

by *Dave Knoch*

My wife and I started a drywall company about ten years ago. In the early days it was just me taping houses, but we began to grow to the point where we needed to hire people to assist us in the increasing demand for gypsum. (We are thankful that wood paneling stayed in the 70's). We have seen many young men come and go over the years. We have also seen a lot of substance abuse, violence, problems with the law, money issues, broken relationships, promiscuity, and work ethic problems. By the way, these symptoms are not unique to drywallers. The whole construction industry is rather full of the same problems.

So what is the solution? The far left of the political spectrum says: "These are people who grew up in poverty and need greater access to more social programs." (During the boom of the last three years, I have seen drywallers earn dentists' wages). The right counters by saying: "These folks need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and get to work! And clean themselves up - for crying in the sink!" (My face would turn very blue before this approach brings about any real change.) "For crying in the sink" probably isn't the expletive of choice, but the editor is a pretty clean-living guy and some trades people have to make an extra effort at refinement - or at least this one does. The left and right of this world (however well-meaning) have missed it, because this problem cannot be solved politically, socially, or economically.

The common thread with these men has been a non-existent, broken or sometimes abusive relationship with their fathers. And it's not just in the trades: the world itself is lost. With all the money that people should have made over the past three years, there is even greater consumer debt, more children with multiple fathers, more substance abuse - more, more, more...

I am a father of six children. Though six may seem to be a fairly large number to some, it isn't as significant as the "father" part. Fathers are more than just men with offspring. We all know that, biologically-speaking, a man can produce many offspring in his lifetime, but it is quite different from being a father as God has intended. God is our Father. It should also be noted that it is ever in His heart that all fathers share His heart for fathering. We all know about the troubles and struggles that Israel went through in their history of hit and miss obedience to God. Isn't it interesting to see that in the end of the book of the prophet Malachi, He says that He is going to send Elijah (John the Baptist), who will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the

hearts of children to their fathers. He does this to prepare Israel to receive Christ as we see this same description of John the Baptist written in Luke 1:16. It is in the light of this verse that I am both elated and sobered as I father my children. Quite honestly, without the grace of God, I too would be one of those men described above. It is quite evident that the Father is viewed through an obscured lens because of our personal experiences with our own fathers.

Drywalling is easy. Working with men who have never been fathered is very difficult. Our role as fathers doesn't just end when we have adequately provided food, shelter and clothing for our family. Our role prepares the way of the Lord for our children. That lens is hopefully a little less obscured in my home. I don't want to misrepresent myself here as being the guy with it all together. My job takes me away from home several days a week, like most fathers. I come home mentally exhausted from dealing with everyone's problems (not a lot of hugs at work). Then I am met at the door by some of my six children with a barrage of questions and tales of the day. Somehow, between 6:00 PM and midnight, with supper and bedtime routine in the mix, I am to prepare my children for Jesus Christ (discipleship). I am forty-one-years-old and don't quite have the same zip that I had when I was twenty-years-old. Coffee has been a fairly reliable friend to help me through this time, but this same friend lets me down with an inevitable crash.

So what do I do? I could throw up my hands and let my wife disciple my children. After all, she is academically smarter than me. She is a college graduate, whereas I only graduated from high school. She can exist on far less sleep than me and she's at home already - it all makes perfect sense! That leaves nap time and personal selfish pursuits for me, with a little bit of smiling and nodding to the wife and children along the way - that has got to be the answer!

No. That is not the answer. If it were based on our own credentials, then we would all be sunk and we may as well trust in the institutions again. But for what? The discipleship of our children? The answer looks very different for every father, but it is very simple. It lies in the heart. On a practical level, I need a quantity of time reserved for three areas in my home: the family unit, one on one, and husband and wife.

First, as a family, we have begun to meet after supper everyday, to read the Scriptures, to worship God with our voices, and then

to pray for each other. I have seen a change in my boys in the area of singing. Not only are they participating (because they have to), but they are actively engaged. They want to worship God. The girls have always been singers, but they have also shown a boldness in the area of prayer and the discussion of God's life-giving Word. We are still finding our way in all this, but God has met us time and again. Family devotions have become an entrenched part of our daily routine. It is essential in our road map of discipleship.

Second, one-on-one time. This area needs some work in our home, but I'll tell you the theory behind the intent. I used to kneel (fall asleep) at my children's bedsides and spend my one-on-one time this way. I cherished the time and the half hour that I would spend with each child seemed to go by rather quickly. But I got older and had more children and got more tired and my children, as smart as they were, knew how to keep me there just five minutes more: They would ask the really simple questions at the end of our time, such as, "How can a girl become a son of God?" So, we decided to move what we called "disciple time" to Sunday after our church service. We come home and eat, I get a nap, then I meet with as many children as time permits on a one-to-one level. (The ones I don't meet with get put on the top of the list the following Sunday). We discuss life, we pray, then I assign the appropriate Scripture to memorize and write about. After that, I look at their academics, if there is time. Often the academics are found woven into Bible-writing assignments any way. Math is a tough one to weave in but reading, writing and comprehension fall quite naturally in the pages of Scripture.

Third. The wife. My wife is an anchor. She carries an enormous load that I am sure I do not fully appreciate. Yes, I go to work each day and I work hard outside the home, but she works equally as hard, without a day off, seven days a week. Even though I have spent my day listening to every one else's problems, she still needs my empathetic ear every night. I don't always give it to her. Sometimes I just want to go to bed or read a book or stare into space for a while. She has been more than patient and gracious with me. I think we men believe that if we give our wives our ears they'll completely consume us with details and decision-making that we are not ready for. This is closer to reality than we care to admit. But more often than not, my wife is looking for some validation and support of what she facilitates during the day. Really, she is just answering to her husband, the father of her children, the guy whom God has commissioned to disciple the children He gave him.

In your home, you are that guy if you are a father- homeschooler or not. You are the guy and you can do as He has mandated for you. The grace of God has room for you and me to take that little mustard seed of faith and begin to prepare the way for our

children for a glorious eternity.

I have never been divorced or been a drunk in my marriage or completely abandoned my family like some of the guys described in the first part of this article. However, I have found myself withdrawn when faced with certain challenges. I may not be all the way down the road of abandonment, but I'm still on the road, especially when I decide for a reclusive heart posture. I need to allow God to change that part of my heart. It isn't that the commission to disciple is so impossible, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light. It is in whether our desire is to do this or to lurk quietly in the shadows, fulfilling minimum requirements all the while watching life slowly slip by. In writing this, it is my intention to encourage fathers, not to condemn or judge them. What I have written is as much for me as for any who would receive it.

*Dave and Suzanne live on an acreage just outside of Raymond with their six children, Jeremiah, Naomi, Samuel, Selah, Joel and Isaiah and 95 chickens. If demand for drywall dries up, we'll eat eggs. They also own and operate a small drywall company called Integrity Drywall Ltd. out of Lethbridge, AB.*