For Your Tomorrow, We Gave our Today

How we handle this historical moment will have far reaching consequences.

If we continue to allow our communities and churches to be the places where fatherhood is neutralized and family is destroyed, we will have mishandled our watch. How we respond now, with the days and hours that have been delivered into our hands, can help to swing the trends working in the church for many generations. If we handle ourselves well in this area, we can swing the trends back in a healthy direction.

I do believe that God is sovereign and that he can do anything He wants to do without any of our help. But the reality is, He has called us to co labor with Him for His purpose.

The moment is upon us and we dare not rest in our traditions while they slowly put us to death.

The historical moment that is upon us reminds me of one of the bloodiest battles in Marine history. It was the most unusual battle in history – the WWII battle for Iwo Jima.

What happened there on that very small island during a 36 day period, tipped the scales and brought an end to the war with Japan. Iwo Jima was a very small place where very big things were accomplished. It is a two and a half by five mile island (eight square miles), located 600 miles off the coast of Japan.

My father was there.

As the island was being secured by the US Marine Corps, he flew P51 Mustang fighter planes on strafing and napalm raids to secure the north end of the island and then to protect B29’s on their bombing raids on mainland Japan. These bombing raids were the death knell to Japanese military capability. They were essential in causing the Japanese surrender. These raids had destroyed 65 of their major cities, so that when we dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan had already collapsed, even though they still wanted to fight.

We need sacrificial men willing to pay the price

Iwo Jima was the bloodiest Marine battle in military history. On that small island, The United States Marine Corps took a hellish beating. The courage that was displayed there meant that they would receive more medals of honor than any other group in military history.

The Japanese were dug into a vast sixteen-mile matrix of tunnels going down six stories and three levels. Japanese soldiers had hollowed out the inside of Mt.
Suribachi, a 500 foot high hill overlooking the island, into a honeycomb-like killing machine of bunkers and artillery positions.

Thousands of marines were slaughtered on the naked beaches and scorched earth under an unrelenting hail of enfilade fire from which there was no cover or protection. These conditions made a US victory almost impossible.

My father was there, first in a foxhole for two weeks, and then, after the airfields were secured, as an Army Air Corps P51 Mustang pilot who protected B29’s on bombing raids on mainland Japan, bombed Japanese targets, strafed villages, and dropped Napalm on enemy cities.

My friend, Raleigh businessman, Bill Henderson was also there. Bill was with the Fifth Marine division on D day on Iwo and lived to finish the battle and secure the island thirty six days later. On the morning of D Day, Bill started with 1175 men in his outfit. By the end of the day, they had 75 men left.

Admiral Nimitz, who was the commander of the Pacific theatre of the war remarked that with these men,

“Uncommon valor was a common virtue.”

We live in times that are begging for men of uncommon valor.

For my purposes here, the uncommon valor needed today is for the reformation of common fatherhood practices that are lived out in the home and encouraged by the church.

The family and the church is a small corner of the world and it will take a Herculean effort to save her. But even though she is small, she can have a massive impact for generations.

This is a call to self-sacrifice.

We are calling men to abandon their own traditions and plans and the plans that our Christian culture has engrained on the landscape of our churches.

We are calling for men to return to the Biblical order that the Law and prophets and historical writers and poets delivered in the Old Testament.

We are asking fathers to rise up and act for God’s glory for the coming generations.

Men have unwittingly relinquished their God given roles as leaders of their homes and churches and teachers of their children, and the fatherless go uncared for.
Thankfully, there is a new generation of men who are rising up. They are going back to the Bible for their roadmap. They are becoming teachers of the next generation.

Here is what Bill Henderson writes about what he saw on the last day of the Battle for Iwo Jima:

“Finally, on March 26 we secured the island and they gave us orders to pick up our gear and that we were going to be evacuated and taken back to our base camp. As we did, we struggled down the road. We were a rag tag bunch, and a miserable looking outfit.

No other outfit had ever seen combat for 37 days of intense direct conflict. In other long battles, the conflict would go on for a few days and then back off, but not on Iwo Jima. No other outfit was involved in this kind of combat for 37 days. No one had shaven for six weeks. Of course I was crusted with sweat and rain and volcanic ash dried on. We were a crummy looking outfit. Our eyes were sunken from our lack of sleep. They were blurred from the horrors we had seen.

As we marched down the beach, we detoured around to go by the Fifth Marine Division’s cemetery. At first we were stumbling along, but as we got closer and closer to the cemetery I noticed something happening. The men started to march. They formed themselves up in order, and instead of stumbling on, they were marching. Those who were limping no longer were limping. When we got to the cemetery everyone was standing ramrod straight. There was not one limping. Something had happened to them. There was a sense of awe and reverence. As I left I saw an epitaph which was written on an ammunitions carton. It is engraved on my mind. It read:

“When you go home, tell them for us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today”.

We stumbled off the beach and got on the boats. As we started to get on the boats, we had no docks. We had to go out in the small boats, but the ocean was surging up and down. When we got out there, we were too weak to climb up the sides. The sailors (you must remember that there is always a fight between the sailors and the Marine Corps). These sailors held us in their arms and carried us aboard.

To give you the magnitude of it, when my battalion landed on February 18, we had a total of 1688 men. When we came off the island, we had 86 men who were not killed in action or wounded. It took 22 ships to bring our division to Iwo Jima, it only took eight to take them home.” (Source)

Because we secured Iwo Jima, we waged a successful bombardment of Japan, which led to her downfall.
But there was more. Just being there saved the lives of over 24,000 Army Air Corps Pilots and crewmen who were returning from battle with damaged airplanes, who would have plunged into the ocean if Iwo Jima was not secured by the United States Marines.

We are in a war. For me, the battle for Iwo Jima is a parable for the battle for fatherhood in the church and the home in our time.

**We need an army of defenders**
My father and a hundred thousand soldiers rose up to take that tiny flyspeck of an island so that we could win the war.

And this is what we must do now for the sake of the salvation of our offspring in future generations.

A man must risk his reputation and his future in order to accomplish this, because he will have to live differently than the common man. He must, by faith redirect his energy. He must, with courage and discipline use his time and money differently. But, he must move swiftly and decisively.

The need of the hour is for men who will embrace the greatest evangelistic opportunity before the modern church; saturate their households with the Word of God; break the patterns of their own fathers; Understand the purposes of their lives and be organized for action.

**We need men of valor**
My prayer for fathers is that “uncommon valor would become a common virtue” and that we will “give your today, for the tomorrow of the next generation.”

“Rise up O men of God, have done with lesser things.”