**FATHERS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**FELIX ALLEN**

Hello everyone and Happy Father’s Day! I would like to thank all of you for being here, for sharing this moment, and for allowing me the opportunity to speak to all of you while we remind ourselves of the importance of fathers, their rolls in ... or on the fringes of... life, and what it truly means to be a father.

So... what does it mean? The simple definition of “father” is not so simple. If we just quickly check the dictionary, we’d find at least fifteen definitions of the word. From “male parent” to “any male ancestor,” “a man who exercises parental control,” “the oldest member of a society or organization,” “a priest,” “a prototype,” .... all describe to us the word “father,” but we all know the term... or terms... the person... the influence on our lives, is so much deeper and more powerful than simple definitions might ever express.

In our lives, as we acknowledge our blessings, we know that the best guides we have to teach us about fatherhood can be found in our faith because we, who believe... or we who are at least open to possibility... find solace and strength in the Lord, our greatest example of what fatherhood truly means.

In Proverbs 22:6 we learn, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” The context of fatherhood is formed with love and protection, wisdom and integrity, firmness and the willingness to learn while teaching. An authentic and committed father understands the responsibility of his legacy and knows the importance of providing a framework that includes respect, honor, duty, and love. To dwell in the kingdom of fatherhood means to understand that there are people that look up to you and so it is our duty and honor to lead by example... with love and purpose and the intention to provide guidance and lessons that will transcend time and whatever tests and challenges life may throw our way.

To paraphrase Ezra Taft Benson, “Fatherhood is not a matter of station or wealth. It is a matter of desire, diligence, determination and the understanding that one’s involvement and commitment to see one’s family exalted in the celestial kingdom is what counts. If that prize is lost, nothing else really matters.” We also must bear in mind to be patient... to suspend judgement, and to do our best to resist the temptation to “look onto other people’s plates.” Fatherhood is not a contest nor is it a life sentence... in a bad way. What fatherhood means to me is an opportunity to learn, to appreciate, and to reach down into my own soul to search for what it means and meant to me to have a father, to be a father, and to prepare the future generations to be as present, loving, and guiding as they grow up and seek their own stations in the world of parenthood.

I am proud to say that I was blessed to have the father I had. He was an example, a roll model, a disciplinarian, and my biggest fan. (**Name your father**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was a serious example of ethics and purpose. He was a very hard working man who loved his family above all and he made sure to let us know that. He was also not one bit bashful to remind us just how he took care of **everything**. He worked all of his life until he retired and we all moved to Florida. Even though it seemed like he was always working, my dad led by example and demonstrated unflagging dedication to supporting me in every way he could. I can tell you he **NEVER** missed **ANY** of my school performances with the choir or any other events in which I participated... and I know... because I **CHECKED**!! I would always look out for my dad in every audience.... and he was there. **PRESENT**. He had my back and that meant so much to me....

I remember my father taking me to Publix to fill out an application for employment, and he made sure to remind me, “You have to work for what you want.” Those were simple, powerful, guiding words and even in their simplicity, their impact remains.... He told me that thirty two years ago.... How do I remember the exact date? It’s easy... that’s how long I’ve been employed at Publix and I worked my way up to Retail Distribution Manager following my father’s example and work ethic. My father taught me the lesson of a lifetime in one sentence. I also remember that on my first day of work, he shared, “In everything you do, for anything they ask you to do, make sure to give **ONE HUNDRED PERCENT**. Give your all.” And I did. And I do. And I freely share that wisdom. It works.

I learned so much from my father and I believe it’s important for fathers everywhere and anywhere to possess and share these three points:

* **Discipline**... you need to have it to keep you on the right path and you need to know when to dish it out to make sure your children understand what is expected of them.
* **Determination**- none of us will grow, learn and be senior to our circumstances... whatever they may be, if we are not focused.
* **Dedication**- we all get one life and whether or not we realize all of our blessings, they are **THERE**... everything in life is a blessing, a lesson, and a gift. Show your dedication to your own life and the quality of life of your family and your children.

My father taught me, “Never settle for being average. Average is just on top of being at the bottom.” You know what? I have found that those are words that I live by.... and in case anyone is wondering.... that sentiment applies to **ALL OF US**... it doesn’t matter if we are or are **NOT** currently fathers. We are all sons. We all have a place on this earth and a mission to leave this world and those in our lives in a better place than where we... and they, may have started.

Proverbs 23:24 tells us, “The father of one who is right with God will have much joy. He who has a wise son will be glad in him....” Every day I strive to honor my father, may he Rest In Peace, my family, and my faith, and every day that I have been a father to my three beautiful daughters, I am inspired by my father’s wisdom, dedication, and spirit, and in turn I strive to do more than my best to share those life lessons with my daughters.

As I was preparing to speak with all of you, naturally I began to think of what it’s been like to be a father. For me, fatherhood has been the greatest honor, challenge and purpose in my life. I realize that in order to be that person to whom one’s family looks to for love and strength, I had to love **myself**. I believe that it’s important to love who you are and what you represent in your life.... in your family... in your community....because let’s face it... the term “family” doesn’t stop at the front door of our homes. Every group, every community, whether comprised of neighbors, friends, school mates, teammates, or professional colleagues, is inspired by the “family dynamic.” Although we’re speaking of and focusing on fatherhood today, I believe my “words of wisdom” can apply to any and every relationship we have, so here goes:

* Remember to have pride in who you are and the contribution you make and the potential you have to inspire and influence people in your life.... whether positively or negatively. Be conscious of your actions and words and be responsible for their impact on those you love... or maybe even just **like**... (**Wait for the laugh**). Remember as a father or a father figure, you’re a leader. You represent the head... the conscience... the thoughtfulness.... the consideration... and **NOT** the tail!!
* Be conscious and aware of the importance that you, as the **father figure**.... no matter how young you might be, are blessed and mandated to take care of your family. No one is expecting you to be perfect, but you must be willing to care. Be willing to **LEARN**. Be willing to **GROW** and to **LEAD** your family. We are all at a crucial place in the world.... in our society... our country... our communities, and mostly in our families... because that’s where **EVERYTHING** begins.... and in order to break the cycles of dysfunction and broken families, we must start **SOMEWHERE**... and that’s **AT HOME**. If anyone is sitting here and shaking his head thinking “I don’t know where to start.... there’s too much noise...too many problems... so much confusion....**SURPRISE**!!!! You’re **HERE**!!! You’ve **ALREADY** started the process!!!

One of the greatest gifts God gives us is the ability to be a dad, a husband, a friend, and a good, decent, and honorable example of **POSSIBILITY**. I once heard someone on TV say, “I found out pretty early on that I’m a pretty bad father. I make a lot of mistakes. Most of the time I don’t have any idea of what I’m doing... but my kids love me anyway... Go figure.” His kids love him and your kids do or will love you because kids are smart. They have intuition. They know that even though they would prefer that you are perfect, you’re **HUMAN**, and that’s the whole point.... being alive and being on this earth is one **HUGE** experiment that **NEVER** ends. No one has all of the answers but one thing is for sure.... we know the difference between right and wrong. When we have children...at the time we become fathers.... we give up the option to be lazy, irresponsible, and uninvolved. When we become fathers, that’s the time to really **SEE** what’s in front of you and to really **FEEL** what it’s like to care more about that little, helpless human being more than you care about whatever passing whim or pleasure catches your eye. When we become fathers, it’s time to **GROW UP** and rewrite our personal history... because we **HAVE TO**. It’s **THAT** important.

As we grow up and as we grow older, it’s natural to be exposed to, and take on, more and more responsibility. Fatherhood is one of those life changes that cause us to grow up quickly.... it’s been said that Mark Twain, the famous author said, “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant that I could hardly stand to have the old man around but when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much **he** had learned in just seven years....” That was backed up by the words of the late TV commentator, Tim Russert. “The older I get, the smarter my father seems to get.” My friends, it’s like I said.... it’s up to US to learn every single day.

I imagine that some of you here today may have challenging situations at home. I think we all understand that and if you’re in that situation, you have a community around you to help you get through the hard parts in life. But whatever you do, know that you are strong. You are powerful. You have faith and curiosity and you also have what it takes to be stronger than the limitations you think you have. I bet every person in this congregation, at one time or another wanted to give up and take the easy way out... You know, just walk away and wipe your hands clean of the situation, but that’s not how it works, no matter how much we want to kick back. Think of the words of Jerry Lewis who said, “When I was a kid, one afternoon I said to my father, ‘Daddy, will you take me to the zoo?’ He answered, ‘If the zoo wants you badly enough, let them come and pick you up!” (**Wait for the laugh**). That makes a funny joke, but we all know that really, in life, **THAT DOESN’T WORK**. If you’re old enough to **BECOME** a father, you’re **MATURE** enough to **BE** a father.

Proverbs 4:1-9 teaches us: “Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth...”

I am grateful to have had the father I was blessed to have. I am grateful and humbled to have the chance to pass my father’s love and wisdom into my daughters. One of God’s greatest gifts for men is the ability to be a dad, husband, and friend. I love my family because they are so much more than that. They are my life!!! (**If your family is there, perhaps you should introduce or at least acknowledge/thank them**) I am blessed to have my wife, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ here today along with my daughters, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Together we make a great team and I thank them for inspiring me to be a loving husband and a devoted and proud father. Thank you all... may God bless, and Happy Father’s Day!