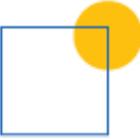




THE BLUEPRINT

Virtual Town Hall



Systems: The Fatherhood Battle Against System Bias

The Blueprint Virtual Town Hall

September 29, 2020

Transcript

Moderator: Bishop Darren A. Ferguson

Panelists: Dr. Jerome Maultsby and Dr. Sidney Hankerson

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([00:07](#)):

Welcome to The Blueprint. And we're talking about systems today, specifically the fatherhood battle against system bias. I am joined today by doctor Dr. Sidney Hankerson, psychiatrist at Columbia University Medical Center. And I am also joined by Dr. Jerome Maultsby, a practicing psychologist and a master life coach in the Atlanta area. I am so glad to have you two gentlemen with us. Thank you so much, gentlemen, for joining us this afternoon. And I just want to get into it, I don't want to take too long. Just for those who don't know, I am the president of the board of Fathers Incorporated, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Orange, New Jersey, and a reentry coordinator for the city of Orange, New Jersey, just in case you all decide to Google me or something. But more importantly, we have these two distinguished panelists with us this afternoon.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([01:01](#)):

We're talking about systems and research shows that supporting responsible fatherhood is critically connected to lifting black men and their current and/or future children out of poverty and at the same time, we need to lay a firm foundation for their success in life. So The Blueprint is arguing that we can reimagine the black father by unpacking the narrow and often stereotypical images and stories bestowed upon him and perpetuated by society at large, while also understanding the plight of black fathers in light of structural institutional barriers. So I want to get right into it and I'm going to ask you both and either of you can answer, I'm going to go left to right on my screen, I've got Dr. Maultsby on the left and Dr. Hankerson on the right, so I'm going to go from left to right. So Dr. Maultsby, I'm going to ask, in your field of work as a practicing psychologist and a master life coach, what role do systems play in creating barriers for black fathers in your experience?

Dr. Jerome Maultsby ([02:05](#)):

First, let me say thank you for inviting me on the show. I'm excited about it, Bishop, and I know of Fathers Incorporated fantastic work that do in our communities, so I'm just really glad to be here today. Systematically, this is historical, this is not something that's happened in the 21st century, this is been going on for a while. And so we know that this oppressive nature of the system in this country today, is escalated by our penal system. I



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THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

think that one of the major societal issues is the incarceration rates of black men and black fathers. So I think our systemically [inaudible 00:02:43] upon us is this idea of taking away black men freedom, separating black families.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([02:51](#)):

Yes. Excellent. And Dr. Hankerson, same question. In your field of work, what role the systems play in creating barriers for black fathers?

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([03:00](#)):

First, I also want to echo Dr. Maultsby sentiments, thank you Bishop Ferguson, and thank you to Fathers Incorporated for having this timely discussion. I completely agree that this country's history of institutionalized racism is the primary system that has served as a barrier for black men getting services. Specifically, as it relates to mental health, we all know about Tuskegee and the fact that over 300 men were blatantly lied to about receiving treatment for an illness that they were not receiving treatment from. That has cast the legacy of distrust among black men from the very system that is supposed to help them, being the healthcare system. As it relates to mental health in particular, when we think about the trauma that our brothers are facing, whether it's from racial injustice or from the criminal justice system, that certainly impacts black fathers and black boys. And so, the criminal justice system has now become the de facto state psychiatric hospitals. They provide most psychiatric care for men of color in this country. So that's a huge systemic issue.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([04:17](#)):

Wow. And I have to say, as a black man who has spent time in the criminal justice system, the first time I ever saw a mental health professional was inside Rikers Island in early 1990. So I definitely agree. The next question is, what do you think is the biggest systemic impact? I mean, we can talk about mass incarceration. We can talk about over policing in black communities. We can talk about the lack of education or the funding of the educational institutions in our particular communities of color. But my question is, what do you think of all these things, that are many things, access to wealth and so on? What do you think is the biggest systemic impact on black fathers today?

Dr. Jerome Maultsby ([05:00](#)):

I think that it's internal. I think it's our black families. I think it's the responsibility of our parents and us as to change the narrative of who we are, how we see ourselves. As Dr. Hankerson said, our mental health issues have been prominent but not addressed for so long. It was that attitude that we as black folks, if you say anything about mental health then, "I'm not crazy." The attitude about you have to be crazy to consider your challenges in terms of your psyche. So I think that was a major part of us and [inaudible 00:05:36] be more [inaudible 00:05:38] about that we do have challenges on the mental health side, and our families. And so [inaudible 00:05:44] we just relied on our churches to try to solve those areas, but as individuals [inaudible 00:05:50] we



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

call a plumber. When it comes to our psychological stability, we're known in our community to address the work that Dr. Hankerson and I do.

Dr. Jerome Maultsby ([06:03](#)):

So I think that's a big issue for us to change that language, that whole narrative about how we see ourselves and our challenges and our communities, because obviously we know that outside the oppressiveness has been there for centuries. That's not changed. So what do we do? We have to work it internally. And so I think that to address our communities and our health challenges as such, it's a major part of how we can do that. We turn the corner for and know that, yes, we do have issues, let's talk about what they are, let's address them professionally and get the help that we need to turn the corner. Because I believe that our families, the structure of our families, has been slide over the past years. And so I think now look at what's going on right now, we have a perfect example of [inaudible 00:06:49] in our community.

Dr. Jerome Maultsby ([06:51](#)):

So now it's an opportune time, because we have the world looking at us, as what our [inaudible 00:06:56] are and our challenges are. So I think it's a great time for us to turn the corner and really look at who we are, look at our belief systems, how we address those, take responsibility for ourselves and our community. Stop addressing things as though as we're victims. We need to get out of that victimization mindset, and thinking about how we see ourselves, what can we do ourselves as some of our fathers and sisters have done. And to get stronger in our communities in terms of dealing with issues within our community and stop looking for someone else to deal with our internal problems.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([07:30](#)):

Excellent. Dr. Hankerson, same thing. I'm just going to put a little tag on what Dr. Maultsby said in that. One of the things that I'm trying to say in my pastoral role is I'm very clear about when my skills in pastoral care and counseling leave off and someone is in need of some professional help. And I'm very clear about that and I'm very adamant about referring people and making sure that people get the help that they need. Are you in agreement with Dr. Maultsby that that's one of the biggest systemic impacts on black fathers?

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([08:07](#)):

Absolutely. I just want to shout out Fathers Incorporated for putting Dr. Maultsby and I together. We have never met, but we perfectly compliment each other. He addressed the familial structure and our own internal psyche. And I completely agree with that. And not to repeat what he said, but to shed light on some of the external factors, I think that the mass incarceration of black men in my mind has had just such a devastating impact on the family. When you think about what incarceration does, it impacts your ability to vote, it impacts your health access to healthcare, it impacts your educational attainment, within an impact in your education, your income opportunities, which then of course impacts your ability to provide to your family. So it's such a complicated



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

cycle. And when you think about how we have... I was thinking about 13th, the documentary 13th. And how systems were created and embedded within the constitution of this country to create labor and how that has prevented access to needed services. So I agree with certainly the familial structure and also, look at that external structure as well.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([09:33](#)):

And then looking at external structures. One of the things that I found in my research in doing reentry work and my research in working with Fathers Incorporated that access to wealth, poverty is one of the greatest underlying factors in what they call in the field criminogenic behavior within the black community. Are there any ways that we can... Besides the obvious ones. We want to close down prisons, within prisons that are still existing we want to end isolated environments for long periods of time, segregated populations. But is there anything that you believe that we can do to start to address the underlying issue, the ounce of prevention piece that would maybe stem the tide of mass incarceration, which is poverty? How can we do that on a systemic level?

Dr. Jerome Maultsby ([10:32](#)):

That's a great question. I believe that [inaudible 00:10:35] in our black communities that... We had Black Wall Street. We had different times where we were frankly successful. Prior to integration, I have my personal beliefs about that, but we were a strong community where we were within our own. We had our spot within ourselves and we also were great entrepreneurs. So we weren't just dependent on outside employment or dependent on a system that's not designed for us to succeed solely on working for someone else. So I believe we'll get back to our entrepreneurial chip, creating jobs within our communities, teaching our sons and daughters about how to be entrepreneurs, having the segue or an option when one's not able to get hired in the general population.

Dr. Jerome Maultsby ([11:26](#)):

So I think it's a huge piece for us to get back into sustaining ourselves and not just surviving, but thriving. So how do we thrive? We thrive by being independent, being self-sustained. And so I think we've lost that. We have so much in this culture about wanting someone to hire us and [inaudible 00:11:44] in terms of education wise, in terms of the racism and in terms of all these areas that we know have been there for ages and are still here today. So I think that's one way for us, to get back and grab hold of who we are, the talents, we have so many talented people that are just not able to thrive in the system as it were, they're just looking for a job.

Dr. Jerome Maultsby ([12:07](#)):

So I think that if we get more self-sustaining in terms of our economic status, I think we were all made before prior to integration and because we lost that, because now we're starting to try to evolve in another system that wasn't for us anyway. And so way beyond how we started in this country, where [inaudible 00:12:30] so therefore they needed workers. So at that point in the sixties and in the seventies, we worked any job. We were



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

able to have that dream of owning a home and all those things, but now that we're no longer needed in that area, we have to be [inaudible 00:12:46] ourselves within our own communities. Our own banks, our own businesses and those kinds of things, so we can employ ourselves, not wait for those who don't want to employ us.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([12:57](#)):

Excellent. Dr. Hankerson, same question.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([13:01](#)):

Yeah. I completely agree in terms of creating new streams of income employment, which will ultimately create new streams of wealth. And I think one of the keys to that is looking at our educational system. There's a saying that your zip code will determine where you go to school, where you work and will predict how long you will live. And so, so much our longterm economic opportunities, our employment opportunities, our ability to pursue entrepreneurship is based on the educational foundation that we get. And for so many black and brown communities, those opportunities are limited to nonexistent and certainly are underfunded.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([13:46](#)):

And so one of the first studies that I did looked at racial differences between white and black adults with clinical depression. And we found that black adults who were clinically depressed were more impacted by depression by white adults. And when we looked at the factors that most contributed to that greater level of impairment among black adults with depression, it was the level of education. And so, educational, opportunities and that foundation, especially for our black boys is crucial. And so I think that's a crucial point.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([14:28](#)):

Wow. You just brought back a memory. I went to New York City public schools first through fifth grade. Sixth grade, my mother had a white Jewish friend who said, "Your son's too smart to be in the public school system. Let's get him in this private school." So they took me to the [inaudible 00:14:51] school, which is on 89th street. It's now called the [inaudible 00:14:54] school. And back in 1974, when I was in sixth grade, it was 200 and something dollars a month for tuition, which is more than we paid for rent. And my mother struggled, and that was with a partial scholarship, half scholarship.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([15:09](#)):

So my mother's struggle got me in the school. And I went there sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. And eighth grade it was no longer sustainable for my mom, she couldn't afford it anymore. I left and went to public, I went to [inaudible 00:15:18] high school in [inaudible 00:15:19]. Here's what's interesting. The same books that I got in sixth, seventh and eighth grade in the private school, the white school, the rich kid school, were the exact



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

same books that I got in 10th and 11th grade in public school system. And from then on, even 40 years ago, I've always looked at the disparities in education between black and white kids and the haves and have nots.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([15:46](#)):

And that's been a huge contributing factor to where we are, where we stand in society. Thank you for that. Thank you for indulging me that memory. In terms of systematic and systemic impact of... We've looked at poverty, we've looked at education, we've talked briefly about the access and our attitudes towards psychological care in our communities. In the light of what's going on with George Floyd and the protest and all of that that's going on right now and in light of the fact that we're in the midst of probably, in terms of race relations in this country, the most important election that we'll ever see possibly in our lifetimes, what other systemic issues should we be looking at, and should we be trying to solve, and should we be studying in this climate?

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([16:39](#)):

Well, so many, but a major one, I think for me is [inaudible 00:16:47] aware of is that our spiritual selves, our greater selves outside of these systemic issues. And so I do believe black churches have such a huge role in this systemic change. How we being in, particularly now, as you mentioned, the third fourth situation and all those others as follows, you see a did stop with George Floyd continues. So there's a great power to invoke. I believe it's our spirituality. And I'm not saying whatever you to the practice that fine, but I believe that we need to get back to those tenants of understanding who we are at our greater selves, at the idea of our mind, body, soul, the neglect, and of that into this rewrite of who we are as a people in our culture, we need to reconnect in that to sustain ourselves.

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([17:39](#)):

And I believe our spiritual consciousness, our spiritual awareness is a great and a necessarily foundation in our collective addressing of these systemic issues. Because if we continue to work just externally, you can stop [inaudible 00:17:54] and I believe that our power lies within ourselves and understanding who we are and those things. So I believe that black churches have a major role at this time to move forward, because this is a global [inaudible 00:18:10]. Who would have thought that we'd have [inaudible 00:18:13] in all these European countries and all the countries that are watching and [inaudible 00:18:17]. This is an opportune time to address those things at that level of [inaudible 00:18:23].

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([18:26](#)):

Excellent. I didn't think I get to say that during this call, but hallelujah. Amen. Dr. Hankerson, same question.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([18:36](#)):



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Yeah, no, I certainly agree about the importance of houses of worship. The churches and faith based organizations were invaluable in the sixties in terms of galvanizing the civil rights movement. And I think that we are at a critical time now and most of my community based work is done in partnership with churches to train faith leaders how to identify and support and connect community members to care as well as reducing stigma and our overall goal is to really create a groundswell of awareness and advocacy for increasing access to culturally sensitive mental health services in our community.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([19:18](#)):

And I think, Bishop Ferguson, that's where you and I have connected in the past. It's about the important role of the church and our spiritual life in really leading this charge. I also just think that, I just keep coming back to what we call the social determinants of health, where we live, so our neighborhoods, where we go to school, where we pray, so our churches, our mosques, and where we play, so many of our communities don't have access to green green spaces. And really addressing some of those systemic issues I think is important. And actually the churches have played and can continue to play an important part in addressing those.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([20:08](#)):

Wow, excellent.

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([20:11](#)):

I totally agree with that. [inaudible 00:20:17] a young man in Connecticut in the seventies, the outdoor activity, the not being the [inaudible 00:20:20] kid, taught me to explore my creativity, my creative self, but also learn how to socialize that with my peers. I grew up at a Connecticut mixed area with Italians, Greeks, Hispanics, [inaudible 00:20:33] so that active being outside, as you said Dr. Hankerson, we had that other avenue to allow us to expand ourselves and get our kids outside the house, get them away from those cell phones, get them away from those games.

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([20:47](#)):

They don't know how to socialize, the don't know how to interact in our communities. Because us as a kid, everybody [inaudible 00:20:52] we all played together, we all knew each other, we all did things together [inaudible 00:20:56] this isolation. So in this isolation, we find that our children are experiencing anxiety, stress. In the black community, we'd never thought about folks talk about suicide in our community back then. So now, with the social bullying and all these things, now we're going to a different space in our communities. And so we have to really be able to address those and to turn the corner, Dr. Hankerson, and afford options to be more well-grounded in our communities and began to have the communities know each other and work together and talk together and share.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([21:30](#)):



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Yeah, that's-

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([21:30](#)):

And Dr. Maulsby, I just really want to highlight that point you made about suicide. I don't think many of the viewers know that we are at such a critical time as it relates to suicide, especially among black boys and black youth. For the first time in this country history, black boys between the ages of five and 11, have higher rates of suicide than white boys. Also, a study came out last year that showed between the early nineties and mid two thousands, the rate of suicide attempts among white youth went down 9%, but among black youth, it went up over 100%.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([22:09](#)):

So, suicide is something that we thought that only white folks did, but clearly there's something that's impacting our community. And I think black fathers have a unique opportunity to speak to boys about the importance of their emotions and getting in touch with their internal life and being able to acknowledge if they're feeling angry, upset, and really redefining some of our cultural and gender norms about what it means to be a man, because our boys and our youth are taking their own lives in numbers that this country has never seen.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([22:48](#)):

Wow. That's a perfect segue into my next question or my next topic. So we're talking about these systemic issues, we're talking about education, talking about all of these thinker issues, it requires thinking, but we may be talking right now to someone who is an average black father. Guy, he might have a high school diploma, associate's degree, he's working at Amazon, he's making a life while he's raising his kids, he's doing what he needs to do. No shade, no nothing, just a good guy like our fathers and some of us. I was that guy for a while too, before I went back to school.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([23:35](#)):

But that guy may feel in the light of three gentlemen with advanced degrees having this conversation, three black men [inaudible 00:23:43] might feel like, "Yeah, well, that's you all. You got all fancy degrees. You have Columbia, you got your little practice, you got your church, what do I do? What's my role in this? How can I make things better?" And we know the obvious things go out and vote and all this stuff, but what advice would you give a young man between 25 and 35 raising his kids, got a wife, girlfriend or whatever, doing his thing, but he wants to get involved, doesn't know how to get involved, and doesn't know how, what he can do from his corner of the world can make a difference. What would you tell that young man?

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([24:21](#)):

Well, there's several ways, depending on the person's time. There's mentorship. Mentorship is huge for our



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

communities to help the fatherless young men, essentially. I know Fathers Incorporated is really addressing and talks [inaudible 00:24:34] work in that area. But yeah, the mentorship is a key way to start out with. You have kids that they need help with their homework, that need someone to take them to the park, play some ball with them, do stuff with them to engage them, to get them that interpersonal relationship that they had so [inaudible 00:24:51] we have something to reflect [inaudible 00:24:54] for us. But if that worked for you, imagine how that would work for a young men who don't have access to that male role.

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([25:00](#)):

Someone who can [inaudible 00:25:02] and grab them by the bootstrap and say, "Hey, young man, this is what can work for you. This is how you can build your self esteem. This is how you can know your power. And this is how this works." And also I would recommend them to know their history. We come from great people. We come from kings and queens. We don't come from just the plantation, which is this information that probably they hear. They only hear about that part of history that is about slavery. We're much more than prior to that. [inaudible 00:25:30] I talk to my grandchildren about that. This kind of thing I think that are systemically [inaudible 00:25:36] for those young men who are trying to have a role in turn helping young men and young ladies [inaudible 00:25:42].

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([25:43](#)):

And so I believe that we don't really pull up, in essence. And so I think that if young men [inaudible 00:25:50] reach out to your mentor, start there, start on your [inaudible 00:25:54] in your neighborhood, reach out to them, talk to them, take them with those single mothers that you're aware of and if [inaudible 00:26:02] for you, talk to your family, with your sister's kids, your cousin's kids. Find a way to act and [inaudible 00:26:12] first to give some security as what's really [inaudible 00:26:15]. But again, it's about reflection. What worked for you, if it worked for you don't you think it'd work for someone else? So I do believe that we just don't know our own power we have, we rely on outside sources to take who we are, to validate who we are. I think that needs to turn around and [inaudible 00:26:35] with it. So I would suggest start with men and children.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([26:39](#)):

Excellent. Dr. Hankerson?

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([26:42](#)):

Yeah. In addition to mentorship, I would just say being present for your family, which is mentoring, you, you're basically your children. There's a saying that each individual is the sum product of the five friends who they spend the most time with. And so, as black men, who are we spending our time with and what influence are we having on them? And so I think that's the question that all of us as black men need to ask, is who are we spending time with and what influence are those people having on us? And then, how are we influencing the people in our lives? How we're influencing our partners, how are we influencing our children, how are we



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

influencing those at our jobs? And so I think it's really starting where we are, living according to the principles and values that you hold dear and trying to work that out as much as possible.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([27:40](#)):

Excellent. So gentlemen, we've got about five minutes left. We've got a hard stop at 30 minutes. I want to say thank you to both of you, for your insight, for your wisdom, for the continued work that you do in our communities, for all of those lives that you have impacted over your many years of service and work and the lives that you will impact in the future. And I want to say personally, as a formerly incarcerated individual, that it is gentlemen like you who inspired me, gentlemen who dare to come into prisons while I was incarcerated, that also dare to mentor me even for 15 to 20 minutes, taking the time out to talk to me and pour into me. That work is invaluable and you never know of what you're planting or what you're watering for God to increase when you do the work that you do.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([28:31](#)):

So I want to say thank you to both of you and God bless you and God bless the work that's been committed to your hands. So with four minutes left now, I want to ask both of you in two minutes, if you could sum up what your thoughts and feelings were, if that's even possible in two minutes to say, what would you like to say regarding the fatherhood battle against system bias in closing.

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([29:02](#)):

Two minutes, okay. Yes, what I would like to say is to be the [inaudible 00:29:06] of black men to be self apart first, to seek to get their act in order first and seeing what does that mean. So that's the life experiences teach them and have them get the lessons from their lives to know that what's working for you, what's not working for you and why, in a self-reflection. Because again I think we took [inaudible 00:29:27] as system, the things that we know that have changed. So I suggest that our men become more self empowered by doing the hard work, looking at themselves and being out of the tutor themselves and be able to turn the corner by seeking help, look for agencies like Fathers Incorporated for example, to come in and get different [inaudible 00:29:49] that you need to being yourself.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([29:53](#)):

Excellent. Dr. Hankerson. Wow.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([29:57](#)):

Yeah, I would say so much of the country was turned on its head when it witnessed a black man killed by the police. We know about it, but we saw it. And that sparked something in America that has not been sparked in it before. And so when I think about how this country has come together to speak out against police brutality and



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

support of racial justice, I think about when I was in college and when they're with the Million Man March, and when all black men from across the world descended upon Washington DC to show our unity.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([30:38](#)):

And so I think that if we cultivate that spirit of cohesion, of advocacy, of tenacity, of perseverance, of passion for supporting those who are in our circle of influence, so supporting the lives of our families, of our children and in our communities, I believe that we can truly transform, both the perception of what it means to be a black man and our impact as black men on the world. And I'll just close with the words of president Obama, who said, "The moral arc of the universe is long and it bends towards justice." Now is our time as black men to bend that arc towards a brighter day for our kids.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([31:30](#)):

Wonderful. Okay, gentlemen, thank you so much. This is The Blueprint on behalf of Fathers Incorporated and our general Kenneth Braswell. I want to thank you both for joining us. Thank you again. We got one minute left and we are black, obviously, so anybody you guys want to shout out that might be watching this afternoon?

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([31:53](#)):

I would shout out to all the men that are part of Fathers Incorporated and that sustain themselves through the leadership of Kenneth Braswell and his team.

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([32:04](#)):

Yeah. I want to shout out Kenny, and I want to shout out my wife and my two daughters and my parents who have been amazingly supportive during this time.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([32:15](#)):

That's right, Dr. Hankerson, you got a three month old, right?

Dr. Sidney Hankerson ([32:19](#)):

I do indeed.

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([32:20](#)):

Awesome.

Dr. Jerome Maulsby ([32:21](#)):

Congrats.



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Bishop Darren Ferguson ([32:22](#)):

Well, that's all of our time. Our 30 minutes is up, the clock is pointing on 30 minutes. God bless you. Have a smile upon you. Once again, ladies and gentlemen, this is The Blueprint, Fathers Incorporated. And God bless you. This has been a conversation about systems with Dr. Hankerson and Dr. Maultsby. God bless you.

Speaker ([32:40](#)):

Take care.

