

A Charge to Fathers

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[0 : 00] Deuteronomy 6, verse 1 to 9. Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, That you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it.

That you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son, and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Ephesians 6, verse 4.

[1 : 45] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The word of the Lord.

Thanks for reading for us this morning. Let me join Clarence in wishing all of the fathers a very happy Father's Day today. As Clarence mentioned, there are some gifts for fathers, but there's a particular gift that is for more than fathers, and it's a family worship Bible guide.

And the purpose of this little guide is to help fathers in particular, or heads of households, to lead their families in God's word.

And if you were to ask me if there was a single thing that we can do in this nation to try to turn it in another direction, I would say we need to restore altars in families.

If I just had to choose one thing, that would be the thing. That if we can get our families restored around a family altar, praying to God, opening his word, I believe it will permeate throughout our society.

[3 : 17] But I just want to read from the cover, the back cover of the book, just to give some idea what the book is about. And this is what... I need my glasses to see you, but not to read.

This is what the authors write in commending the book. Leading and nurturing your family as you seek to glorify God and encourage spiritual growth in your home is both God's command and your privilege.

One of the best and most effective ways to do this is through intentional, worshipful, daily family devotions, where the truths of God's life-changing word are openly discussed chapter by chapter, hand in hand with your Bible, this family worship guide, this family worship Bible guide presents rich devotional thoughts on all 1,181 chapters in the Bible, including searching questions to promote conversation.

To help you with this responsibility, use this resource every day alongside scripture to read each chapter's major takeaways aloud and then discuss them with your family.

With the Holy Spirit's blessing, this book will transform you and your family. And so we want to commend this book and not just commend it, but to offer this book to the heads of all households.

[4 : 54] So if you are a married man, head of your household, or a single mother who heads a household, a copy of this book is for you and I encourage you to use it and allow it to help you with this task, this responsibility and privilege of leading your family.

So a copy of this for all the heads of households. Some years ago, I came across this statement that was written on an advertisement advertising a family, a Father's Day event, is what it said.

Mother's Day is always a big thing. And rightfully so. Where would our world be without faithful moms? But then Father's Day for many is a big nothing.

And I think for obvious reasons, fathers are not celebrated and should not be celebrated to the same extent that mothers are. Hopefully the reasons are obvious for you.

If they're not obvious, talk to me after church and I'll point them out to you. But I believe that fathers, generally speaking, are wrongly marginalized and they're not sufficiently celebrated.

[6 : 20] I think this is certainly true in this nation. I believe that an honest assessment of the problems that we face in the church and in our nation will show that they result from problems that flow from the homes and fathers are both primarily the cause of these problems and the keys to fixing them.

When Israel was backslidden, unfaithful to God, and steeped in idolatry, the Lord didn't commission a study or appoint a committee to find a solution.

Instead, he spoke a word to the nation. And the word that he spoke, he spoke in the very last book of the Old Testament.

In the book of Malachi, he spoke and said that he would send a prophet. He would send a prophet who would turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the hearts of children back to their fathers.

This is God's solution. This is God's solution for a backslidden nation that was steeped in idolatry. And for 400 years, some 400 years, those words comprised the only word, the last word that Israel heard from the Lord.

[7 : 49] I think you would agree with me, most of you who are old enough to remember, that generally speaking, our nation is far away from the place where we were in terms of fearing God and serving God when we were established as a nation in 1973.

I think the fear of the Lord and serving the Lord have significantly decreased. And I sincerely believe that the solution to that lack of godliness, that lack of serving the Lord, is the same solution that the Lord gave to the nation of Israel.

that it is the hearts of fathers turning to their children and the hearts of children turning to their fathers. And I believe it's in the context of knowing the Lord and out of that relationship with the Lord, relating to our children and then directing our children to do the same.

And I believe that this is especially critical for our children in the 10 years. I think it is especially important for the hearts of fathers to be turned to their children and the hearts of children to be turned to their fathers in their 10 years.

And the reason I say this is because generally when children are young they're closely supervised by parents. But almost without fail there seems to be a pattern that when children are maturing when they're getting into the 10 years and a lot of fathers in particular tend to take their hands off and kind of allow them just to go.

[9 : 41] They draw back. And this is regrettable because it is in those 10 years when peer pressure is greatest and teens especially need the guidance of their parents and their father in particular.

It's when teens begin to face a lot of worldly temptations engaging in premarital sex drug use alcohol use and the lure of a world that lies about the so-called fun life while withholding the truth about the so-called fun life that ends with shipwrecked lives.

The young person who becomes addicted to drugs or alcohol the young girl who gets pregnant and has to either postpone or altogether cancel her future plans for her life.

The young man who finds himself as a young father and who has to now shoulder responsibilities that he's not really prepared for. And the list goes on in the many ways that young lives are shipwrecked.

And I know I'm not saying things that are foreign to you. I think all of us could recall and bring to mind individuals who've been so affected. But during the teen years our children are beginning to think of big ideas and big choices.

[11 : 14] The career they may want to pursue. Some are thinking about relationships, boyfriends and girlfriends and dating. And in these big decisions children need their fathers to guide them.

And yet it's the time when a lot of fathers are exiting and allowing the children to make these decisions and they kind of hope and pray that they will make the right decision.

Brothers and sisters, by the grace of God, we don't want that to be our experience here at Kingdom Light. We'll be one in status. We want fathers. who will sit in the gates of their children's lives and guide them and direct them and let them benefit from the experiences they have had and their knowledge of the Lord and point them in the way so that they don't have to make the mistakes that many of us have made.

and as another expression of our broken world while I'm speaking primarily to fathers, there are a lot of single mothers who need to listen as well because they're doing double duty.

There's not a father present who can guide and direct and do these things and so though I speak primarily to the fathers, I also speak to single mothers who are heading households.

[12 : 35] And so this morning I want us to hear this charge that the Lord gives to the nation of Israel out of Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 1 to 9.

But first let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we are grateful to you for bringing us together this morning. Lord, thank you that in your wise providence you have ordained that we should come into the world with fathers and mothers and Lord, today as we focus on fathers and we celebrate them for all that they do, Lord, would you speak to the hearts of fathers, would you speak to the hearts of children who still are their fathers.

And Lord, would you help us all to respond to your word as you would have us to. Lord, I especially pray this morning for single mothers who do double duty.

Would you give them much grace and assure them that you are a father to the fatherless. We ask that you would do this in Jesus' name. Amen. So the context for the book of Deuteronomy is that the nation of Israel had been redeemed out of Egypt.

They had wandered around the desert for some 40 years so that the unfaithful generation would die out before they entered into the promised land. That was God's plan.

[14 : 03] He wanted them to die in the wilderness. And what Moses did in the book of Deuteronomy was he repeated the law for them. Deuteronomy is the repetition of the law. And what we have is the nation of Israel standing on the doorsteps, as it were, of the promised land and the having the law repeated to them.

So that's the context of Deuteronomy chapter 6. It's kind of like a review before the test. And one of the important things I think we need to see before we delve into the text is that these words had a general audience.

It was all of Israel, but they had a primary audience. Very much like this morning. There's a general audience to the message, but there's a primary audience as well. And what we see is that the general audience was all of Israel.

Two times in verses 3 and 4, we see, Hear, O Israel. Hear, O Israel. But primarily, the Lord was addressing the fathers in Israel. It's clear to see that as we work through the text.

For example, in verse 2, the Lord refers to you, your son, and your son's son. He doesn't say you and your sons and daughters or you and your children.

[15 : 28] He says you and your sons and your sons' sons. He's addressing fathers in a multi-generational way. The focus is on fathers and their sons who were just expected to be future fathers.

And so as we bear this in mind, here's what I believe these verses convey. The enduring truth of these nine verses in Deuteronomy 6 convey this truth.

God calls fathers to love him wholeheartedly and raise their children to do the same. That's what God calls fathers to do.

Love him wholeheartedly and then raise their children to do the same. That's God's enduring word that doesn't change over the generations.

This is the duty of fathers. Now this sounds very simple, but it's really profound when you think about it, what the Lord says to them.

[16 : 37] They are getting ready to go into the promised land land. And what God does is God hinges blessing and prosperity in the promised land on fathers loving him with their whole hearts and teaching children to do the same.

He says, if you do this, you will prosper in the land, you will be blessed in the land, if you're simply faithful to do what I say.

that's simple, but it's very profound that the Lord would hinge the entire success of this nation he's going to establish, this new nation he's going to establish.

He's saying, this is the foundation for your blessing. Love me wholeheartedly, teach your children to do the same. Now as we bear this in mind, what I want to do this morning for the remainder of our time, and I'm going to try to be brief this morning, I want to share three responsibilities from this passage that fathers are primarily called to.

Again, fathers primarily doesn't mean that mothers don't do anything, but primarily this is what God calls fathers to do. The first responsibility that fathers are called to is seen in verses 4 and 5, and it is this, love God wholeheartedly, love God wholeheartedly.

[18 : 09] Now when we read these words in verses 4 and 5 in light of verses 1 through 3, they almost appear to be inconsistent or illogical.

Notice again what Moses says in verses 1 to 3. Now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his commandments and all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you in a land flowing with milk and honey.

It seems to me that after you read verses 1 to 3, you would expect a list of things to do and a list of things not to do. It says, Hear, Israel, keep my commandments, keep my statutes, and so you would think he's going to list some things, but he doesn't do that.

What we find instead in verses 4 and 5 is God addresses the heart. He addresses the heart. That's where he starts. In verses 4 and 5, these verses have come to be known as the Shema because the Hebrew word Shema is the first word in the sentence and it means hear, it means listen.

[20 : 04] It's a confession that God is one. It's a confession that he is the only true God and logically since he is the only true God, the heart of his people should be fully devoted to him and not be like the other nations who had multiple gods and they served all kinds of different gods.

So God doesn't begin with external duties, do this and don't do that. He begins with the heart. During his earthly ministry Jesus was asked by someone, a Pharisee, what's the greatest commandment in the law?

And Jesus gave an answer, it's found in Matthew chapter 22 and verses 37 and 38. This is what Jesus said. And he said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment. Now it's important to note that Jesus in answering him was reciting Deuteronomy 6, 5.

And I think we should learn from Jesus in how he answers this man by not appealing to the Ten Commandments.

[21 : 33] Jesus doesn't list any of the Ten Commandments. They had already been given almost 40 years prior. But when he was confronted, what is the greatest commandment?

He doesn't go, don't make graven idols and don't commit adultery and don't lie and don't steal and don't covet. No, he says, you're to love the Lord your God with all your heart.

And then he goes on, Jesus goes on in verses 39 and 40 and he explains why this is. Why this is the greatest commandment. He goes on, he says, and the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. In the second commandment, Jesus again doesn't quote one of the Ten.

He quotes Leviticus 19 verse 18. Jesus says that these two great commandments, our duties towards God and our fellow man are heart issues.

[22 : 47] They begin in our hearts. And so this first responsibility of fathers is to obey the first and great commandment, to love God with your entire being.

And if you think about it, this is the only logical response to the only God, the supreme God, that we give him nothing less, that we give him a wholehearted devotion.

And again, you can see why Jesus doesn't, why God does not go at duties, because if our whole heart is devoted to God, it will be reflected in how we live.

It will be reflected in things that we do. It will flow from within us on the outside of us. And let me just see if I can explain a little bit what I mean by that and how that works.

I think all of us know that those of us who are married, we have duties to our spouses. They're responsibilities that we have towards them.

[24 : 05] love. And so I could be very dutiful to Alexene. I could do all the things that I'm called to do as a father. But I can do them without my heart being involved in them.

And one of the results with that would be I would do it begrudgingly. I would do it in a matter-of-fact kind of way. I would do it with an absence of joy.

But if I just loved her, if I truly was loving her from my heart, the love in my heart being expressed towards her, I would do those particular things.

And they would be a delight to do. They would be a joy to do. They would be a natural thing to do because they flow out of my heart. And this is what the Lord was seeking from fathers in Israel.

This is what the Lord is seeking from all of us, that we would give him our hearts, that our hearts be devoted to him, and out of that devotion, we would live lives that are consistent with what he has called us to be and to do.

[25 : 15] So let me ask you this morning, as you think of this great commandment fathers, as we think of this great commandment, are we loving God with our whole hearts, as best we know?

How are we doing? Are we making even an effort to actually do that? As we reflect, as we think about our hearts, where are our passions?

Where are the things that make our heart beat? Are they the things of God or are they other things, other pursuits, desires?

The reality is this morning that only those of us who don't truly know our own hearts or who are just outrightly dishonest would say, I am loving God with my whole heart.

The truth is that all of us have fallen short, all of us are falling short, and in fact, with even our best efforts, we will all fall short from this standard that God has called us to.

[26 : 35] And yet he doesn't lower it for us. Even though we have fallen short and we will fall short from loving God with our whole hearts, he doesn't lower the standard for us.

The standard remains the same. same. But you know, one of the best ways to be motivated to love another person is to consider that person's love towards you, that person's love for you.

And one of the ways we can grow in our love for the Lord is considering his great love for us. And this is what he was doing with the nation of Israel. He was saying to them, I have brought you, out of the land of bondage, I have brought you out of slavery, and in light of that, this is how I'm calling you to live a life of devotion to me.

And he was calling them to recount what he had done for them. If you jump ahead and look at verse 20 in Deuteronomy 6, the Lord says, starting in verse 20, when your son asks you in time to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God has commanded you, then you shall say to your son, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and the Lord showed signs and wonders and great and grievous, great and grievous against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household before our eyes.

And he brought us out from there that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive as we are this day, and it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God as he has commanded us.

[28 : 52] God anticipated that as fathers lived faithful lives, their sons would ask obvious questions. Why do we do these things? He said, and then when they do, you remind them of what I have done for the people of Israel, and this is why you are to live in the way that you do.

And for us, brothers and sisters, when hopefully our children will be asking us these kinds of questions, we would then say to them, this is what God has done for us. And he did it at a place called Calvary, where he sent his son, when we were lost, when we were weak, when we were without strength, when we could do nothing for ourselves, he sent Jesus Christ to live a life that none of us could live, to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law, and then to go to the cross in our place and die in our stead, that we might be forgiven of our sins and reconciled to God.

And it's in light of that that we do these things, that we serve the Lord with wholehearted devotion. When we are questioned by sons and daughters about why we live the way that we do, we must point them to the grand reason of redemption that God has shown to us through Jesus Christ.

So first, God primarily calls fathers to love him wholeheartedly, and then second, we see in this passage that God primarily calls fathers to meditate on his word consistently.

Love him wholeheartedly, meditate on his word consistently. Look at verse 6, Deuteronomy 6, verse 6. These words I command you today shall be on your heart.

[30 : 50] It's a call to love God's word and to have it on our heart. I think we all know that the things that are near and dear to us are near and dear to our hearts.

The things we treasure, the things that are valued of us, they find a place in our heart, they find a place of affection. And so this next instruction is for fathers to teach God's word to their children, but it starts in their own hearts.

It starts with fathers themselves having God's word in their hearts, treasuring it, knowing that wherever our hearts are, wherever our treasure is, our hearts will be there also.

Now here's what we know from what's recorded in scripture. Based on Israel's experience, fathers did not live up to this responsibility.

The fathers in Israel, they fell short. Not only did they not love God's word as he called them to, but in some instances they flatly and outrightly disobeyed and rebelled against God's word.

[32 : 12] And the result was they were returned into captivity. Instead of being established in the land, they were exiled from the land. They were expelled from the land. And even when they were restored to the land, they continued to rebel against the Lord.

And I think it's fair to say that when we consider the situation in our nation, we would have to acknowledge that so much of the result that we have is because fathers have fallen short.

We have not lived up to what God has called us to do and to be. We have rebelled and we have flatly disobeyed parts of God's word.

And sadly, even in the sight of our children, who are able to watch our actions, watch our attitude, and even watch how we relate or don't relate to God's word.

So I'm going to ask you this morning, what's your attitude to this second responsibility to be meditating upon God's word consistently?

[33 : 31] contemplating it, thinking about it. Do you make a practice of availing yourself of the weekly scriptures that we memorize as a church?

Making some effort. I know sometimes our days and weeks can get the better part of us, but is there some degree, some mark, some evidence that you're engaged in this, trying to memorize God's word, trying to hide it in your heart, that will be upon your heart, that you're able to impart it to your children?

What is your heart really on? Is your heart on politics, or sports, or work, and business, or other kinds of endeavors? And fathers, this is not going to just happen by osmosis.

This is not just going to be dropped upon us. We must make grace motivated effort to hide God's word in our hearts, to have God's word on our hearts.

We must do things like adopting a Bible reading plan that can help us to regularly be in God's word, in a very consistent way.

[34 : 57] We should be guarding our hearts and minds against things that can clutter our minds and can dull our hearts and turn us away from loving and serving the Lord.

We need to be discerning what we watch, what we listen to. Sometimes we need to be intentioned to turn off the radio, turn off the television, tune out social media, and turn to God's word.

This is the only way that we are going to cultivate a heart that is meditating on God's word, that God's word is near to us, that we grow in our affection for God's word, that our appetites are shaped for God's word, and all that it pertains to.

So Father, God calls us to love him wholeheartedly, he calls us to meditate on his word consistently, and third and finally, he calls us to teach our children diligently, teach our children diligently.

look again at what he says in verses seven to nine, you should teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise, you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes, you shall write them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

[36 : 45] Fathers, we are called to seize every moment, every moment possible, to teach God's word to our children, and logically, this starts with the first and greatest commandment, to love God with our whole hearts, to love him with our entire beings, with our entire lives.

We're called to do it all the time. We're called to do it when we sit in the house, when we are on the outside of the house, when we are getting up in the morning, when we are going to bed at night.

I imagine that some people might be thinking, man, that's pretty extreme, that's pretty, that sounds fanatical. This is what the all-wise good God says will cause things to go well for us.

This is the way we live in the land that God gives us, in the place that God gives us. This is the way we prosper, and not just in our generation, in the next generation, and in the next generation, by seizing these moments.

And interestingly, it should cause us to think generationally, because when we do this with our son, we're investing in our son's son, and his son's son, to do the very same thing, talking with them, sharing with them, and what it is, it is wholehearted devotion, at all times, and in all settings.

[38 : 28] And this is in fanatical, brothers and sisters, this is the normal Christian life. This is normal, but what happens is sometimes when what is normal falls away from the norm, what is subnormal seems like it's normal, and then what is truly normal seems like it is subnormal.

He calls us to teach wholehearted devotion at all times, and in all settings. that's driving to school in the mornings, in the car, that's shopping in the food store, that's walking in the mall, that's perhaps watching a movie, and guiding them, and sharing with them about the implications for their lives, at all times, and in all settings.

In verses 8 and 9, we have these further instructions to fathers, but it's clear that the children are in view. Fathers are called to bind the word as a sign on their hand, and as a front lid between their eyes, and to write them on the doorposts, and to put them on the gates.

And so it's a call to fathers to, in a primary way, have the word of God before them. But here's the thing, our children cannot see the word of God on our hearts.

They just cannot see it. So we have to make it visible for them. And we make it visible for them when they're able to see the high place that God's word has in our lives as fathers.

[40 : 24] Jewish men came to take these instructions that the Lord gave them about binding the word on their hands and putting on the frontlets of their eyes. And what they did was they wrote out Deuteronomy 6.4, they wrote it on eventually, they wrote it the whole thing, 4 through 9, and they put it in little boxes called phylacteries.

And they would bind it on their hands and they would put it on their foreheads and they would post it around their homes and the doorposts and on the gates. They literally did it.

But history showed that that wasn't enough. It was not enough to simply write these scriptures that the Lord had given, these commands that the Lord had given, and put them on their bodies and put them around their houses.

Scripture shows that that wasn't enough. Israel failed as a nation because they did not take those commandments and put them on their hearts so that they could serve the Lord with wholehearted devotion, modeling it for their children to actually follow, putting their children in a position to do what God called them to actually do.

Again, I know these verses, they sound fanatical, but this is what devoted life to the Lord is supposed to look like, a life that meditates on the Word of God.

[42 : 04] And so fathers, I think this calls all of us to sober reflection and self-assessment. How are we doing in this area of seizing the moments, seizing the opportunities to teach our children to love God wholeheartedly, to serve the Lord with our whole hearts?

How are we doing? Are we embracing mealtimes when we're together to open God's Word and to have discussions around God's Word, to direct things in a way that would point to the Lord or to allow conversations to just drift on the ocean of meaninglessness?

Are we modeling what a personal devotional life and obedience to God looks like for our children?

Is the environment in our homes pointed in that direction, marked by devotion to God? What do the environments of our homes say when we consider areas like the TV programs that are watched, the movies, the books that are read, the music that is listened to, the sites that are visited on the Internet?

the world A number of you are here with your fathers, and that's a wonderful thing to see, and I say to treasure them.

[43 : 53] My father passed away some 24 years ago. But I was reflecting on two fond memories I have of my father.

one, watching him read his Bible. He had a favorite Bible that he loved, a Bible that had a lot of notes, and he would, for extended periods of time, pick that Bible up, and he would read it.

And then another is to hear my father pray. My father would wake us up as a family in the mornings, and though we were sleeping, halfway sleeping, he didn't require us to pray, he just required us to be there.

And we would be around their bed, and we would hear him pray, hearing my mother pray. And it shaped my life in a lot of ways.

One of the memories I have, distinct memories, is hearing my father and mother pray for particular needs, and watching God meet those needs.

[45 : 10] And I will say this as a child who was in family devotions, most of the time halfway sleeping, it still shapes you. And fathers, I want to urge you, I want to encourage you, I want to urge you, take responsibility for the family altar in your home.

It's one of the most enduring ways, and most meaningful ways, you can mark your children for good for the future. It would have been very, very difficult for me, having had the example of my father, to not seek to model the same thing for my children.

children. And so fathers, I call us to do this. One of the scriptures that was read this morning is Ephesians 6, 4. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

Brothers, where might we be provoking our children to anger? anger? And why? I think one of the ways that we can provoke our children to anger, a lot of fathers do this, a lot of parents do this.

We want certain things for our children. We don't want them to have certain experiences, but our lives don't reflect the same value. And so we call them to do what we are not doing, we want them to do what we aren't doing, and they're able to see through us.

[46 : 45] Children are able to see far more than we think. They're able to see, they're able to connect dots far better than we think they can connect dots. And so we want to be careful that we're not provoking them to anger by this duplicity, by this don't do as I do, do as I say.

God calls us to do this. He calls us to teach our children diligently. So how did Israel do?

As I mentioned, Israel failed. Although they repeated the shema twice per day, they wore their phylacteries, they even added additional religious duties that the Lord didn't call them to do.

And they failed. And the reason they failed is because fathers did not love God wholeheartedly and they therefore could not impart to their children to do the same.

And so they were cast out of the land. They were exiled from the land. The book of Malachi is not a long book. It's just four chapters long.

[48 : 01] But it details how Israel failed. How the priests weren't faithful, how the people weren't faithful. Over successive generations, the fathers failed to love God and to teach their children to do the same.

And here's what we read in the last three verses of the last book of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi. Remember the law of my servant Moses.

That would include what we have in Deuteronomy chapter 6. The statutes and the rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

other translations like the New International Version, the King James Version, and the New American Standard Version, they don't use the word destruction.

[49 : 13] They use the word curse. And so the last word that Israel heard the Lord speak for some 400 years until we come to the New Testament is this word curse.

God was saying that that is where things were headed if he did not send the prophet Elijah.

In his gospel at the very beginning, Luke identifies John the Baptist as Elijah, who was a fulfillment of Malachi 4, 4 to 5.

This is what it says. Luke 1, 16 to 17, and he, referring to John the Baptist, will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

John the Baptist was the preparer of the way who pointed to the Messiah, the Lamb who was going to take away the sin of the world. And Christ came and Christ lived perfectly.

[50 : 36] He fulfilled the first and greatest commandment perfectly, and then he died as a substitute, as a perfect spotless lamb, in the place of sinners like you and me, that we would be forgiven, that God would give us mercy and grace because of what Christ did.

And so while fathers remained very critical in building families and churches and nations, without Christ, the outcome would be the same as it was for Israel.

Without Christ, the outcome would be a looming curse over the land. Brothers, we would be deceived if we think that in and of ourselves, we're better than the first fathers who received this charge from Deuteronomy 6, 1 through 9.

We're not better than them. But we have one who is better than all of them, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ. And at every point where we fail, he has succeeded.

it. And so we can trust in him, and we can seek to be faithful, to love the Lord our God with our whole beings more and more, even though we know that we fall short.

[52 : 08] We can teach our children wholehearted devotion, and we can be honest with them, and we can honestly say to them, I have failed, and I will continue to fail to love God with my whole being as I should.

And you will too. But we have one who has succeeded where we have failed, and he is our hope. He's our only hope.

He's our only hope to love God wholeheartedly. God credits that to us, that Jesus has loved him in a wholehearted way.

Jesus brings us into this vital relationship with God and enables us to please God. So, fathers, I again say to us, let us by the grace of God, even though we fall short and will not do it perfectly, let us live before our children as an example of men who are wholeheartedly loving God, who are consistently meditating on his word, and who are diligently teaching our children to do the same.

Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful for the mercy and grace that has come to us through Jesus Christ.

[53 : 37] Lord, thank you that Christ has succeeded where we have and will fail. God, I pray, Lord, that you would help us all as fathers and indeed as heads of households to take very seriously this responsibility to model wholehearted devotion, to have your word upon our hearts, meditating upon it, contemplating it, and to teach our children to do the same.

Lord, may this Father's Day be a true turning point for all of us, that we will grow in these things. We thank you, Lord, for the true and lasting treasure that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's our only worthy and lasting and true treasure that we have. Would you help us to treasure Christ and be more fully devoted to you, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's stand for a closing song.