.

Guys, there are many "little foxes" at work in our world and in our homes that are "ruining the vineyard" of God's harvest in our children's lives. Most of them don't look particularly dangerous, but they are.

One of the main foxes is our own busyness. How much time do you actually spend in substantial conversation with your children? Do you know who their friends are? Do you know what they're currently interested in? What they're currently afraid of? What they're currently hoping for?

Studies have shown again and again that the level of a Dad's involvement in the lives of his children is one of the strongest predictors of how safe those children will be from the attacks of the enemy in the years to come. It is far more important for your children's spiritual welfare that you know such things as these about their hearts and that you protect their hearts from "all the little foxes" that nip at and pursue them every day than that you provide them with big houses, nice cars, and other material advantages. The truth is that those material things actually have negative correlations with the spiritual well-being of your kids.

And how about the spiritual anchors of your children's lives? As important and as wonderful as a mother's love is, studies repeatedly show that it is the father's influence that has the most effect—for good or for evil—on children's relationship with God. And once again, the place to begin is in your own heart.

My friend, have you sworn your heart's allegiance to Heaven's One True King, as the knights of old swore their allegiance to their earthly kings? Does your daily life reflect the priority of that allegiance? When you leave home in the morning, are you wearing God's spiritual armor for the spiritual battles of the day? Do your toys, your hobbies, and your business distract you from the service of your King, or is your life focused on things that have eternal value? Your kids and your wife know the answers to those questions. Do you?

One of the great dangers in our lives as men and as fathers is of succeeding at things that don't really matter in the end. If you and I are not teaching our children that nothing else is as important as making Jesus the Captain of our lives, our calendars, and our resources, then our lives are actually leading our children and our grandchildren away from God, and we will have to give account for that failure.

As just one example, many Christian Dads have allowed athletic and similar events to co-opt their families' observance of the Lord's Day and to derail the spiritual nurture of their children. Participation in sports has great value in teaching discipline, teamwork, fitness, sportsmanship, and many other good character qualities. But those activities frequently take priority in our family schedules, pushing out any care for the spiritual lives of our children.

There would be no athletic contests on the Lord's Day, and no practices either, if Christian Dads banded together to stand against them. The foxes really are "in the henhouse," and it is our children that they're eating. As God said to Ezekiel long ago, "*I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one*" (Ezekiel 22:30).

The Bible says, "*Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them*" (Psalm 127:5). Are the arrows in your quiver

sharp and straight and strong, or have they been crafted from the soft, warped wood of the world?



I thought about passing out .22 caliber bullets to all the Dads this morning as a symbol of our responsibility to be Warrior Dads who put to death all the foxes that attack our children and our families, but I decided those bullets would be too small. Warrior Dads don't need plinking bullets. They need hunting bullets like this one. Guys, you and I need to get serious about doing battle to create a world in which God's will really is done on earth "as it is in heaven."

And so, on this Father's Day morning, I challenge you to give yourself with renewed courage and conviction to raising heaven-bound kids in a hell-bent world. I challenge you to *"take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs. Mark out a straight path for your feet [and for your heart]. Then those who follow you, though they are weak and lame, will not stumble and fall but will become strong"* (Hebrews 12:12-13, NLT).

I challenge you to build a spiritual home for your children, not a spiritual prison. I challenge you to become a Warrior Dad.



# I AM A WARRIOR.

**I AM A WARRIOR** in Heaven's Army, and I have sworn allegiance to the Risen Christ, who is Lord of all lords and King of all kings.

I have put on all of God's armor so that I can stand firm against every strategy of the devil, and I will stand my ground, wearing the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.

I carry the shield of faith to protect my heart from hostile fire. I wear salvation as my helmet, and I wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. My boots bear God's peace so that I am fully prepared for battle.

**I AM A WARRIOR.** While I may give my life for my King, I will not get out, sell out, be talked out or pushed out. I will do whatever my King requires of me. Where He needs me, I will go. Whatever I know to be His will, I will do. If my King wants to meet a need through my life, I am His servant.

**I AM A WARRIOR.** I do not need to be pampered, petted, primed, pumped up, picked up, or pepped up. No one has to call me, remind me, entice me, or lure me. No gimmicks or bonuses are required to get me to serve my King, whom I gladly follow into battle.

**I AM A WARRIOR.** I am at my duty station, saluting my King, obeying His orders, and advancing His Kingdom. No fear will stop me. No discouragement will turn me from my duty. The price of obedience will never cause me to abandon my post.

**I AM A WARRIOR.** I can do all things through Christ, who has promised to supply all my needs, and in Him my victory is forever sure. Money cannot buy me. Devils cannot defeat me. Disappointment cannot disillusion me. Weather cannot weary me. Sickness cannot stop me.

**I AM A WARRIOR.** I will never surrender to the Enemy, and I will never turn back. I am a warrior, marching heavenward, taking captivity captive as I go!

**I AM A WARRIOR** whom even death cannot destroy, for when my King calls me at last from the field of battle, He will bring me back again to rule this world with Him forever.

**HERE I STAND!** I can do no other. May God help me keep my word.

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