

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
Straight From The Heart: The Homing Instinct
Mark Batterson

A few months ago, I was speaking to a group of guys, about 500 men in the room and I asked the question, how many of you were intentionally disciplined by your dad? Three hands went up. Houston, we have a problem. That is .06 percent. We have biological fathers who have never learned what it means to be a spiritual father and then we wonder why marriages and families are falling apart. But we have a bigger issue. We have men who have never learned what it means to be a man of God. And that is a strange way to begin a message on Mother's Day! But I believe that one of the greatest gifts a woman can give to a man is to be a woman of God. And I believe that one of the greatest gifts a man can give to a woman is to be a man of God.

This week, we begin a series called Straight From the Heart. I just feel like doing that. Here's the deal. What we want to do over the next five weeks, and these will be very different messages is we want to somehow take something that is in here, in our hearts, and try our best to put it into words. If you said, Pastor Mark, what is the deepest desire of your heart, I have a very short and simple answer, I want to be famous in my home. Sure, I want to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and I want to love God heart, soul, mind and strength. I want to hear God say well done good and faithful servant. Those are biblical baselines. But what I really want is I want someday to be famous in my home. And I have a simple definition of success. It is when those who know you best respect you most. And that is my wife and my children. You need to know, I love pastoring. I love writing. Those are callings. They are not insignificant but they are not my highest calling. I have a higher calling and that is to be a husband to my wife and to be a father to my children. And I have perfected both of them! Ha! I don't know that I've ever felt more like a hypocrite. I just put that out there. There is hardly a day that goes by that you don't feel like a failure if you are married, right? And as a father, how many times have I messed up? Pray for my children! But I know the bull's eye, I know what I'm aiming for. I want to be famous in my home. So I want to talk about it this Mother's Day weekend.

Let me say this, I realize that half of our congregation is single and I know that there are many people who are married who don't have children. And I know that there are some people that are married who don't have children that can't have children and this is a difficult weekend. And then you've got everything in between. And while my comments might be directed towards men this weekend, they are for women. And even though I might speak to marriage and parenting, I believe this is for everybody. If you are not a parent, I bet you were a child. So if you stick with me, I there will be a payoff at the end.

Turn to the last book of the Old Testament, the last chapter and then the last verse of the last chapter of the last book. I'm making a point right here. This is the last word. This is significant. Malachi 4:6 and we'll get there in just a moment.

Prior to the First World War, a pair of English ornithologists named Matthews and Lockley were fascinating with the homing device in birds. They took a pair of birds called shearwaters from their nest on the island off the coast of Wales and they released them from various places

around the world to see if they could navigate their way back home. One of those birds was carried by aircraft to Venice. It was released a tremendous distance from home and by the way, a place where shearwaters do not live. They tagged the bird and released the bird and somehow it found its way home from a place it had never been by a path it had never flown in 341 hours and 10 minutes. Impressive, right? But they didn't stop there. They took a pair of shearwaters, closed them in a box on a train to London then put them on an airplane to Boston. One of the birds did not survive. The other bird was released from a pier near Boston Harbor. 12 days and 12 hours later, that bird, who had been tagged number AX6587, was back home in its nest. Ornithologists are still mystified by this homing instinct. They will put magnets on bird's heads and the birds still find their way home. This is crazy stuff! What in the world? Are we not fearfully and wonderfully made? Not just humans but birds. It is the inherent ability of certain animals to navigate to a birthplace or a breeding place no matter where they are in the world. It is an instinct to go home.

I think there is a homing instinct within us, deep within the soul to go home.

In 1670, a French philosopher Blaise Pascal, called it the God-shaped hole. It is this homing instinct to know and be in relationship with our Creator. And I think it is this instinct that kicked in when the prodigal son had wandered far from home and had squandered his inheritance. He was actually in a pigpen. That is hitting rock bottom for a kosher Jew. This is the bottom of the barrel but there is a moment where he has a fleeting thought, a fleeting feeling, I'm not sure exactly what it is but I think there is this moment where he remembers home and remembers his father. And there is this homing instinct. But the question is, would my father take me back after I wished him dead and took the inheritance? Well, I've got some good news this weekend. If you hear nothing else, I hope you hear this. There is a heavenly Father with arms wide open watching and waiting for the moment for you to turn back to Him. He loves you more than you can imagine.

So it says he comes to his senses and says I will set out and go back. It is this fatherly instinct that I have and if I feel it this deeply, imagine how much the heavenly Father feels toward you.

Now in the same sense, I think we have a homing instinct for our heavenly Father and I think we have a homing instinct for our earthly father. I think we have a homing instinct for our family or origin even if it was an incredibly dysfunctional family of origin. I think there is something within the human heart that desires to be parented. We might say we don't want to be and there might even be moments when we don't enjoy discipline for example, but I think there is a deep longing to be loved and parented. And when things aren't right with your family of origin, and I dare say that might be most of us, and every family is a little dysfunctional right? Because you are in it!

But when things aren't quite right, something feels wrong. And you can medicate it or ignore it or try to avoid it but you can't really escape it.

Robert Bly called it a father wound. Richard Rohr calls it father hunger. If you had a dad who wasn't there or a dad who was abusive and you wish he wasn't there, I think it creates this father shaped hole in your heart, a father void if you will, and the first thing I want to say is that I'm so

sorry. I was blessed with a wonderful dad so sometimes I have a hard time fully understanding that/ But I know that can be an incredibly painful thing and right now some of you might have difficulty listening to this but I appreciate you trying to listen to this. I believe that there is a heavenly Father who wants to fill that void. But here's what I'm getting at, my desire as an earthly father is to do my best to at least give my kids an occasional glimpse of how wonderful the heavenly Father is. I will fall short. I don't do it every day but every once in a while, I want there to be moments when my kids get a glimpse of who God is because of their earthly father.

And that brings us to the last book, the last chapter, the last verse of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:6.

See, I will send before you the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

I don't think it's a half turn, I think it is a full turn. The word 'turn' literally means to restore, to repair, to reconcile. Here is the reality. There are some parents here who have a relationship with a child that needs to be restored. I don't know who is at fault and I don't know what happened but there needs to be a reconciliation. And there are some children who need to be restored to their parents, to their fathers. I think my prayer this weekend is that maybe this would be the beginning of a process. I don't know how this strikes you and maybe you think, ok, why are we so focused on what seems to be a minor chord but I want to push back and suggest that even though this didn't make Long Story Short, this is huge. It is a major chord. In fact, it is not just the last note in the Old Testament. What I want you to understand is that it is like God hits the sustain pedal on a piano and for four hundred years, this is the only note that plays. And then finally when you get to the New Testament, what is the first note? You could ask 100 theologians and I bet 99 of them wouldn't even get this. Let me connect the dots. It says in Luke 1:17

He (referring to John the Baptist) will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children.

Are you picking up what I'm throwing down? This is the last note of the Old Testament and it is the first note of the New Testament and we've got three out of 500 dad disciplining their kids. We need God to turn our hearts to our children and to turn the hearts of children to their parents.

Now, the question is, why does he single out fathers? I don't know all the reasons and I don't want to overcomplicate this but I think part of it is that mothers are naturally more in tune and more in touch with their children. I think part of it is oxytocin. It is the hormone that is secreted when a woman goes into labor and gives birth. It is the hormone that is secreted when a woman breastfeeds her baby. It is a chemical bond that is created and I think it is a gift from God. I think part of it too, I know I'm on thin ice talking about stuff like this because I'm a man, but I know this, it is one thing to conceive a baby, it is another thing to birth a baby! Conceiving a baby, that is quite pleasurable and easy! Birthing a baby, quite painful and difficult. I think there is something about that pain that is experienced in childbirth that creates another bond between a mother and a child. I think what I'm getting at is I don't think moms are the problem. Am I

saying that is never the case? No. There are crack babies born, mothers who can't seem to overcome an addiction for the sake of their kids. There are moms who are abusive but I think by and large it is fathers who tend to be more absentee and more abusive. I know that right about now it is feeling heavy this weekend on Mother's Day. But I don't think moms are the problem so I'm not sure they are the ultimate solution. I think God calls out and singles out dads to step up and step in and fulfill the highest calling that God has given to us. I think ath God wants to tune our hearts and turn our hearts to our children and when He does that, we will see the kingdom of God come in a way that we never have before.

Well, can we have a little fun now? I came across a little piece a few years ago called The Differences Between Men and Woman. You may enjoy this. The average man has four items in his bathroom, a toothbrush, a razor, a bar of soap and a towel from the Holiday Inn. The average number of items in the typical woman's bathroom is 437. The average man can identify 4 of those items! Man will pay \$20 for a \$10 item he wants. A woman will pay \$10 for a \$20 item she doesn't want. A woman has the last word in any argument, anything a man says after that is the beginning of a new argument. Women love cats, men say they love cats but when women aren't looking, men kick cats. What is the difference between women and terrorists? Terrorists negotiate. What is the difference between men and government bonds? Bonds mature. I'm an equal opportunity offender! This is my favorite. A woman knows all about her children. She knows about dentist appointments, best friends, favorite foods, secret fears and hopes and dream. A man is vaguely aware of some short people living in the house. And if it weren't true, it would be funny.

Alright, here is the reality. God has created us male and female. We live in a culture where I think in some sense gender is perhaps more confused than previous generations and there are some swirling realities. I want to be careful how I talk about this because I know people who are confused about gender and I don't think it is just something we flippantly talk about. This is a journey for people and we have to love people on that journey. I also believe that God created us male and female for a reason. It is not just a good idea, it was a God idea. So it is not some subject matter to be avoided. It is something to be celebrated. And the significant point is this, I think that men and women reflect the image of God in a unique and wonderful and different way. And it wouldn't be complete with just one gender. And I think that is significant.

Last week I talked about the fact that God is gooder than good. Poor English but good theology, hopefully. Six times, and God saw that it was good. Finally God says it was very good. The first time we come to something that is not good is Genesis 2:18.

It is not good for man to be alone.

That is another sermon for another weekend but God comes up with a solution to the problem. He makes a helper suitable for him. I think this is one of the most important and most misinterpreted verses in the Bible. So let me go back to the Hebrew and explain what suitable helper means. The word 'suitable' in Hebrew means corresponding to. I think the best way to think of it is a jigsaw puzzle. Remember how you have to get those pieces to fit together perfectly? Men and woman are meant to fit together like this. Not better or worse, not inferior and superior, just different. We are different. Would you agree? And I think that is by design.

And sometimes that gets confused and we have to wade out way through those cultural definitions and get to a biblical understanding but the good news is, we are supposed to correspond to one another. And then the word 'helper' means helper, but here is where it is interesting. I think sometimes this gets interpreted, who is helping who here? Did you know that this word is used of God Himself? He is our ever-present help in times of need. So this isn't about creating some kind of sliding scale of who is superior or inferior. This is about God saying it is not good for man to be alone. So God created male and female and then comes up with this idea for marriage. I'm going to talk about that in a moment. I want to be clear about this. I think you can be single and absolutely complete and fulfilled. In fact, Paul talks about some of the advantages of being single in I Corinthians 7. And then there are some advantages to being married. But I don't think this is another one of those sliding scales. I think it is about understanding the season that we are in and celebrating it.

So what I want to do this weekend is just issue a little bit of a challenge. It is for men but it is also for women.

Number one, husbands love your wives. That is Ephesians 5:25. This is where some of you are thinking 'go get 'em pastor.' Preach it! But this isn't just for the men, I think this is for everybody. Would you agree that women are not held to a lower standard? Guys, you need to love your wives as Christ loves the church, but women you can get by with less than that. No. Or how about friends, lower standard? No, there is one standard of love and it was set by Jesus Himself. But again, husbands are singled out and called out. I believe that not only is this the greatest gift you can give to your wife, loving your wife as Christ loves the church, it is also the greatest gift you can give to your children. If you can model what it looks like to love someone sacrificially, for better for worse, in sickness and in health, you have modeled something that is more caught than taught. And it is a gift to your children.

One of my all-time favorite authors is a guy named A.W. Tozer. Two of his books. Pursuit of God and Knowledge of the Holy are two of my all-time favorites. They so impacted me that I decided to read his biography and I was disappointed. I want to be careful right here because I think all of us make mistakes and we all have regrets and all of us are works in progress and I don't think what I'm about to share invalidates who he was or what he accomplished for the kingdom. When he died, his wife remarried. And a few years into that second marriage, a friend asked her how she was doing. She said I've never been happier in my life and she explained why, and I don't think she meant any disrespect to her first husband but it was an honest assessment. She said A.W. loved Jesus, Leonard loves me. I remember reading that and thinking to myself, wow, whew. I'm not sure you can do one without the other. Because to really love Christ is to love your spouse.

A week ago, I released a book titled Play the Man. It's a book I've wanted to write for eight years but waited for a variety of reasons. Don't buy a copy, Lora and I are going to give you a copy on Father's Day weekend. It is a rumor but I have a good source!

Let me just say this, on Saturday, June 17th, 9:00-12:00 at the Miracle Theater, I want to spend three hours with guys. It is an open invitation. I want to take about the seven virtues of manhood and I want to talk about how to slay the three-headed dragon that I wrote about in the book. And

then there will be a little bonus session. I want to talk about how to disciple your children. A discipleship covenant, a year of discipleship, rite of passage, some of the things that I did as a dad and some of the mistakes I made. I want to encourage you to be there for that three hour session. But let me say this. I outline seven virtues of manhood. There are hundreds virtues but no one could write a book that long. So I chose seven virtues because I like the number seven and by the way, I think these apply to women as well as men.

The very first virtue of manhood is tough love. Let me give you a definition. Tough love is carrying a 300 pound cross 650 yards down the Via Dolorosa for some else's sin. That is tough love. Tough love is loving someone when they least expect it and when they least deserve. A tough guy is not somebody who can blacken an eye or bloody a nose. A tough guy is someone who is willing to be nailed to a cross with seven inch spikes. That is tough love. That is tough as nails. And that is the example that Jesus sets. So when the Bible says husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church, that is a pretty high bar.

Let me tell you the difference between lust and love. Lust is focused on what you want. Love is focused on what the other person needs. Foth defined it this way. Love is the accurate estimate and adequate supply of another person's needs. If I had two minutes to do premarital counseling, here it is: don't focus on getting your needs met, focus on meeting the needs of your spouse. If you are focused on getting your needs met, you will be perpetually disappointed no matter how amazing your spouse is. But if you focus on meeting the needs of your spouse, it flips the script and it changes the game.

I have a theory and my theory is this, you are selfish. And so am I. And the cure of selfishness is something called marriage. Listen, I'm not saying you can't be single and unselfish. I believe you can. Some of us just need more help because here's the bottom line, you can be married and selfish at the same time but you can't be selfish and happily married at the same time. See, marriage is about putting someone else before yourself. And there is something about that process and it is brilliant, isn't it? God says, hey, here's what I'm going to do to help you with your selfishness, why don't you share a bed, share a sink and share a bank account with someone of the opposite sex. Brilliant, right? Now, it doesn't always completely work and this is where my theory continues, so God gives us children. And sometimes it takes more than one child. The word 'diaper' spelled backwards is repaid. This is not a coincidence. God knows that some of you need more diapers to change! The goal of marriage is not happiness. The goal of marriage is holiness. And it is a process that God is working in your life. It is not easy but there is tremendous joy and I believe it is a high calling.

Now, I believe we are called to love our wives as Christ loves the church. It is tough love. And then let me share this. I think the highest compliment you can give to a man is to call him a man of God and a close second is to call him a family man. Someone who has their priorities straight and who understands the importance of being a father to their children.

So this week, Lora and I went over to Children's Hospital to visit Chris and Katherine Douglas, our worship pastors here at NCC. They had twins, precious girls, and one of the girls, a couple of days after being born, needed an operation on her heart. As you can imagine scary, fragile, and what a precious little girl. We went into that hospital room and it was wonderful to just see this

precious new little life but the thing that struck me as well is that Chris and Katherine are different than they were the last time I saw them. It is the craziest thing in the world. It is like a switch flips and all of a sudden, this instinct takes over and they are a mom and a dad and these babies have only been around days but they would die for those children. I think that is a gift from God. But I think what happens over time is that a heart can harden, a heart can wander, and parenting gets difficult and the next thing you know, your heart is turned in a different direction.

So how do we turn our hearts back towards our children? I think it starts with prayer. You will never be a perfect parent but you can be a praying parent. And I believe that it is prayer that turns us into prophets and we begin to shape the destiny of our children. I prayed Luke 2:52 for my children thousands of times, may they grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man. I want to emphasize this point but let me broaden it. Anybody have anybody in your life that you don't like? This should be everybody. That person that you don't like, you don't love the way your heart feels toward them do you? You almost feel, what do I do? I'll tell you exactly what to do. Pray for them. As you begin to pray for someone, your heart shifts, something changes.

It is interesting, when we walked into the hospital room and met little Keelan for the first time, it didn't feel like we were meeting for the first time because we have a little prayer circle in our home and her name is in the middle of it and we've been praying for her since before she was born because we knew some of the potential complications. So when I walked into that hospital room, I already had a deep love for this little girl because I have been praying for you.

You pray for the people you don't like and God will begin to change your heart and you will actually begin to love that person. The Queen Mary is one of the largest, most famous cruise ships. It is now anchored in Long Beach. It is 181 feet tall, 1,019 feet long and weighs 81,237 tons. Big ship. But do you know how it is turned? With a small rudder. Do you know what is on that small rudder? Any even smaller trim tab. A trim tab is that little apparatus that turns that entire huge ship. Prayer is the trim tab that turns our hearts. You tell me what you are praying for and I will tell you where your heart is. We've tried about every parenting methodology on the market and I think they have tremendous value. I would read all of those books again. But here's the deal, we've dared to discipline, tried to raise modern day knights, tried to grow kids God's way, but it hasn't always resulted in a new kid by Friday. I put less stock in a methodology and I put more stock in the simple power of prayer because I believe at the end of the day, my prayers for my children will make the difference.

I'm going to try to close with this. Our 20th president, James B Garfield only served 200 days before he was assassinated. He was the only ordained minister to serve as president and maybe the only president who didn't run for president. If you are a Political Science major, you probably know this. 1880 Republican convention, it was in a deadlock after the 35th ballot. Garfield wasn't even on that ballot. On the 36th ballot, he gets nominated and the next thing you know, he doesn't want to but he wins the presidency and ends up in the White House. I'm not a political scientist but I have a theory. I think it traces back to a defining decision James Garfield made as a young man. Here is what he said, I mean to make myself a man and if I succeed in that, I shall succeed in everything else. So he made himself a man and America made his president and the rest is history. Now, I don't think that is a formula for you becoming the next

president, per say. But if you want a formula for greatness, I think this is it. You focus on being a man of God, you focus on being a woman of God, and I think everything else is going to take care of itself.

When I first moved to DC, it was before NCC even existed, a guy named Dick Foth invited me to lunch in the Senate dining room with Dr. Richard Halverson. I was so out of my league but I will never forget that lunch. One, the bean soup is awesome in the Senate dining room! Two, I was about five feet from Mohammed Ali. He wasn't at our table but he was at the table right behind me. Pretty awesome! But I have such profound respect for Dr. Halverson. In fact, one of the benedictions that we pronounce at the end of our services, when you leave this place, you don't leave the presence of God, you take the presence of God with you wherever you go, is a paraphrase of a benediction that he pronounced at Fourth Pres in Bethesda for decades. That is where it comes from. A tip of the cap to Dr. Halverson. Dr. Halverson told a story, it is one of my favorites and I will end with this. It is called the old man you will meet someday. And I think it goes for old women too. He said you will meet an old man someday down the road, 10, 20, 30 years. He is waiting there for you. You will be catching up with him. What kind of old man are you going to meet? That is a rather significant question. He may be a seasoned, soft gracious fellow, a gentleman who has grown old gracefully. He may be bitter, disillusioned, dried up, cynical old buzzard without a good word for anybody. Dr. Halverson said the kind of old man you meet depends entirely on you. Because the old man will be you. He will be the composite of everything you do and say and think today and tomorrow. His heart will be turning out what you've been putting in. Every little thought, every deed goes into the making of this old man. He will be exactly what you make him, nothing more, nothing less. It is up to you. You will have no one else to credit or blame. Every day in every way you are becoming more and more like yourself. Live only in terms of what you are getting out of life and the old man gets smaller and drier and harder and crabbiest and more self-centered. Open your life to others, think in terms of what you can give to life and the old man grows larger and softer and kinder and greater. A point to remember is that these things don't always show immediately but they will show sooner than you think. These little things so unimportant now, attitudes and goals and ambitions and desires, they are adding up inside where you can't see them crystalizing in your heart. It ends by saying character crystalizes.

Do you know who I would like to meet someday? An old man who made a lot of mistakes, failed more times than you can count as a husband and father, but understood what he was aiming at. That success is that those who know you best respect you most. Someday I would love to meet a man of God, the old man who is a man of God. I think that is my prayer for us.

Let's pray.

Father, thank You. Help us to not just be hearers of your Word but doers of it. God thank You that is in never too late to be who we might have been. Your plans and purposes still prevail. God I pray right now for those who have been a part of a marriage that has failed, that have a family that has issues that seem so irresolvable, God for those who maybe have a longing in their heart to be a parent but that gift has not been given, God there are a lot of people in a lot of tough places and I pray right now that your grace would meet us in those places. Thank You Lord that You are a God who doesn't look back. In fact, You forgive and forget. You are a God who looks

forward, who has plans and purposes, that with arms wide open is ready to embrace us and love us. God I pray for those right now who that homing instinct is so strong in their spirit, they aren't even sure why they came this weekend and they might not even agree with half of what I said, but there is a deep longing in their heart to know You. God I pray that You would meet them right here, right now I this moment, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Transcribed by:

Ministry Transcription