

## Tragedy or Opportunity

In the movie, “Life as a House”, a divorced father loses his job and finds out he has terminal cancer within the week. If there ever was a hopeless situation in life, this guy was facing it. What does he do? He decides to reconcile with his rebellious teenage son. How does he do it? He manages to have his son participate in a summer-long project of building a house with him. In the process, he establishes his identity and legacy as a father.

I mention this movie because it tells us so much about ourselves. It makes us examine our highest priority in life. It causes us to ask, “When all else is gone, what remains?” It says that so much of what we focus on in life is expendable. So much of our energy is devoted to temporary outcomes, and often at the expense of our relationships with our children. Relationships, on the other hand, last. Good or bad, they go on even after we’re gone. And they impact future generations.

Why is it that a tragedy or crisis must occur before we are willing to make a radical change in life? There are many reasons, but it begs the question.

Usually we are so wrapped up in living that we are unaware of problems lying just beneath the surface. We tell ourselves, when our children act out, that it’s just a phase. We’re so busy dealing with the behavior, we never get around to examining the underlying cause of the behavior...nor do we think we could be part of the problem. It’s those ‘other’ kids at school. It’s that teacher or principal who isn’t fair to my child. It’s the music or video games or television shows my child is bombarded with. It’s my psycho wife/ex-wife. Heaven forbid that I might be so busy pursuing my own interests that I don’t sacrifice my time to just hang out instead of running to this activity or that.

Another reason for maintaining the status quo is because we fear the unfamiliar, so we stay where we’re comfortable – healthy or unhealthy. But when a crisis strikes, we cry out for hope. We cry out for an answer and a better day. This is not an entirely bad place to be. It is definitely not what we would choose, but it can be the tilling of our inner soil that prepares the ground for something new and alive. The weeds of guilt and blame must be pulled up so the real growth can happen and something new can emerge.

So often, fathers ask us how to go about this reconciliation process with their child. Most of the time, a tragedy has occurred. “My child has left home.” “My child has become another person whom I don’t even know any more.” “My kid is in jail.” “My child got kicked out of school.” “My daughter/son is going to be a parent.” “My kid has a tattoo.” Yes, the tragedy is relevant, but the turmoil is the same.

Unfortunately, there is no quick fix for restoring the bond of father and child. The answer isn’t a checklist of do’s and don’ts. If relationships were defined by a

formula, they would simply be arrangements, devoid of emotion and meaning. The wonderful thing about our children is that each one is different and relates differently to situations. The other wonderful thing is that there are principals to guide fathering, such as active listening, commitment, communication, knowing – *really knowing*- our children, protecting and providing, loving your child’s mother, and being the spiritual head of your home. How those principals take shape is very individual and very uniquely manifest.

Going back to the movie, it is obvious that working together on a common project, a common goal, can provide the “intensive care unit” for healing to take place.

In connecting with your child, find out what interests him or her. This is a part of knowing your child and you must take the initiative. Develop a project. Even if the interest is not evident, be creative. The important thing is that perfection is not the goal. Performance cannot be a source of conflict. . *Relationship* is the goal. Therefore, if the project causes you to lose sight of those around you, you’ve missed the point. Choose a project that is expendable to you. Involve the child in whom you are willing to invest your life. It’s about the time you spend together. When it seems that you’ve run out of time, beg borrow or steal to get one more week, one more day, one more hour together, And always remember to listen, listen, love, love.