

Doug Smith: 0:07

Hey, leader, and welcome to another episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host, and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. We're also recording this episode live from the new returncom studio. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm so glad that you're here and I hope that you'll enjoy our content and become a subscriber. I know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel, so make sure you subscribe there as well. And, as always, if you've been listening to the podcast for a while and it's made an impact on your life, it would mean the world to me if you'd leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcast or Spotify or whatever app you listen to podcast through. That really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders, so thank you in advance for that. Well, leader, in today's episode you're going to hear my conversation with my good friend, Zack Blair. Zack is the pastor of Hill City Church and the author of the new book *The Father Code* the origins of a connected father, and I've known Zack since 2003, where we met at a youth camp and we have been doing life, leadership and ministry together ever since. And I've always looked up to and admired Zack in so many ways and I've learned so much from him, specifically in the area of parenting, which is exactly what we dive into today. We dive into his book, *The Father Code*, and you're going to love this and I really want to encourage you to get a copy of this. If you're a father, you need to read this book. If you want to be a father one day, you need to read a book, and so I really encourage you to pick up a copy, and maybe you can just grab a few other guys that you can read it together and go through a small group together with it. I think it will really add value to your life. But before we get into today's conversation, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors. The financial advisors at Baritongue Advisors help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Baritongue Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website at baritongueadvisors.com. That's B-E-R-A-T-U-N-G-Advisors.com. Securities and investment products and services offered through LPL Financial, member of FINRA and S-I-P-C Baritongue Advisors. Lpl Financial and L3 Leadership are separate entities. I also want to thank our sponsor, Henne Jewelers. They were jeweler owned by my friend and mentor, John Henne, and my wife Laura and I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henne Jewelers and had an incredible experience. And not only do they have great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in engaged, they give them a book to help them prepare for marriage, and we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out HenneJewelers.com. And I also want to thank our new sponsor, reiturncom, and Leader. Let me just ask you this. Have you ever had an interest in investing in real estate? Well, now, for as little as \$500, you can become a commercial real estate investor. Just visit Reiturn.com to learn more. That's R-E-I-T-U-R-Ncom. Investing involves risk. Just consult the Reiturn offering circular if you're interested in investing. And with all that being said, let's dive right in. Here's my conversation with my good friend, Zack Blair. Zack Blair, welcome to the L3 Leadership Podcast. For those listening, this is a great, great joy. Zack and I have been friends in doing life and ministry together for over 20 years. And my life has been deeply impacted by his ministry, his friendship, and today we'll be talking about how Zack introduced himself in a minute. But Zack just came out with a book, his first book, and he has so many books in his heart and such a message for this generation. And I can't wait to share that with you. So, Zack, welcome to the podcast and congrats on the book.

Zack Blair: 3:28

Thanks, Doug, Thanks for always supporting me and being a great friend man, The real deal. Love you buddy.

Doug Smith: 3:34

Yeah, for those listening who may not be familiar with you, can you just kind of give a high-level overview of who you are and what you do?

Zack Blair: 3:39

Yeah, So I'm an Ambridge boy, Beaver County through and through, Went to Geneva College, wanted to be a pilot and the Lord changed my life, Dramatically changed my life. It's in a real rough spot. I was there on a football scholarship. Believe it or not, Geneva has a. The Bible is a logo, At least they did back then. I think they just recently did an update. I had absolutely no clue. It was a Christian school. I was pretty angry because the coaches, when they recruited me, didn't tell me that it was a Christian school And I don't know how I missed it. It was like God hit it for me. But there I found restoration And you know, you and I we met at Victory Family Church in Cranberry like wow, Doug, about 20 years ago, maybe, like somewhere around there. So I've served in youth and young adult ministry for a long time. I was a youth pastor, young adult pastor, but we served in with kids and youth a lot longer than that. And then five years ago my wife and I started Hill City Church in Robinson Township and it's been a journey, but family, man and a father and I love it, Absolutely love it. Right now. It's kind of. It's kind of chaotic in our world right now the Doug. You know that.

Doug Smith: 4:42

Yeah, man. Well you've always gone before me pretty much in every area of life and you wrote a book on fatherhood and and you know, knowing you as long as I have you have so many messages on your heart that could be incredibly helpful to people. But your, for your first book, you really felt led to write a book on on two fathers, and it's called the father code, codes of a connected father, and so I still remember when you became a father. you know we lived next door to each other And I remember you pulled me in the backyard and say, man, we're having our first kid. And man, it's just been such a joy to watch you and Lauren grow your kids up and really again you kind of set the path and Lauren and I look up and admire you significantly and learn so much from you. But why, why this book? Why this message? Why why now?

Zack Blair: 5:24

The Lord put this on my heart, probably about 2015. What I had noticed is when, in years of youth ministry, you know, i realized that there was a big difference in the lives of kids who had a connected father. You know, i started to do some research on this and started to see, because, again, i noticed it. So within the book I'm telling stories that have compiled a change, a little bit of details here and there to keep protect people's anonymity, but that specific, that specific burden on my heart, i would say there are two things. You know, there was a girl who we helped save her life, you know she was. She had a, an imbalance in her brain, she had a chemical imbalance. And I asked her, you know, when she opened up for help with us, you know what saved her life? And she said it was my, it's my connection with my dad. You know I couldn't do that to him And there was just something that the Lord, just I was just like what, like a connection with her father, was stronger than a chemical imbalance in her brain and it saved her life. And so now I get a little frog in my throat thinking about it, but like when you use it, when you ask the word why I'm like if I could just help one kid, that's it. You know, like that's it. And so for years, you know, being a father, i started to realize, like man, we have a huge responsibility, but we also don't have like a lot, of, a lot of guidelines around it. You know, and there's things, there are things all over the place, and you know there's no such thing as perfect father, but we can be a connected father And it's that connection that really helps. What, even what I found, doug, is the. The mom's job is is essentially to teach her daughters to be a woman, but but dad's job is to teach them to be secure in their womanhood. And then it flip flops. You know, dad's job is a teacher. His boy is how to be a man, but mom's job is to teach him to be secure in their manhood. And when that father is connected to sons and daughters, his

sons and daughters, there is a security that nothing else on the planet can bring. I think it is fatherhood, is, is is the most important ministry or most important leadership position on the planet is just being a dad. You know, like, lead your home right. It starts there, yep, so much man.

Doug Smith: 7:35

Yeah, when you were mentioning people in the beginning of the book and dedicating the book to people you dedicated to your dad, your father-in-law and then three other men that have had a significant impact on you as a father, can you talk about that and why did you dedicate the book to those three men?

Zack Blair: 7:52

Yeah, so I have Pastor Larry Bettencourt. He was a spiritual father to me and I just so appreciate his voice. In my life, pastor Larry showed me how to be a connected father. I'd come home with him and the five love languages. Each of his girls and his family had different love languages and I would watch him connect individually with each of his girls and the security that that has obviously brought them. Now the fruit is there. He loved us, he brought us into his life and he didn't want anything out of us. It was one of the first times that I knew a relationship like that, where it was just unconditional love, that I could talk to him about anything and he would actually still care for me and even care more about and more for me in the revealing of, just like my deepest, darkest hurts or things I was struggling with. And so, man, he was just instrumental. I would not be anywhere if it wasn't for Pastor Larry's belief in me, and so I look at him as another father spiritually. And then my uncle Dave as well. I was abused when I was a kid and I went through some really difficult, not by my family but sexually abused by two people outside of our family And my uncle Dave saw that I couldn't make eye contact with anybody and he saw that I had behavioral issues, i was getting in trouble in school And rather than correcting me, he just simply put his arm around me and that connection, it changed everything for me And he took me to church and that's ultimately where I ended up receiving my healing, you know, and obviously my father-in-law is a part of that too. So that was only. I have my dad, my father-in-law, and then those two men and obviously my wife and kiddos.

Doug Smith: 9:41

Yeah, man, that's huge. I mean we talk about. We, both of you and I are involved with an event called Man Up. It's actually happening tomorrow as we're recording this, And it just talks about the epidemic of fatherlessness And what I heard you say, basically through the men you dedicated the book to who weren't your biological fathers, where this book isn't just for a father of a family but it's also for basically any man recognizing that they can be a fatherly influence in young men and young women's lives that can have a dramatic impact on the trajectory of their life. Is that what I'm hearing, right?

Zack Blair: 10:12

Yes, absolutely So. one day there was a girl in our youth ministry and I'm just going to call her a student And I'm just going to call her Suzie, you know it's a great name for a girl, but Suzie, right. So Lauren sends me a text and she says Zach, have you talked with Suzie lately? And I'm like no, and I was like is she okay? She's like she needs help. And I was like okay, well, why don't you schedule an ice cream with Suzie? You know, and she's like she needs more than ice creams. Suzie actually needs rescue. you know, and you know the situation. I'm like trying not to get all emotional over this man. Like it's like this is one of those. this is one of the stories you just never, you never forget. you know, the situation she was in Doug is not a situation that most people would understand. You know she didn't have a bed sheet, she didn't know how to brush her teeth Like nobody taught her that. And she's 13 or 14 years old. She's in our youth ministry And you know she's 13 or 14 years old but she's, she's hood smart. you know, because she just she can work the system. She knows like she's super intelligent, but she was like a 98 pounds for

a while already to fight anybody at that age, you know. But we would. Lauren said we man. Lauren said she needs to rescue. So we started bringing her into our home and just creating like a safe space for her because her environment at home wasn't safe at all. Okay, her mom was one of the best people on the planet but struggled deeply with addiction And, like I love her mother right. And her mother eventually asked us if I pass away, will you adopt Suzie and bring her into your home? And we said of course we would. you know, and her mom is doing really good right now, from all that I know. But I watched Suzie be in that trailer park, you know, fighting to everybody And you know Fist of Cuffs ready to go. But she'd be over our house and she'd just be making brownies with our kids and just like any, any kid, you know. But she'd get back in that environment and just be fighting. And we found that when we brought her into our home she experienced safe, safety and peace, maybe for the first time. And I'll tell you what. we still keep in touch with her today, you know that saved her from a lot, Like her mom had her first child when she was 13 or 14, right around that age, right The grandmother the same thing But she came into our house. Now she's happily married. She has three kids. She's one of the best moms I know. Like I'm just so proud of her. you know Whenever? yeah, i just have nothing but awesome things to say about her you know?

Doug Smith: 12:34

No, that's incredible, and so you know. This book is your. Listening to this man. It's not just for dads or families, but you could be a dad and a father figure in so many people's lives In Zach. I've seen you do that over and over and over, again And again. We live in such an epidemic of fatherlessness in our country. I remember Henry Cloud said one time he said we need mothering and fathering every single human being, but it often doesn't come through. Your biological parents Find it. If someone's listening to this and they're hearing stories like you just shared and they feel like they haven't had a connected father and there's a wound there, what would you or your encouragement be to them?

Zack Blair: 13:09

You know, obviously I'm a pastor and so I'm a man of faith and I feel that ultimately, a connection with the father heals, you know, and it's in our world. You know there's so many beliefs about God. You know, i'm talking with an atheist right now who's a very good man and he's got a lot of really great insight and I'm growing from him and you know we're challenging each other. He was really upset by the way that he said the reason I became an atheist was because you believe people go to hell and nobody ever told me about Jesus. It tells me how much you care. That's what he said to me and I'm like that is a valid point. You know, that's a valid point. But I'm also there talking to him. You know what I mean. So it's pretty cool how God brought that. But those wounds are real. You know those wounds are real. You know you grow up and maybe you have a disconnected father or you know your father left. Abandonment is real. What I found is, you know, first, my faith is everything I've received, that love of the Father, from the Father. But God will bring people in every season to fill in the gaps. He'll bring a replacement. You just have to open your eyes to it, and I think one of the biggest issues is this. The fatherless mentality, though, carries around with you, right? So I realized this a lot of times, where it's like I got to fight for myself. There's nobody protecting me. That's what Suzie was going through, but she carried that mentality all throughout life, got to fight for myself, got to fight for myself, and we see it a lot in leadership. People who have that fatherless mentality will be great leaders, but they're trying to make a name for themselves, right, because they don't realize their identity isn't necessarily set yet. So they'll get things done, but they'll walk over all that, everybody else, because their identity isn't set yet, right. So God will bring people in to fill in the gaps, but we also have to receive that as well, right, we have to be open to that love, and now that real quick too, doug. It can also get a little weird, you know, like if somebody's coming to you and like I'm your spiritual father, now you don't even know my name. You know, tell me everything, like, hey, you know like it can get a little weird. So you got to follow your heart. Don't go against your heart with that, you know.

Doug Smith: 15:16

Yeah, Well, thank you for that. Let's dive into the book. So the father codes. You have several of them And I just want you to elaborate on each one. So the first one is we never leave.

Zack Blair: 15:27

Yeah, yeah, we never leave. Well, as we talk about not abandoning our children, you know there's a lot of opportunity. There's a lot of opportunity to do so. There's a lot of opportunity to be we get another one of the codes is to be there and present. You know, so like not only just you know, just not leave, but like actually be physically present. But when we I open up the book, and when I say we, i'm always referring to my editor, because she was just so amazing. Rachel Hills just helped me so much to get this book out. But just as you spoke about, you know and there was a census around 2008 to talk about fatherlessness And when there's not a father in the home, the percentages that a child will actually be incarcerated or commit a violent crime or create more fatherless children, they skyrocket right. I mean getting an A on the report card. You know fatherless children have less of an opportunity to even get an A on a report card according to this US census, which is absolutely. I just had never tied that together, you know. So we never leave. It's a charge to men that our presence is vital in the development of our children. To never leave, like God wants us to protect our kids. God wants us to be there. God wants us to validate, you know, and that's vital.

Doug Smith: 16:53

One thing with this, and I mean this has always stuck with me and I actually do it with my kids now too. Can you share and I can remind you if you need to remind it, but you used to take off your wedding ring and show it to your kids. Yeah, can you tell people that? Cause I love this exercise and just what it communicates. The kids that give them the confidence of this principle is huge.

Zack Blair: 17:14

Right. And so even in the moments where you know husband and wife have a disagreement, like these are normal things. We're not looking for perfection here, you know, these are normal life things. But I say to my kids say, hey, what is this wedding ring me? I'll take it off and they'll play with it. And you know this one's a Qualo or whatever it is. But you know I have another one at home. It's just like real special, you know. And I said what does this mean? Well, you never leave You never leave me. You know That means I'm always going to come back to you. I'm never going to abandon you. I love you with all my heart. I'm not going to leave your mom. I'm going to be here, you know.

Doug Smith: 17:48

That's so good. I love that. Thank you for doing that again. Just thank you for modeling that And, fathers, if you're listening to this, i can encourage you enough to do that Again. The security that provides to your kids is huge. Another code is just you mentioned it already is we're both there and present. You and I both know maybe we live in an extremely distracted world. I know you and I are prone to distractions here and there once in a while. Yeah, what advice do you have for dads on actually being there and being present, because I know this is huge for you and Lord.

Zack Blair: 18:18

Well, i asked a gentleman a while ago. He was a great dad. I said, hey, give me your best piece of advice. And a lot of the book is written off of me just asking those questions to great dads. Their kids have grown up and done great things and they're solid. I asked him hey, give me your best piece of advice. And he said cheat your hobbies, cheat your job, but never cheat your family. And like, wow, that's crazy. So I'm like wait, what does that mean? He's like well, if golf is in the way of my connection with my kids, then I'm

going to be there for them. But when I'm there, he said I'm going to be both there and I'm going to be present. So what I realized is like when we would just want to disconnect after a tough day of leadership, after making tough decisions or you know, you see something, you're like your heart's burdened by it A lot of times, we want to disconnect. Rather than grieving that, we want to just kind of pick up our phone and just bury ourselves in our phone. Just, i just need 10 minutes, i just need an hour, i need whatever, and it goes and you're there with your children and you're not actually present. You could be there but you cannot be with them, so they're asking you questions. I've had times with that. My kids like they're asking, i'm in the car and they're asking me questions And I'm like yeah, uh-huh, uh-huh, yeah, yeah, i was not even close to being present during those times, you know.

Doug Smith: 19:33

So we've all been there.

Zack Blair: 19:34

Be both there and present. Yeah, yeah, me too bud.

Doug Smith: 19:38

Yeah, I know one thing your family practices consistently that helps with this is a weekly Sabbath And it's a subject I've talked about on the podcast, a time that's been huge in our lives the last two years. For those listening, can you talk about Sabbath and what does your Sabbath look like as a family and why has that been important as far as being there and present?

Zack Blair: 19:56

Yeah, so that is vital. I mean putting screen time down, you know, and watching, watching dad movies. Now, my kids love to watch 80s movies with me and I have an app that kind of filters all the bad stuff out. So, yes, my kids have seen Rambo. Yeah, it's awesome.

Doug Smith: 20:12

What app is this?

Zack Blair: 20:13

Angel Vid. Angel Vid, you can't watch any 80s movie, but you can watch a lot of them, right? I just love the predictability. Like you don't have to think too hard. You know the bad guy is there's huge explosions. Yeah, they don't make sense. You know a car doesn't explode if it just like hits the telephone, pull five miles an hour. But you got. You know the kids love it, you know. So you can filter out basically anything you want in that. So we watch a dad movie. You know I make breakfast. It's one of my favorite things to do for my family, you know, and just be there with them. But you know one other thing too with this dog and I can even come back to Sabbath. But like, spending 15 minutes of intentional time with your children a day is vital. So, no matter how crazy life is, just pulling them aside and talking with them, for just asking them questions about themselves, just for 15 minutes each, you know It's vital, you know. So anyways, back to Sabbath or where you want to go with this buddy.

Doug Smith: 21:05

Oh yeah, i want to go back to Sabbath, but I just want to reemphasize that 15 minutes a day. I forget when you shared that with me years ago, but literally in my head again you've had such an impact on my life. In my head pretty much every day is like Hey, have I given that 15 minutes yet? And I try to have more time, certainly, but 15 minutes. It devoted time individually, each kid like. And again, in a Distracted world that we live in, like you said, where we have so much pressure as leaders coming at us, it's so easy

unplugged but but I think anyone can listen to. Hey, could I do that for 15 minutes? I think everyone could do that. So just setting those little targets of time daily. You know Sabbath is great that it's one day disconnected, but that may sound like way too much of a leap for where some people are. But 15 minutes a day, leaders, if you're listening this, i know you can do that. But yeah, let's go back to Sabbath. So just one day. What else? what else do you guys do?

Zack Blair: 21:49

Okay, to set up the Sabbath. We have a, we have a day at work and we have a full day of work, and so that's a connection in and of itself, because I'm teaching the boys how to do some things around the house, and you know, my son does how to fix cabinets my, you know what I mean like little stuff like that. It's really like my youngest eight years old, you know, because he just he's focused, you know. So we do our Saturday or our Friday day of work, right. So we have Friday off as a family throughout the year, which goes back to my schedule and my kids school schedule, which is slightly different, you know. So two consecutive days off, one of those days is gonna be a work day. We're just gonna bust it all day long, we're gonna work so hard that all we want to do is sleep the next day, and that actually helped my wife so much, because she has her honey honey do list is huge, right. So I was like, babe, when I come home, is it's hard for me to get all this done? I'm going to, okay, but if I write it all out and we take one day as a family to get this all done, how do you feel about that? She's like, oh, i'd love that. So we start with that. We start, and I found that you can't necessarily have a good Sabbath without hard work And you can't have hard work without a good Sabbath. You can't like, sustain that hard work without a good Sabbath. They work together right. So the next day wake up in the morning, i make breakfast, we'll watch, usually like Mandalorian or something like that or you know, dad movie of the day, and then we'll do things. Rambo baby Yes, it's true story. Ask Noah, next time you talk with them What's your favorite movie. He'll say Rambo, definitely Rambo. You know, he's like so confident when he says it to. But uh, you know, we just we just kind of lay around and just kind of do whatever we want to do, you know and just, but we're connected more together. Like I'll play video games with them, but we're talking the whole time. You know, if we do any kind of like, we'll go like anything outside. We'll go for a hike, we'll, you know, we'll just be together Intentionally as a family and we're not perfect in that like there's weeks where it's absolutely crazy, like this is the season that we're in right now. I hope that we can. We can set this aside, like I have to find a way, you know, to make that happen in this new normal.

Doug Smith: 23:48

Yeah, and leaders, if you're listening to this and you don't practice a weekly Sabbath, i can't encourage you enough. It took me years to be convinced of this. Zack and I are both Enneagram seven, so love to have fun, and what sold me on Sabbath was I used to think it was just like a boring day. It's like one might just gonna sit around. But I think Dan Allender had a quote of like hey, the Sabbath is the day we should look forward to more than any other day, and it's the day that we should talk about Looking back more than any other day of the week, and it should be a day filled of fun. You know doing all these different things, so for me I just thought of, like man, i'm just gonna have load it with fun, and it's been an absolute blast so, and we can include several resources that have helped us with Sabbath, but Sabbath is obviously, you know, for faith-based people. We're both believers. One thing I've always admired about you and Lauren is how you're raising your kids to really just know and walk with God. Can you talk about some of the, the practices or rhythms that you have in your life with your children To help ensure that you know that one day, though, though, know and walk with God all the days of their life?

Zack Blair: 24:46

Yeah, yeah, and and I could speak to that even personally and as a pastor, and you know, as a, as a father of the home, like, i'm the pastor of the home and that's separate than my job, quote unquote as in

ministry, you know, it's my job to lead my family spiritually and so My family has seen the faithfulness of God in their lives. You know, and we've we, you know, like right now We are, we brought in, we brought into little girls and we just love them so much. It's tough situations, a complex situation, but they're, they're there with us and they know what ministry is. One of the one of the most important things that we can do is expose Them to the pain of the world, and a lot, of, a lot of times, as parents, we don't want to do that. We want to protect them for pain, but if they never experience pain, they're never gonna experience growth. Like. It just doesn't happen that way, right? So, like, think about weightlifting. Right, it hurts the weight lift, but you're never gonna grow your muscles unless you actually like experience some pain, right? so, with our kids, i've tried to do my best to To allow them to experience pain at a level that their mind can, can understand, and I've been in some situations where, you know, there's been trauma in their life and there's been some really crazy situations where we have had to protect them obviously right, but on the other end of it, exposing them. Taking my son on a mission trip This is what I. One of the things I do is Every when my kids turn nine, i take them on their first mission trip. We do a lot of work in Peru. If they just see a family of ten living in a one bedroom apartment or two bedroom apartment, They have one restroom, a kitchen, a living room, but there's ten people there and they're loving life. You're my kids start to realize, wow, how, this is how I have it amazing, i'm doing awesome. You know like we have it really, really good and that gratitude we stir that up. You know I one of the things that try to do is validate as well with with my kids. It's easier as you get to know them and ask questions about like, what, what they're, how their heart connects with God, right? So I love sharing books that I read on prayer with my daughter, because she's just a Worship, her in a prayer. My son, my oldest son, wants to be, in his terms, a Crazy missionary. You know like he wants to go into the most remote places of the world and preach the gospel and like that's awesome. So I share those books with him, you know. And he's also a little bit more intellectual, so he loves CS Lewis and we really connect on that. We actually read a hiding place together. It was so fun to be able to connect with my, my oldest son I.

Doug Smith: 27:14

So, Zack you mentioned earlier about you and you've always had a heart for adoption and for fostering And obviously that's a little bit of a higher commitment level than you know just choosing to be a father figure to young men and women. Why has that been on your and Lauren's heart and what advice would you give to people who may be considering, or maybe even have never thought about doing that? What would you tell them?

Zack Blair: 27:38

So our story with that is Lauren and I wanted to have a lot of kids and she had a miscarriage right before we had our first, and then she had another one right before we had our third. And while she had our third she had some tremendous complications. And so she said, Zack, i think that I think my body's telling me that that three is three, is enough. And I said, sweetie, it was like, like we're, we've always talked about having a huge family And I really wasn't open to adoption. At first, you know, i said to her what, how are we going to make that happen? You know, like, and I always thought it was just going to be our biological children, i really did. So Lauren's had to be. Well, Zack, like, i've really been processing adoption And you know, as a father, i was a little bit, i was a little bit overwhelmed by that, because I was like OK, and this is how I put it, i don't put it this way anymore But at first I said could I love someone else's kids? is I love my own right, like? my answer at that point was was like, i don't know that I could, you know, and I don't think that's fair to bring into my family., So, Lauren's, like I just want you to pray about it. That's, that's how we make big decisions in our family. Like, hey, i'm not going to talk to you about this, lauren, this is what I think but I'm going to allow you to pray about it. Just go process it and come back to me. I'm not going to bring it up again And then you know we come back. So she did that to me And I was officiating a wedding and there was a man there who he came up and he was pastor for a long time And he said this was, you

know, such a great wedding, thank you so much for helping. It was a friend of mine and it was his grandson. And I said, hey, thank you for all that you've done for our city, thank you so much. And I felt in my heart something that I was like real insecurity and ask him. But I felt like I should ask him if he'd ever adopted a child. And I was like I'm not going to ask him that. So I went around the bush. I'd beat around the bush. It's like so, tell me about your kids. You have kids, you know. He said, yeah. He said, well, our first daughter we adopted. And he just came out of the gate And then I said I said, man, this is like this guy's probably in his 80s at this point. And I just said can my wife talk to me? if she's really processing adoption right now? Like I need that to drop in my heart, I don't, can you help me? And he's like, yeah, i'll definitely pray for you about that. And he didn't say anything. He walks away and he's like I'm going to pray for you right now. And he's like, as a matter of fact, i'm going to grab my wife. And so he got they both pray over me and I'm not even joking Like adoption went from like here to here as they were praying And I felt like, oh, i can do this. Then the next day I'm taking my kids out to eat You know we have two kids at that point. Taking them out to eat, i sit and pray with them around the table And this lady comes up and she just says I'm so glad to see you praying with your kids, it's wonderful. And I felt that same thing again ask her if she's ever adopted. So I was like, okay, i'm going to be more bold this time. I said you wouldn't happen to have adopted any kids, would you? And she said to me I've adopted three kids And so you know I was like, hey, i think the Lord is calling us to this, but it's a calling, you know It's a calling. So the Lord also began to give us a picture of having a diverse family. You know everybody would say, oh, you have such a sweet, perfect family. And you know everybody matches all the time And we're like that's not the picture that we have in our heart. You know we see multiple skin colors in our family, where not everybody is looking the same. But they are our kids, you know, and we love them. Fostering is one of the favorite - It's one of my favorite things I've ever done in my life, you know, just because from my standpoint I can't speak to the situation. We have a good relationship with mom. It's tremendously complicated, right, it's tremendously complicated. I can't get into the details, but you know, you think about the circumstances that would take two kids to have to be fostered, you know, and the emotions that they go through. We love mom. We love those kids. They are, they're just easy to love. They love being around our kids. I'm not trying to get them to call me dad, you know. Neither is Lauren. We're just trying to support their mom in a great way and we're serving the family And that's, i think, our expression. One of the things that challenged me is if every church in the United States would adopt one child from the foster system, there would be no more children in the foster system, right? Just one one like one person, one family in every church in the United States. I said that wrong.

Doug Smith: 32:39

Either way. Well, thank you for the challenge there. And if you're listening to this and again, sometimes you don't recognize something could be a calling until you're exposed to it. And when I meet Zack and Lauren, who have have been a part of the adoption process and fostering, i just always love them to share their heart, because maybe you're listening right now and maybe something started stirring or dropped in your heart. And thank you, Zack and Lauren, for being obedient to that little stirring and new. And if you're listening to this and feel that's stirring as well, i would encourage you to keep looking into that and keep praying about it. And, who knows, maybe God's calling you to do the same thing, zach. I want to wrap up the book a little bit. We talked about a couple of the principles. The next one you have is we stand God or, i'm sorry, our hands will bring love, not pain.

Zack Blair: 33:21

Yeah, So Discipline is very difficult, it's tricky, right So? and with each kid discipline, like if I go to my, if I, we were taught like Spain and the United States and I use my language, my language, but we were taught like spank on disobedience. But then you look at kids, you're like everything they do is disobedience. You know it's crazy. Still, like what am I gonna paddle on time? And I'm not big on paddle. I

think, like you know, everybody has their own way of doing it. But I think sometimes this is just my approach and I don't mean to sound critical, but there's a smarter way. A lot of times There's a smarter way. So like, if I paddle my youngest son, this kid doesn't, it doesn't affect him, but if I tell him, i'm disappointed in him. Man, that really, that really gets you know. And so discipline at the end of all disciplines should actually be a deeper connection. You know the scripture in Hebrews says that the Lord disciplines his son. He doesn't treat us as illegitimate children. That means like a father actually brings discipline and discipline is. you know, we look at our disciplines, you have disciplines, i have disciplines. You know we wake up in the morning, i try not to eat Oreos after 11 o'clock. And now he does the discipline, you know. But when you look at that word discipline, it's disciple And in the context of that word it's so relational, it's such a relational word, right? When Jesus made disciples, he had his 12 disciples. He brought them into his life, he talked with them about things. Yes, he had tough conversations with them And he braided the, he braided the court, but he was, he didn't whip anybody, you know, but they let he let them see their. He let them see his anger as well, you know. And so it's okay to express those emotions, but sometimes you got to let. There's a story that I tell about an older gentleman in this, in this particular chapter, who let a little water out of the dam. He said to me one time And I'm like, hmm, that's interesting, like so if you're, if you're disciplining out of anger, you got the wrong heart. You know. You've got to discipline with it, with the best in mind for your son or daughter, and you've got to do it with the end result of being more connected with them. That's using our hands to express love, not pain. I don't want my kids to look at my hands and think, no, don't touch me, dad, because those hands have brought me so much pain. I don't want that. I want them to look at my hands and just see hands of love, you know, like these hands have held me and they've brought me close. That's what I want them to see. These hands never leave me, you know.

Doug Smith: 35:42

Yeah, that's good, yeah, the next code you talked about was we stand and protect.

Zack Blair: 35:47

Yeah, and so we talk about emotional, spiritual and physical protection. That's what dads do, you know. Emotional protection is a little bit more difficult for us, i think naturally Not all dads, you know but a little bit more difficult. Spiritual protection is big too, you know. We've seen not all people in the pastoral world have good intentions And it's a father's job to help his son or daughter navigate that, you know, to be there for them if somebody's trying to manipulate them, because that does happen, right, and we're friends with so many pastors Like you've done a tremendous job of bringing unity to pastors and in by and large, like pastors have good hearts in Pittsburgh and we love that right. So I'm not saying like be cautious of everybody, but what I am saying is there's extremes. I tell an extreme story in that, one of a girl who just needed a dad to tell her, hey, this is dumb, like this is not right, you know, But he wasn't engaged, he wasn't connected in that. So it goes physical, like that's, you know, stand up. Like I'm gonna jump in front of a bus for my kids, like obviously I'm gonna do everything I can to protect them. So I'm gonna give up my life to protect them physically But then emotionally as well. We have to help them kind of be a counselor, coach, counselor, consultant, colleague in life where you know like they experience a pain of negative words about them And we have to help them navigate that. That's a responsibility And then also spiritually like stand guard to protect, you know.

Doug Smith: 37:15

That's so good, and the last code you talk about actually has to do with repentance. Can you talk about that to parents and dads?

Zack Blair: 37:21

Yeah, well, so the goal is to be an example in everyday life and when not in repentance, right. So we've got to say sorry every once in a while. You know, when you have specifically like the firstborn gets the wrath right, like they don't know, you know, we don't know, and they're coming into our lives and we're so hard on them because we think we're naturally we're hard on the firstborns. Have you ever noticed every firstborn seems to be very black and white. Why? Because we made them that way. You know. It's like this is right, this is wrong. And then number two comes in. You're like, okay, i'm gonna relax my grip a little bit. And they're like but that's wrong. You know, we build into them this sense of justice, right, and we might be. I found myself more harsh with my firstborn throughout life And so I found going to him and talking to him and repenting to him when I haven't been an example maybe I raised my voice to him Has actually built more trust with him in the longterm And it's allowed him to express like dad, like that wasn't cool, you know, but we need to teach our kids character and character, integrity, like the word integrity, and it's like whole person, integer, right, it's like it comes from the word integer. It means whole person. So I'm gonna be the same person in every room I'm walking in, okay, and kids need to be taught that. But also we have to realize we're flawed. There's gonna be moments that we don't handle situations right. Number one, because they might have snuck up on us. Or number two, like you know, hey, just like we've never been trained on this, but we're just doing the very best we can Just talk to the kids and just tell them hey, i own it, i messed up, i apologize, i'm so sorry. You know, it's such a big deal, such a big deal.

Doug Smith: 38:57

Yeah, so good. Oftentimes, when I'm interviewing people that I look up to in the parenting realm, I ask them what's your best parenting advice? And I can't tell you how many times this subject has come up, but I never hear anyone else talk about it. But the actual ability to own your mistakes in front of your kids is so huge. I think I was interviewing John and Lisa Pavea and they both said the same thing Like their kids are now grown adults And the thing they look back on and respect the most they said their kids say about their parenting is that if they missed it or dropped the ball, they would always acknowledge that and repent for it, And so I think that just leaves a lasting impact on the kids. So you end the book with a conclusion to draw, with a challenge to draw a line in the sand. What would be your challenge you wanna leave fathers with today?

Zack Blair: 39:41

So the premise of this book? you know, we follow the story of two men who have diverging paths, but they're in the same family. One made it and one didn't, and it becomes evident about the 34th chapter where it's heading. One drew a line in the sand and he was able to overcome all the insufficiencies of his life and he didn't focus so much on what he didn't have, but he had a vision for his life and had a vision for where his family was gonna go, and I watched him in my relationship with them. I watched him exude many of these principles. I know this man personally. His brother didn't choose that. He got wrapped up in the bitterness of not having, you know, what he deserved or what he felt he deserved, you know. And so men like we've gotta read this book. We've gotta read this book from the standpoint of not that fatherless child but the opportunity to give to our children what we never had a lot of times. And so draw a line in your sand. In the sand, because your connection with your kids is one of the most powerful connections in the world And you have a level of responsibility that comes with that. Now, the other part of this, doug, is that I wrote this book to be read in relationship, you know. So the opening we talk about just true relationships, what they are, and so we have a hard time. Men. We only have three to five really solid relationships throughout the course of our life that we can open up to and share everything with, and so I feel that what would be best is that men would actually read this book within the context of those relationships to hold each other accountable to those codes, because all these codes are values, you know.

Doug Smith: 41:35

Yeah, well, thanks for writing the book. And yeah, i can't encourage you enough. Again, it's been a great privilege to be friends with Zach and to do life in ministry with him for the past 20 years, but to be able to have the motto and thank you, zach, thank you for your vision, thank you for this message for fathers, thank you for your example that you've said for all of us. And again, dads, i really encourage you to dive into this book. It'll help you be a more intentional parent, a better dad, and just make the world a better place at the end of the day. And so, thank you, zach, anything else you wanna leave leaders with today as in close.

Zack Blair: 42:03

You know what? No, i just wanna say thank you with all my heart, with all my heart Doug, for just all you do. You're a great friend and a great leader And you've given me a lot of compliments, but I appreciate your friendship and I appreciate your leadership. You've done more for me than I think I've done for you, and I didn't get to share much about it. But just thanks for supporting me, man, and thanks for always being a good friend, thanks for being there. And one of those true relationships that I write about in the very beginning is you, man. Like you're it, dude, i love you so much man.

Doug Smith: 42:33

I love you too, man. It's an honor to do life for you, so thanks for having a value to me. Thanks for adding value to everyone that'll listen to this and keep dad in hard man.

Zack Blair: 42:40

Thanks brother.

Doug Smith: 42:41

Well, leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Zack. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with him and links to everything that we discussed in the show notes at [l3leadership.org forward slash 377](http://l3leadership.org/forward/slash/377). And, as always, leader, i wanna challenge you that if you wanna attend extra growth this year, then you need the other launch or join an L3 leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups are simply groups of six to 12 leaders that meet together for at least one year in order to help each other grow, hold each other accountable and to do life together. For me personally, mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last eight years. So if you're interested in learning more about launching or joining a group, go to [l3leadership.org forward slash masterminds](http://l3leadership.org/forward/slash/masterminds) or email me at [dougsmith at l3leadership.org](mailto:dougsmith@l3leadership.org). And, as always, i like to end every episode with a quote, and today I'll quote Dr Henry Cloud, who said this. He said co-dependency is taking responsibility for another person's problems and not requiring that person to take responsibility for their own. So good, and so many leaders are co-dependent. If you are Really encourage you to get help with that, it'll you need set free and it'll help you immensely in your leadership. Well, i hope that this episode encouraged you. Know that, my wife Lauren, i love you, we believe in you and I say it every episode. But don't quit, keep leading. The world desperately needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.