

Today being Father's Day, I am deeply honored that Pastor would ask me to bring the message for him this morning, and it is intended to be a Father's Day message, and it is entitled \*SL **"Returning to First"**, following in the series Pastor began last week about "First". The foundation text is from \*SL **Malachi 4:5-6**, reading from the New King James Version. This is the last prophecy in the Old Testament \*SL **"5. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse"**.

I will issue this warning: This morning's message may have some tough comments in it that you may find difficult maybe because of your situation or that of a loved one. I present these comments to show the seriousness of the present-day family home dynamic. \*SL **Romans 8:1 says "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk after the flesh but (walk) according to the Spirit"**. Some here today have great thoughts about your own father, as I do for mine, as he may have been kind, thoughtful, good to you and your mother, a hard worker and good provider, while for some, this is a very difficult day because your father was anything but good to you. Maybe some here today you have no good thoughts about your father. There are only painful thoughts and bad memories of the things he said or did to you or your mom or siblings. I am so sorry for those of you in that situation today. That was not God's will for you or your father. Some of you men in the room had thoughts of "I want to be just like my father when I grow up" while others thoughts were more of "I don't want to be anything like my father". And you have tried everything in your power to stay away from being like your father. If you could change your last name from that of his you would. If you could change that he was ever your father, you would.

Too often we do not grow close to God our Father if we did not have a good relationship with our own father. If you are one of those men today, God does not want that kind of life for you. He loves you unconditionally, and \*SL **James 4:8 says "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you..."**

The first part of \*SL **John 10:10 says "The thief comes not but to steal, to kill and to destroy..."** There is no doubt that over the last 50 or 60 years there has been a HUGE breakdown in the family dynamic that God designed for there to be in the home. \*SL **GOD LOVES FATHERS**. Naturally, \*SL **GOD loves mothers and children too**. We know that. But \*SL **GOD LOVES FATHERS AND GOD LOVES YOU father!** HE is our heavenly Father and HE is a GOD of order. Just as Colossians 1:18 says that Jesus is the head of the church, and later in Revelation, the church is named as the Bride of Christ, He loves the nuclear makeup of the home with a father, a mother and their children. And I believe that GOD's heart is indeed saddened with the current climate of the makeup in our homes. Now obviously, in many, many homes across America, this is not

the family dynamic today. And there are many reasons for this, but this is not what GOD designed nor what HE intends for homes, especially Christian homes. If the devil can get the fathers removed from the home, he has an easier path at getting to the children. Just look at what has happened to so many of the young men and young ladies in our culture TODAY. Seemingly headed in the wrong direction with no moral or godly compass. Many wanting to change the gender Almighty God designated at birth from that of a man to a woman and that of a woman to a man. Sad.

\*SL From the National Center for Fathering in an article entitled The Extent of Fatherlessness, approximately 58% of Black children, 31% of Hispanic children and 21% of White children live without their biological fathers. Is it any wonder that so many of our young people appear lost.

\*SL According to the US Census Bureau, the number of children living only with their mothers has doubled since 1968.

\*SL From the Institute for Family Studies, an excerpt in an article from Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur from “Growing Up with a Single Parent”, they say “Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents, regardless of the parents’ race or educational background...over half of all children in the current generation will live in a single-parent family—and these children simply will not fare as well as their peers who live with both parents”. Now we know that there are always going to be the exceptions to this, and we know that \*SL **Philippians 4:13 says “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”** and that there are doctors and lawyers and business owners, and teachers and accountants, both male and female, that come from single family homes, but these are the exception. I believe that that first part of John 10:10 is the devil’s strategy to deteriorate the family nucleus by removing father, predominantly, or mother, from that family dynamic so he can have easier access to the kids. There is not that shield or protector in and over that home as there should be. Sometimes both father and mother are either absent or unfit or have vacated the children, and thankfully, a grandparent or other family members have stepped in to raise and take care of the children, saving them from the streets, or these children have been adopted by other loving parents providing them a much better life and a better chance of success. After all, each of us who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have been adopted into the family of God.

But God...can you say But God?

Yet, there are many fathers, who despite the odds and the pressures against them, have stood in the gap, who have not left the home, who have not quit on the mother and the wife of his kids, who have by the grace of God found a way to make things work, it not being easy at all, working several jobs to make ends meet as my own father did, just to make it work. Sometimes,

it's not the biological father who has done this but maybe a step father is the one who stepped in as the "father" for the kids. They have made it special for the kids by being that constant and positive force in their family, who encourages them and provides for them, giving them a better chance of growing up safe and having the opportunity of a better life. Thank the Lord for these men, these fathers, that were not the biological fathers but who cared for these kids as if they were their own.

**\*SL The last half of that verse in *Jn 10:10* says "*but I (Jesus) have come that you would have life and have it to the fullest*".**

So what does a Godly father look like? To answer that question, we must look to God the Father and His Word. There are at least 7 things I want to give you this morning of what a Godly father looks like that we as earthly fathers can follow after. This is from an article from Kenneth Copeland (don't shout me down if you are not a Copeland fan. These are Biblical and helpful points): **(Darren: each of the 7 points need \*SL. These would be the 7 points of the message)**

1. A Godly father loves God and others. ***Luke 10:27 "So he answered and said, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and (love) your neighbor as yourself"***. The number 1 way a father provides for his family is to love God, he prays, reads God's Word and attends and participates in church, giving his tithes and offerings. He also provides for his family by loving others. He is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful or proud (1 Cor 13:4). He is available to teach and train others, especially his children. The love of God through the father provides a sense of belonging and provides strength to overcome obstacles in life.
2. A Godly father forgives as God forgave him. ***Ephesians 4:32 "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you"***. The best kind of father is the one who forgives and keeps on forgiving. God forgives us over and over (Psalm 103:3) and we should do the same thing. Everyone makes mistakes and everyone needs to be forgiven. The simple act of forgiveness provides stability in the home.
3. A Godly father walks in the fruit of the spirit. ***Galatians 5:22-23. "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law"***. When a man is born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live within his spirit, and what a difference that can make. The Holy Spirit will work through a father so that his natural inclination changes from the old ways to the ways of God. Instead of anger, he can demonstrate love. Instead of sadness, he can be quick to show joy and laughter. Instead of strife, there is peace. Rather than lose his temper, the father can patiently wait and act with kindness, gentleness and self-control.

These things do not happen overnight, but as a father yields to the Lord, the fruit begins to ripen to the image of Christ.

4. A Godly father puts the Word of God first place in his life. ***Psalm 119:10-13. "With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth"***. A father also provides for his family by putting the Word of God first place in his life. This means God's Word is the final authority in every decision. Decisions based on God's Word will bring successful results. A father must consider God's Word in deciding where to go to church, where to work, where to live, how to spend money, and how to be a witness for Christ. Those decisions come easier as he and his wife are in agreement with the Word of God (Matthew 18:19-20).
5. A Godly father prays about everything. ***Philippians 4:6-7. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"***. Another way a father provides for his family is by praying about everything. That's when spending time daily with the Lord becomes essential. Knowing what to do, and how and when to do it, can be a challenge. A father who prays about everything can have confidence in his decisions. God is his source and will provide all he and his family need, including God's wisdom and peace. A father's prayer also provides confidence for each member of the family. They know their father's prayers are effective because he prays according to God's Word. Even more powerful is when a family prays together.
6. A Godly father is generous with his time and resources. ***Matthew 6:19-21. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"***. A father who is generous with his time and resources provides for his family. It takes effort for a father to be generous with his time and resources. After all, his job, which oftentimes provides for his family, takes most of his time and attention. And it takes a concentrated effort to focus on the family's activities, interests, and responsibilities. Being a father is not for the fainthearted (which is why some men walk away because they cannot, or do not know how, to be responsible, among other things.)
7. A Godly father avoids the things God hates. ***Proverbs 6:16-19. "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren"***.

This is a good list to live by! But some are sitting here this morning and you would say, Ken, I have been very good to do these things and to raise my son or daughter according to these things, and they have not only turned from the Lord, but they have nothing to do with me. They will not return my calls, voice mails or emails, and you may not even know where to find them. I get it. It's tough. It stinks. But God...can you say But God? I have three verses to close with for you this morning:

**\*SL (1) *Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he, or she, should go and when he is old he will not depart from it".***

**\*SL (2) *Luke 15:11-32 and the Prodigal Son WHO CAME HOME***

**\*SL (3) *Malachi 4:5-6***, our foundation text, which says BEFORE the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD, he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. If you are walking with the LORD and for some reason are away from your father, this says your father's heart will turn back to his children FIRST. This means your earthly father will REPENT and realize the wrong he has done and will RETURN first to the LORD and then to you. Therefore, be ready to forgive him, and be reconciled to him. And it says the hearts of the children will return to their fathers. So if you are a father here today and your children are away from you and the Lord, stand on God's Word. He is not man that He should lie. If you are a son or daughter of a father who is away from the Lord, don't stop praying for him. Stand on this verse. Stand on God's Word. HIS promises are "yes" and "amen"!