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THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING SOME "ME" TIME

Throughout our hectic workaday lives as men and fathers it is not uncommon from time to time to lose a certain amount of perspective and clarity in relation to where you are going and what you want to achieve in life. It is in these times especially that you may find it beneficial and sometimes even vital for you to become a little selfish and schedule some 'Me' time. The most effective 'Me' time often involves getting away for a few days from everything and everyone that has constant access to you. It's like putting up a sign that says, 'Gone Fishing'.

Do not disturb

For many of us, our daily lives involve being plugged into everything electronic and media friendly, whether it be mobile phones, laptop computers and tablets etc. We conduct our business through many of these devices and they are extremely helpful in these endeavours, but they also place demands upon us both mentally and emotionally. I have found on occasions that the best way to maintain your long-term effectiveness in life is to unplug yourself totally for a time.

This is often as simple as hitting the OFF button and trusting that the world will keep running without you.

Getting your mind free from stress and worry

There are many things that men need to deal with daily in our modern lives and each of them take up room in our minds and emotions. Finding ways to free our thought life from stress and worry helps maintain our longevity and effectiveness in every area of life. I have found that writing down detailed lists of things we need to do and want to achieve helps get them off my mind and onto paper, so that I no longer must be concerned about forgetting something important. Once I have written down my detailed list of everything that requires my time and energy in life, whether it be family, business or any other commitments you may have, I place it in my briefcase and shut it and lock it away in the boot of my car.

The physical action of locking away my written thoughts helps my mind understand and accept that all those areas are safe and secure. Each of these areas can be addressed later at a more appropriate time, but for now I'm leaving them behind in the boot.

Throughout your 'Me' time some of the things that are written down and locked in the boot may try to resurface in your mind, it is then that you must be adamant that they are not coming with you on this adventure.

Freeing yourself to dream

Creativity is a God-given capacity that resides within each one of us, although some of us seem to be more adept at accessing it regularly. It is the capacity to come up with new and original ideas, but it is often only when we have effectively re-prioritised our minds that our true creativity can emerge. Once our minds are liberated from cares and concerns, we find a new freedom and ability to dream creative dreams for our life through the use of our imagination.

Putting things into perspective

Some of the more important times in my life when I served as a Church Pastor involved being present with families and friends of those who were about to die. Offering support and comfort to family members through these times gave me a perspective on what are the real and truly important issues that we all need to face in life. I have yet to meet a dying man who wished they had spent more time at work throughout their life, without exception I have found that the things they regret most is the lost opportunities to share their love with their family.

When it all comes down to it, most of the things we worry about in life lose their importance in the face of imminent death. To help identify the things that really matter to you in life, it may help to consider what you would miss the most if you died tomorrow.

Once those things are clearly identified you will have achieved a new perspective and are now more able to focus your energy and time into the areas that mean the most to you personally.

Plotting a new course

It is only after we have achieved a fresh perspective on life and on the things that we hold dearest in our hearts, that we are able to build a better tomorrow. A better tomorrow is one that is based upon those things that will give us true and lasting fulfilment. Where do you want to be in 20-30 years' time, and who do you want to share it with? What changes do you have to make to ensure that your relationships continue to prosper throughout your time of building your dream? A changed perspective automatically brings about changed priorities, and changed priorities require you to plot a new course in your life.

Once we have taken the time to put out the 'Do Not Disturb' sign, to re-prioritise our minds and free ourselves to dream afresh then we are able to find a fresh perspective in life and plot a more sustainable and fulfilling course for our future.

GRABBING HOLD OF HOPE

Many times in life we arrive at places or find ourselves in circumstances that we wish were different, that we wish we could change. Whether it be a job that leaves us feeling dissatisfied or the boredom of doing the same old things continually, frustration comes to us all. Sometimes while we are giving our best effort in raising children we find ourselves disappointed and discouraged as a parent.

Thankfully there are occasions when something arises in our hearts for just a fraction of a second that offers a potential way out, a light at the end of the tunnel. We see it in our hearts and feel the clarity it brings as it rises into our minds, a hope for better things to come.

When hope begins to arise in the human heart different people respond in different ways. Some people see the chance that hope brings, but immediately begin to consider all the reasons why it couldn't happen or wouldn't happen to them and they change the image of hope in their heart to an image of failure and defeat.

Another person may find themselves in a similar circumstance but respond quite differently when they see the chance that hope brings. They perceive that hope is not just a random thought floating through their mind, but that it comes with **power and a sense of destiny** attached to it. When the hope arrives in their heart and mind, they grab hold of it firmly, like a man clinging to a life-preserver amid a stormy sea. The more they hang onto it the firmer it becomes in their hands, and what began merely as potential begins to grow into an assurance that this can really happen.

The more they ponder and consider the hope that they have seen in their hearts the **stronger the image and certainty grows** inside them, that there is a way out, that better things can come into their life. I believe that often hope is not just a random thought, but is an encouraging message sent from God, our loving heavenly Father to his child. Hope shines a light upon the path that He knows will lead us out of our current circumstances and into a better future.

Hope is an anchor

There is a scripture written by the Apostle Paul that reveals a powerful principle for life it states that "Hope is an anchor for the soul of man". An anchor is a steadying influence for a ship upon the sea, it keeps it facing in the right direction even in troubled waters and stops it from being wrecked upon the rocky shoreline. (Hebrews 6:19)

Hope is a gift

Another one of my favourite scriptures reveals that God Himself is the source of hope to mankind and He imparts this as a gift to those who ask Him for it faithfully. This wonderful promise reveals that the heart of man can be filled with joy and peace as we believe and entrust our lives to Him. (Romans 15:13)

So, what are some practical steps we can take to ensure that we don't lose the chance that hope brings?

- Don't negate hope by believing the negatives that arise in your mind
- Realise that hope comes with power to bring itself to fulfilment
- Be patient and continue to believe in the hope in your heart
- Let the hope grow into a step by step plan to a better future
- · Be brave enough to act on your plan when the right time comes

Hope may only come as a glimpse, a momentary vision in our hearts but if we continue to believe in that hope it will grow stronger and a plan will begin to form in our mind.

Remember that you don't need to see the whole road first before you step out on the new journey that hope brings, every journey begins with a single step in the right direction. Step out in faith knowing that the same One who inspired the hope in your heart will continue to lead you as you travel along the road.

RESOLVING PAST ISSUES

As we progress through life, we meet many different types of people, some will become our friends for a time, but fewer will be our friends for life. Personal relationships make up a huge part of our lives as human beings, how we treat our fellow man and how they in turn treat us. Everyone is wired differently, have had different upbringings and often hold different views than us, and in truth it is these differences that often make life interesting.

Understanding and implementing the process of forgiveness helps us maintain peaceful relationships

Many may hold a different view than you on subjects like politics, morality or religion or a myriad of other subjects, and every now and then our differences bring us into conflict.

Showing respect for every person we meet in life is vital if we are to live on this world in peace, whether you agree with their world view or not.

On issues that we feel deeply about personally, we often hold very strong views. When two people meet who both hold very strong but differing views on a subject there is often conflict. Conflict left unresolved can lead to one or both people having their feelings hurt, and for some this may leave an emotional scar.

Those among us that are more sensitive emotionally are the most susceptible to being scarred. These are the type of scars that don't show on the outside, they can't be seen, but may be powerfully felt as they are scars upon our heart.

People sometimes do things or say things that wound another person emotionally and these hurts often stay in their hearts for a lifetime. These injuries may often come as we attempt to resolve issues within our marriage and with our spouse or wife. Many people deny that they have had their feelings hurt, but still feel the pain inside if the other person is seen or mentioned in conversation. If we are the one who has been hurt emotionally, we can either live with it or take steps to become free of the hurt, by implementing the process of forgiveness.

If we on the other hand have done or said something that has hurt another person, we have the responsibility to resolve the issue with them by asking for their forgiveness.

This can sometimes happen many years after the initial event but is no less powerful or useful. Forgiveness either given to another or received from another person is the pathway to peace both internal and external. "Peace on earth and goodwill among all men!" is proclaimed loudly at a certain time of the year, but it is a value that is best lived daily.

When a person is wounded emotionally, they are far more likely to then go on to hurt someone else, for we all live out of who we are on the inside.

There is a cycle that forms of people being hurt and therefore hurting others, and this cycle continues to multiply in society unless the process is broken. Forgiveness is the most powerful way to break this cycle and bring peace back into our personal relationships.

Conflicts between people are unfortunately inevitable but it's how we deal with these conflicts that can either set us and others free or leave us bound emotionally for a lifetime. For those who feel the need to be freed from the scars of the heart, I would encourage you to click on the link and read my full teaching on 'The Process of Forgiveness'.

HANDLING SORROW AND GRIEF

Sorrows' entrance into mankind

Sorrow and trouble have come as a direct result of the fall of man in the garden of Eden. Before the fall of man there was no sorrow or grief in Mankind, only the joy and peace of living in a Paradise filled with God's presence.

Read (Genesis 3 v 17-19)

God can help you deal with your sorrow effectively

We live in a fallen world where bad things often happen to good people, it is unfortunate but true that we will all face sorrow at some time in our lives. The question is not whether we will have sorrow, but how we will handle that sorrow. Many men do not naturally have the ability to handle sorrow and feel a little overwhelmed when they feel great loss. We as men tend to bottle up our emotions, thinking we may be perceived as weak or effeminate if we show grief, but the opposite is true. It takes great strength of character to come out from behind the facades we build around our emotions, and to be real.

God understands all

God knows the pain we go through as men, and the struggles we face as fathers. He sees all, feels all, knows all. We often feel like we are alone, and no-one can understand the things we are going through, but there is One who understands, One who knows the fullness of all we are facing.

Read (Exodus 3 v 7), (1 Samuel 1 v 15)

Your sorrow and grief are real

Sorrow and grief are very real emotions, they are a powerful life changing experience. If we try to ignore them they can become like a cancer inside us, that embitters us to everything in the world, and robs us of the peace and joy we long for. If we ignore these feelings, it may well be to our own detriment. It may also begin or continue a cycle in our lives of not allowing life's experiences to mould us into wiser men.

Read (Genesis 37 v 33-35)

We don't have to take our sorrow and grief to the grave, although the process to finding emotional stability and clarity may take some time.

God has walked with man experiencing our sorrow

When Jesus Christ came into the world, He did not come as a king or a ruler who was cut off from the challenges of real life. He came as a humble carpenter, who lived and loved those around Him as we do. Before He went to the cross, he experienced the deepest sorrow ever known by man, and came through ready to fulfil His destiny.

The purpose behind sorrow and grief

There is often a hidden purpose, or a positive outcome that is invisible amid the storm of sorrow and grief. This purpose can often be seen only after the season has passed, and in the wisdom of hindsight.

Read (Genesis 45 v 5)

Joseph was a man whose life seemed to go from bad to worse, but in the end, he realised that there was indeed an eternal purpose behind his path and a heavenly hand guiding and protecting him along the way. The experiences we face along life's path can be used to develop a deeper wisdom than we've known before and enable us to reach out the hand of friendship to others suffering as we have.

Read (2 Corinthians 1 v 3-4)

God's willingness to help

If God is our Creator, then He must certainly have the ability to help us, if only He were willing to do so. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are an eternal proof to man that God is willing to help man, if only man will come to Him in prayer asking.

Read (Hebrews 4 v 15), (2 Kings 22 v 19), (Job 5 v 17-27), (2 Chronicles 15 v 4)

God's promise for all who come to Him

Prayer is the way we have contact with God. Because God is a gentleman and will not transgress man's free will, He waits until we humble ourselves and ask for His forgiveness and help. Then He can release His strength and comfort into our hearts and begin to bring the emotional healing we desire.

Read (Philippians 4 v 6), (1 Peter 5 v 6), (John 16 v 33)

The answer to man's need

The answer to the problem of sorrow and grief is found being able to allow God's peace to enter into your heart. He alone can take away the power of sorrow from man and replace it with the peace our heart desires.

Read (Revelation 21 v 4), (Isaiah 35 v 10)

God alone has the power and ability to make sorrow and sighing flee away from our hearts, and to fill that space with peace and clarity beyond anything we have ever known. However, because we are all individuals and our experiences of life differ sometimes God will lead us to get professional help from counsellors or phycologists to help us get through difficult times.

The process

The process of being able to receive God's healing and strengthening in our emotions is often outworked over a period of time, depending upon the individual and circumstances. Nevertheless, **the process is an exchange**, we must ask God to help us to yield or give our sorrow and grief to Him as we are experiencing it, and then we must receive His peace and comfort in place of it. God freely gives us of His Holy Spirit, that we may share in His peace and comfort, even amid difficult circumstances. As men and fathers who are responsible for raising sons and daughters, it is important that we take the time we need to allow the healing process within our hearts.

WINNING THE BATTLES OF LIFE

As men and fathers, we will face many challenges throughout our lives, some of these will be overcome relatively easily while others may prove incredibly difficult to endure. Ultimately it is how we face these challenges that often decides whether we arise victorious from them. Being prepared before you ever face the battle gives you a far better chance of success.

Preparation gives us the best chance for success as fathers

Following are some suggestions to help us as fathers arise victorious from the battles that come our way throughout life:

Create a battle plan

Every man who is raising children needs to be as prepared as they possibly can be for the unexpected events of life. Taking some time to consider how you would be able to react in different circumstances strengthens your overall effectiveness as a parent and improve your parenting decisions.

Although it's impossible to be prepared for everything that may eventuate in life, having a broad plan or strategy at least gives you a track to run on.

Protecting loved ones

In medieval times there were many castles throughout England and Europe and these were usually owned by a regional Lord or Ruler. It was his role to protect the surrounding villagers by defending them from any invading forces of the enemy. When an enemy army was sighted the local populations were protected behind the walls of the castle or stronghold.

One of the primary roles of a father is to protect his family at all costs, like those regional Lords we need to ensure that our loved ones are safe during difficult times.

Increasing security

Wise Lords spent time improving the defences of their castles long before the enemy was ever sighted. They used methods and strategies that had proven successful over many years in stopping an enemy from breaking into their fortification. Some of these strategies included the digging of moats around the castles base and raising a drawbridge thereby cutting off the enemies' access into the castle.

As fathers we need to create an environment of peace and safety for our family, we should ensure that all access points into our home are secure.

Improving lines of sight

In the peaceful years between attacks the Rulers and Lords often cleared the surrounding forest thereby restricting the possibility of surprise attacks, as the enemy could be seen coming a long way off. Farsightedness and awareness are still useful today in our parenting role and it assists us to be prepared early enough to effectively protect our family.

Creating alliances

Building relationships with other regional Lords and Rulers was advantageous as they could combine their forces together to defend successfully or even attack the enemy. Wise fathers realise that creating friendships with your neighbours is helpful in case you need backup or advice in any situation you may face. Being part of a local dad network has many advantages including multiplied insights and ideas on fathering.

Preparing supplies beforehand

One of the most effective ways to strengthen your ability to ward off an enemy's attack in medieval times was to constantly have supplies laid up in storage in case of need. Food, water and weapons were set aside within the castle permanently and the supplies refreshed regularly. Often it might be those very reserves that gave you the victory as the enemy grew impatient and passed on to another region in search of easier pickings. As a father this could be realising that our financial position could change quickly if I'm made redundant at work etc. and setting some extra money aside for tough times.

Having a battle plan improves our ability to function in our role as a father and protector. It gives us the confidence we need to keep a cool head and make the right decisions in stressful situations. Life sometimes throws up surprises that come upon us like an attacking enemy but being prepared beforehand gives us as fathers the best chance of arising victorious.

AVOIDING BRINGING STRESS HOME

As a father we normally have the main role as breadwinner/provider for our family, and this most often requires that we spend large amounts of time away from them whilst at work. These times of separation are made easier in the knowledge that we are enabling our family financially to have food on the table and a roof over their heads.

Fathers are usually the parent who is tasked with 'bringing home the bacon', but it's not just the bacon but often the cares and worries from our work lives that we also 'bring home'. Unfortunately many fathers are being required to work longer and longer hours in jobs that are often in very high pressure environments.

Man is not designed to function under high levels of stress for long periods of time.

Unless a father develops the ability to off-load the cares and worries of his work environment before he gets home, he can often transfer some of that stress to his family. This will often have a negative effect upon the level of peace in the home, and the father will begin to alienate the very people he sacrifices daily to support.

Understanding the processes that continually build up the stress levels in our lives is crucial if we are to develop effective strategies to combat them. Identifying the tell-tale signs of stress build up helps men manage their mental and emotional state earlier and restricts the possibility of things spiralling out of control.

Alleviating the existing stress levels through enacting procedures that bring peace into our hearts and minds ensures that we stay on top of the situation.

Often we are able to relieve stress build up by simply taking a few minutes and changing our thought patterns. This can be achieved by going for a walk or sitting in a park, many people find peace by entering into prayer or meditation. The key is to identify the actions that assist you in finding peace and release from the build up of internal stress; these actions may be different for each person.

Some simple suggestions that may assist you in arriving home ready to take up your all important role as a father:

- 1. Take public transport to and from work and use the time to alleviate stress on the way home
- 2. Get off the bus/train one stop early and walk home briskly, the exercise will do you good mentally and physically
- 3. Find an employer who understands and promotes a work/family life balance
- 4. Don't allow daily challenges to rob your focus from your ultimate goals
- 5. Get out of the office for lunch as often as possible.

Ultimately fathers go to work to provide for the benefit of their families, and the finances they are able to 'bring home' enable the family to function properly. If the stresses of their work environment are not dealt with effectively before they get home it can pollute the peace of the home and the entire family may be impacted.

It is very important that we as fathers are able to **put off** our 'work worries' and be free enough mentally and emotionally to **put on** our role as a father to our children and husband to our wife. These skills may take

THE POWER OF CHOICE

Every man born upon the earth arrives with a great responsibility, and that is the ability to choose his own path in life. Our **free will** is a precious gift from God that is worth protecting at all costs, for there are those who would try to usurp our ability to choose and enforce their own will upon us. Protecting ourselves and our loved ones from enslavement to the will of malevolent forces is part of the father's role in family life.

Back in the Garden of Eden man was given a free will as part of his humanity when God breathed life into him. But man was also presented with choices either to obey or to disobey God's will. In the garden there was every kind of tree that was good for food and man could eat from any of them **except** the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God gave man a free will and an opportunity to exercise that free will so that man could learn the benefits of obedience to God. (Read Genesis 2: 15-17)

God is a kind and loving creator whose greatest desire is to love and be loved by those whom He has created.

God had already made the angels previously, but they were not endowed with a free will, and therefore could not satisfy God's yearning for loving children. The **ability to choose** made man the perfect candidate to enjoy eternity with God, as it enabled him to live in a joyful relationship with his creator.

Lucifer was originally an angel of God, but when he formed sin within himself, he was judged by God and thrown out of heaven and became known as **Satan or the Devil**. Now Satan hates God and mankind whom God had made in His own image and likeness, and therefore Satan took it upon himself to destroy men as an act of revenge. Satan devised a cunning plan to deceive Adam and Eve into disobeying God's will by eating from the tree that they were not allowed to partake of. (Read Genesis 3: 1-7)

As a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience **the sinful nature** of Satan and the Death that comes with it entered man and they were banished from the Garden of Eden.

Now every child born on earth as descendants of Adam and Eve is born with both a free will and a propensity to use it for evil. Therefore, God enacted His **great plan of salvation** for mankind through Jesus Christ that He might restore us back into relationship with Himself.

Satan continues to enforce 'his will' upon fallen man through the power of the sinful nature, and through it even though man may desire to do good, we all ultimately also do evil. The sinful nature compels man and drives man into evil acts against God and against each other. And yet there is still hope for man as we **still retain our free will** and can choose another path, God's path for our lives.

God is a gentleman and would never force Himself upon anyone but offers the free gift of salvation to all who believe in His Son Jesus.

Surely if we as men are to exercise our free will in this world it should be a choice that leads us to life and away from the death that the sinful nature brings. As a father we hold great influence over our own family and can lead them forward either **towards the light** or **back into darkness**, it's our choice!

Christian parents have the benefit of the wisdom and strength that comes through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

FREEING THE TROUBLED SOUL

In human life we go through many experiences, some are wonderfully encouraging while others can be decidedly negative. Throughout our lifetime these experiences are deposited into a vault or repository of the soul that is filled with personal memories and accompanied by many of the emotions we felt through those incidents. We draw from this storehouse of memories and emotions in our everyday interactions with others and to a certain extent they make up who we are and what we believe about ourselves and the world in general.

Thankfully it is possible to selectively choose much of what goes into this vault and thereby build up a stronghold of positive memories and emotions from which to draw upon in life.

It is empowering to realise that what we allow to be placed in the vault is what comes out of the vault. Someone somewhere coined the phrase GIGO Good In, Good Out or alternately Garbage In, Garbage Out.

It is therefore incredibly important to place a mental guard over the door to and screen everything that is seeking entrance into our soul.

If we could place all our positive and negative memories and emotions on a balance scale I wonder in which direction they would tip? Would all the positive experiences of our life tip the balance toward the good or have the negative experiences we have faced forced the balance down toward the bad side? **Unfortunately,** in many instances it is the memory of the bad experiences we have faced that seem at times to take precedence in our hearts and weigh us down mentally and emotionally.

How wonderful it would be if we could go into the vault and clean out the bad experiences and their effects upon us. If only we could get a fresh start and begin to replace them with experiences and emotions that would only benefit our lives.

What a relief it would be if we could get out from under the weight of our disappointments, our failures and shame or our grief and fears, and walk free from those memories that have held us prisoner for so long. Well the good news is that to a large extent you can!

The answer however is not merely mental or emotional but based in an area that overrides and governs these aspects of life. The area I speak of is the spiritual aspect of our humanity, and it is within this area that we will find the freedom we long for. It is freedom that is not found by hiding away in a cave and chanting mantras, or by finding some celestial plain of peace through meditation for each of these pursuits are still based in human endeavour and therefore ultimately destined for failure.

The answer is found in a personal relationship with our Creator and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Only the One who made us truly knows how to fix us when we are broken. To some extent every negative experience we have gone through in life has brought a degree of brokenness or emotional damage into our lives. To be set free from our past we need to have our hearts transformed and renewed by allowing God our Creator to also become God our Saviour.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Being born again involves allowing God our Creator to be the Ruler and Saviour of your life and is accessed by believing in the resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus rose from the dead having conquered even 'death' itself and offers a new life to all who believe in and are willing to follow Him.

When we are born again God's Holy Spirit enters our lives and takes away the power or hold that those negative experiences had upon our lives. Jesus willing sacrifice on the cross paid the price for our sins and our shame, and by believing in Him we receive God's forgiveness.

The new life that begins is the most wonderful adventure, an adventure that is filled with life changing experiences and the blessing of enjoying eternity in Heaven with Him. Christian parenting is enabled through the daily reading of God's Words in the Bible and applying them in family life.

Developing a relationship with Jesus Christ is done through daily prayer and study of His Word as written in The Bible. Through the Bible we begin to understand what life was truly meant to be and still can be within the blessing of living in God's will for our lives.

Bit by bit, day by day we begin to restock the repository of our life and are enabled then to live out of the new experiences and beliefs that come through knowing Jesus Christ.

Christian parenting grows considerably easier the closer we get to God in our personal relationship.

The Ministry Of Dads' UNI

Dads' UNI is an Online Ministry based in Australia and is focused on providing simple biblical teaching to assist young men in Growing Families God's Way.

All Dads' UNI resources are provided free of charge, and we encourage those who enjoy our teachings to share them freely among family and friends.

Dads' UNI can be found online in the following locations:

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Dadsuni/

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/dadsuni/

You Tube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV1vuth1FMmKxiJw_xQZpQg

Website: https://www.dadsuni.com/

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We would also like to thank the Photographer for our wonderful Cover Photo

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