Sermon Title: Straight Talk to Men on Father's Day

Text: 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 -- Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.

Introduction: Over the last twenty years, research has consistently shown that fathers have a unique way of engaging with small children. It turns out that horsing around is more common among fathers than among mothers, especially as infants grow into toddlers and preschoolers. **Studies show vigorous bouncing, lifting, tossing, and chasing take over from more gentle play, and this roughhousing leads to better self-control and school readiness as children turn five**. It is also connected to better gross-motor skills (*i.e., the skills necessary for walking, running and jumping*) in the child. A vast study, published in the journal **Pediatric Research** in the **summer of 2023** adds weight to the idea that a father's **hands-on involvement** underpins a child's later ability to self-regulate and problem-solve. **A research team from Japan sampled 28,040 children. At intervals of six months, from one month of age to their third birthday, each child's mother was asked to rate the father's participation in early child-rearing, including feeding, changing diapers, bathing, dressing, playing at home or outdoors, and putting the child to sleep**. Japanese fathers are typically less involved in child-rearing than North American fathers. But when the researchers examined the children's milestones at age three, they discovered that ***children whose fathers invested more time in their care showed better gross and fine motor skills, problem solving, and social skills than children whose fathers were not as involved*. The lead researcher concluded that "the risk of developmental delay in children with highly involved fathers was 24% lower."** (*Susan Pinker, "The Long-Term Benefits of Hands-On Fathering," The Wall Street Journal (9-21-23))*

As Christians, we understand the importance of the role that fathers play in families. We know that in homes where dad is either absent or neglectful of his duties, the children suffer most of all, and dysfunction is the common result. This morning, I want to take you to a very short passage at the end of **1 Corinthians** where **Paul gives five commands to the Corinthians, and in particular to their men, about how they should conduct themselves as followers of Christ as they seek to impact their families and churches for His glory**. Let's discover together what God has to say to Christian men in these verses as we celebrate Father's Day together.

Be Watchful! The term can be translated "**awake**" as it is in **1 Thessalonians 5:10 -- He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him**. This was a necessary exhortation for the Corinthian church, which was prone to all kinds of moral slumber. They struggled with **FACTIONS** (**See 1 Corinthians 1:10-13**); **SEXUAL IMMORALITY** (**See 1 Corinthians 5:1-2**); **LAWSUITS** (**See 1 Corinthians 6:1-6**); **MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY** (**See 1 Corinthians 7**); **INDIFFERENCE TO OTHERS** (**See 1 Corinthians 10:23-33**), and an assortment of other issues.

A quick survey of the New Testament leads us to **five warnings that believers should be awake to,** if we're going to make our lives count for Christ.

- **Be alert for the devil** (**1 Peter 5:8 -- Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour**). He is our enemy and is seeking to swallow us up. That is how the same word is used in **Hebrews 11:29** of the Egyptians who pursued Moses. The Red Sea swallowed them up. Satan is crafty and should not be ignorant of his schemes (**See Ephesians 6:11**).
- **Be alert for apathy. To the church in Sardis, God said, "Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you"** (**Revelation 3:3**). **For whatever reason, they had neglected the Word of God**. By definition, an apathetic person is insensitive and unalert. The believers at Sardis were so indifferent to the Lord's will that they were unaware of their apathy toward Him. **Listen, fathers, the only way to guard against apathy is to pursue the things of God with great vigor**.

- **Be alert in prayer** (**Colossians 4:2 -- Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving**). Fathers should always be vigilant in prayer for their wives and children. This leads me to a couple of questions: How often do you pray for your family? And what do you pray for your family? **I would encourage you to pray that they will lead and holy and useful life for the Lord**.
- **Be alert for the Lord's return** -- **1 Thessalonians 5:5-6** – After warning that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, Paul writes, "**We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober**". One of the great motivations that we have for faithfully following Christ is knowing that He can return at any moment! **The Day of the Lord will come like a 'thief in the night.'** When He comes back for His church, we want to be found walking in obedience to His Word.
- **Be alert for temptation** (**Mark 14:38 –** Jesus said to Peter, James and John who had fallen asleep while waiting for Him in the Garden of Gethsemane -- **Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak**). Jesus told his disciples to keep watch and pray lest they fall into temptation. The point is that we are most prone to temptation when we let down our guard. Because the disciples did not follow Christ's instructions, they gave in to the temptation to abandon Christ when He was arrested and put on trial.

  As Christian men and fathers, we would do well to heed these warnings. While it may be easy to wink at a temptation or to become apathetic toward the things of God, those who do so will often discover too late that they have maneuvered themselves into serious trouble.

  SERIOUS TROUBLE is what some amateur Massachusetts tuna fisherman found themselves in during the 1998 fishing season. For the first time in **forty-seven years**, the tuna were running only thirty miles off **Cape Cod**. And they were biting! Best of all, you didn't have to be a professional to catch them; all you needed was a sharp hook and some bait. The rewards for doing so were substantial. Some reports said that Japanese buyers were willing to pay at the time up to $50,000 for a large bluefin tuna. As a result, many ignored the Coast Guard warnings and headed out to sea in small boats. What these new fishermen didn't realize was that the problem was not catching a tuna—the problem came after the large fish was caught. **On September 23, the *Christi Anne*, a nineteen-foot boat, capsized while doing battle with a tuna**. That same day, the twenty-seven-foot boat, ***Basic Instinct*,** suffered the same fate. Still another boat called ***Official Business***, a twenty-eight-foot vessel, was swamped after it hooked onto a six-hundred-pound tuna. The fish literally pulled it underwater. These fishermen underestimated the power of the fish they were trying to catch. **In the same way, the devil, spiritual apathy, a lack of faithfulness in prayer, failing to recognize that the Lord could return at any moment and temptation** can devastate the lives of men and their families who are ill-prepared for their assault. **(Review: Be Watchful)**

Be Firm. **Here, Paul admonishes men to stand firm in the faith**. This is not referring to our faithfulness to God, but to ***the*** faith which has been presented to us in Christ. It is the message of the Gospel, having been delivered once for all to the saints (**See Jude 3**). It is that for which we are to '**fight the good fight** (**See 1 Timothy 6:12**).' This truth is the very thing for which the Apostles were willing to suffer greatly (**See Acts 4:18-20**), knowing that to abandon it would result in a meaningless, works-based religion.

Though saving faith can never be taken away from us, the content of what we believe can and unfortunately does become distorted. **This happened in Corinth as human wisdom and philosophy took precedence over truth** (**1 Corinthians 1:20-23 -- Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles**). The church had arrived at this place because godly

men had failed in their duties to champion the gospel and expose the foolish arguments and philosophies that were prevalent in the first-century Greek world.

Though the times have changed, the humanistic arguments that have assailed the church for centuries have not. In the final analysis, the world continues to promote the wisdom and worship of man. **Today, the big word is autonomy – the right for people to govern themselves**. **Just this week, I heard that the state of New York has a bill on Governor Hochul's desk for assisted suicide for a terminal illness or condition that is deemed medically incurable and will, within reasonable medical judgment, result in death within six months**. Besides the fact that in every case where euthanasia has been legalized, suicide numbers have soared, this is a clear violation of Scripture. Essentially, a person seeking assisted suicide is seeking to euthanize himself, with the aid of another person to ensure that death is quick and painless. By taking a "hands-off" approach to the death itself, the facilitator seeks to avoid charges of murder. Proponents of assisted suicide try for a positive spin by using terms like "**death with dignity**." But "**death with dignity**" is STILL DEATH, "**assisted suicide**" is STILL SUICIDE, and suicide is wrong. **The overriding truth that God is sovereign drives us to the conclusion that euthanasia and assisted suicide are wrong**. We live in what is sometimes described as a "**culture of death**." Abortion on demand has been practiced for decades. Now, some are seriously proposing infanticide (**i.e., killing unborn children because of a personal defect**). And euthanasia is promoted as a viable means of solving various social and financial problems. This focus on death as an answer to the world's problems is a total reversal of the biblical model. Death is an enemy in Scripture (**1 Corinthians 15:26**). Life is a sacred gift from God (See **Genesis 2:7**). When given the choice between life and death, God told Israel to "choose life" (**Deuteronomy 30:19**). **Euthanasia spurns the gift and embraces the curse**. God alone is sovereign over when and how a person's death occurs. Job testifies in **Job 30:23, "I know you will bring me down to death, to the place appointed for all the living**." **Ecclesiastes 8:8** declares, "**No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death**." God has the final say over death. **Euthanasia and assisted suicide are man's attempts to usurp that authority from God**.

This is just one of the many moral issues facing our families. As Christian leaders in the home and church, fathers must stand firm in our convictions born of the truth of God's Word and have an answer for those confused by the conventional wisdom of the world, particularly our children. More and more, they are being exposed to truth claims that are wholly and completely opposed to the teachings of Scripture. **To drop the ball here is to risk losing our families to the god of this age**. (**Review: Be Watchful; Be Firm.)**

Be Mature! The phrase in **verse thirteen** means to '***act like men***.' The basic idea is ***mature courage***. It's manifested in a sense of self-control and confidence that is not seen in the immature or childish person. Again, the Corinthians were anything but mature. Paul told them in **chapter three** that he was not able to speak to them as mature believers, but as mere infants in Christ. As a result, he could not give them solid (**doctrinal and theological**) food, but instead Paul had to teach them the elemental things of the faith once again (See **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**). Later, Paul said that maturity is one of the identifying characteristics of love (**1 Corinthians 13:11-13 -- When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love**). It is seen in the life of the man or woman who has learned to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit (**See Galatians 5:22**) and who can speak truth in love so that others grow up in Christ (**See Ephesians 4:15**).

The difference between a mature man and an immature one is often seen in their responses to trials. **The former is able to exercise self-control and do the right thing, knowing that the Lord is His helper** (**See Hebrews 13:6**), **while the latter comes apart at the first sign of peril**. Children want a father who does not

panic when the road ahead becomes difficult. They want the stability of someone who has walked with Christ and therefore possesses the confidence to trust Him with any situation.

Don't be discouraged if you feel you're not there yet. You can still become a man that your children will look up to**. In *The Last Days Newsletter*, Leonard Ravenhill tells about a group of tourists visiting a picturesque village who walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked, "Were any great men born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies." A frothy question brought a profound answer. There are no instant heroes--whether in this world or in the kingdom of God. Growth takes time, and even spiritual leadership must be earned. (Review: Be watchful, Be Firm in Your Faith, Be Mature.)**

Be Strong! The verb here is in the passive voice, so that it means "**be strengthened**." In other words, men do not have the ability to strengthen themselves. That comes from God. The man who believes he is strong apart from Christ is subject to a great fall (**1 Corinthians 10:12 -- Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall**). **In his days as a Pharisee, Saul was prideful and self-absorbed** (**See Philippians 3:4-6**). **When he became a believer in Jesus Christ, he wrote**, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**" (**Philippians 4:13**). A true man of God learns to find his strength and resolve in a source other than himself, drawing upon that endless supply that comes from God. In the final analysis, our children know that Goliath was defeated by a boy who found his strength in the Lord. So, it must be with us.

Be Loving! Love brings everything else in these verses into balance. **It keeps firmness from becoming hardness and strength from becoming intimidation**. As it says in **1 Corinthians 13:7-8 -- love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. It never fails**. As fathers and godly men, we must do all we can to love our families with the very same love that God has for us.

Review: **BE WATCHFUL** -- **the devil, spiritual apathy, a lack of faithfulness in prayer, failing to recognize that the Lord could return at any moment and temptation are always knocking at the door; BE FIRM IN THE FAITH – Those who have no convictions are prone to believe nearly anything; BE MATURE -- a picture of what a mature Christian man ought to be; BE STRONG – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me; BE LOVING – It brings everything we've talked about into balance.**

Conclusion: In an article entitled ***Lite Fare* in Leadership Magazine**, **Al Serhol from Oakford, Indiana,** wrote: It has been said that '***a child is not likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father***." "**Recently**," he said, "**I asked the preschool class in our Sunday school to draw a picture of God. I intended to use them as an illustration for my Sunday sermon. Toward the end of class, the children were excited to show me their work. They came up with rainbows and men with big hands. Finally, my daughter showed me her picture: a man with a suit and tie on. 'I don't know what God looks like,' she said, 'so I just drew my daddy instead**.'" **Oh, how I hope that your children will do the same if asked to describe what God is like**. Men—I charge you to live out the Christian life with such consistency and passion in your home (**in an alert, firm, manly, strong and loving manner**) that those precious gifts of God entrusted to your care will never doubt your love for God or them.