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What's a Dad to Do?

by Dan Jarvis | p. 6

Fathering for Eternity

by Lyndon Azcuna | p. 20

FIVE WAYS TO
FATHER
LIKE GOD



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SPIRIT OF REVIVAL

A Fatherhood Revival

It didn't happen suddenly. At first I denied it. But as uncomfortable talks gradually evolved into tense encounters, I knew the wall of alienation was becoming too thick to simply dissipate. I was losing the heart of my teenage son.

But I was too busy to deal with it. I kept putting it off. After all, I was leading a growing ministry that dealt with matters affecting thousands of people. I wanted to maintain my reputation, and I felt trapped by secrecy. So avoidance became my meager attempt to cope.

Deep down, I knew there was a strong scriptural connection between the presence of God and the father/child relationship (Malachi 4:5-6). I knew I desperately needed God's help, but the longer I went proclaiming biblical answers to others without living them myself, the more the distance grew between us.

After one terribly difficult interaction with my son, I picked up the phone and called the most fervent and faithful intercessor I knew. I poured out my pain and my needs. And that is when a God-sized work began.

In me.

It was hard. But I knew deep down it was my relationship with my heavenly Father that needed the most attention. It was not just that my son's heart had drifted away from me as his dad, but that *my* heart had drifted away from my heavenly Father.

God used the alienation and hurt with my son to drive me back to Him in repentance and desperation.

As the Lord met with me, I humbly asked Him to somehow restore my relationship with Him and with my son. He led me to a place of complete surrender and readiness to take a step of radical obedience.

My son was 16 at the time. I knew he loved the outdoors and jeeps. So even though it was during the busiest time of the ministry year, I took off work, and the two of us went off-roading in the mountains of Colorado. That wonderful week together was only the beginning. But I made a statement that week, not only to my son, but to myself and to God.

I was making a 180-degree turn in my heart to prioritize my commitment to being a faithful father.

This issue of *Revive* is about being a dad. It's for dads who desire and need the presence of God to do His work in and through them—dads who want to be a picture of God to the next generation. And, it's for everyone who loves dads and wants to encourage them to succeed in their God-given role.

We all know that fatherhood is in crisis today. Fatherless homes are correlated with increased crime, incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse, school dropout, homelessness, behavior disorders, rape, youth suicide, child abuse, anger, poverty, and mental illness.

We will not restore a proper view of God until we revive fatherhood.

 @ByronPaulus

Beyond strictly fatherless homes, we all know that many dads in today's culture are distant from their children, preoccupied with other pursuits, or dysfunctional at various levels. If our early comprehension of God is determined by the example our earthly father set before us, then we have a large percentage of children growing up with a distorted view of God!

Forty years ago, a respected leader looked at me and said, "We will never have revival until we restore a proper view of God. And we will not restore a proper view of God until we revive fatherhood." He reminded me that turning the hearts of the fathers to the children was part of God's design in preparing the way for the physical presence and ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ. And it is foundational to the ministry of Jesus today, by way of His Holy Spirit.

The ability to be a great dad begins with entering into or deepening a relationship with the greatest Dad of all. That's when parent/child relationships begin to mend. That's when we learn practically how to be the fathers God intends us to be. ❖


Byron Paulus
Executive Director

WHERE WILL YOU LEAD YOUR CHURCH IN THE NEXT 18 MONTHS?

IMPROVE STAGE DESIGN
IMPLEMENT MARKETING STRATEGY
REFRESH STRATEGIC VISION
LAUNCH EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN

SEEK SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

START BUILDING PROGRAM
HIRE ADDITIONAL STAFF
LAUNCH SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN
REMODEL CLASSROOMS



The vision of any church is best accomplished when the power and presence of God are evident in the lives of people—when families are strong, worship is alive, sin is confessed, and God's kingdom is first priority.

For more than 40 years, Life Action has partnered with thousands of church leaders, helping lead their congregations toward spiritual renewal. We provide innovative events designed with the whole family in mind—praying, singing, preaching, and serving for God's glory—believing God's reviving power in the church is the greatest need of this generation.

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CONVERSATIONS

Thriving or Surviving?

Are you thriving or surviving as a family? My wife and I have a son, three daughters, and a dog. As you might imagine, life is busy and chaotic at our house!

Like most parents, we really want to do a good job raising our children. But many nights we go to bed exhausted, wondering, “We survived, but did we thrive?”

Sound familiar? All of us run the risk of simply *responding to the demands* of life versus *intentionally pursuing* things that are eternally significant.

A thriving life is one that’s in sync with Christ’s kingdom and the value system He gave us through His example and teaching. But every family has a unique way of embodying the life Jesus gives us.

The best way to avoid drifting through life is to clearly identify your values and purpose as a family. You need a family purpose statement.

A family purpose statement is a written picture of what you feel called by Jesus to focus on as a family. It’s a realistic and attractive summary of who you want to be and what you want to pursue as you follow Christ together.

The process of identifying your family vision can be fun and rewarding. By working together to put your most deeply held values into a few memorable phrases, you’ll establish a guidepost to help set priorities, make decisions, and celebrate victories together.

Perhaps most importantly, a family purpose statement enables everyone in your family to clearly understand why you do what you do as a family. This is critical if values are to be taught, shared, and communicated to your children or to anyone who comes in contact with your family.

Here’s what my family decided on after identifying our values, ranking them in order of importance, and then formulating a short purpose statement: “*Our family shows interest in everyone, learns and tries new things, and helps others in every way we can.*”

I love this statement because it captures what’s most important to us: others-oriented relationships, joyful experiences, and self-giving love! It explains what we are passionate about together—what we will pursue, prioritize, and plan toward.

What about your family? Every family is a unique storehouse of interests, talents, and strengths waiting to be unleashed. A family purpose statement can help you maximize what’s best about your family.

To get started, simply gather your family to answer the following questions: “What are we best at? What do we do with excellence and imagination? What are we passionate about? What do we aspire to become as a family? What would we like to see be true of our family when the children are all adults?”

All of us run the risk of simply responding to the demands of life.

Now begin to link together a statement that is brief but uses powerful words. Then spend some time breaking down your family purpose statement by asking, “How are we going to get there?”

The family conversations, soul searching, and prioritizing involved in creating a family purpose statement are incredibly valuable in and of themselves. As each family member makes observations and expresses what they believe is most important to your family, the rest of the family learns a lot about that person as well as gains insight into what God wants to do through your family as a unit.

Once a family purpose statement is adopted, it becomes a great tool to guide the family in decision-making, priority-setting, and service.

Avoid drift, clarify your purpose, and live intentionally. Lead your family to discover their purpose! ♦

Del Fehsenfeld III
Senior Editor

WHAT'S A DAD TO DO?

5 ways to father like God

by Dan Jarvis



I can't measure up," a discouraged dad confided in me, "which is why I'm not attending the fatherhood class at church anymore."

As a young pastor, I often felt out of my depth when trying to counsel fathers about leading their homes, and I often leaned on older men (including my own dad) for the kind of wisdom that would be worth passing forward. But in this case, I realized that my friend's admission had nothing to do with the age of his children or the need for some pithy tactic to better enforce discipline in the home.

My friend was giving up.

He was evaluating supposed "super-dads" around him and thinking to himself, "There's no way I'll ever do what they do." He was hearing articulate, confident guys discussing their commitment to family devotions and passionate prayer with their wives; men who had long-range Christian education plans for their kids and stable financial planning to secure them; couples with biblically rooted household traditions and (he supposed) obedient, cheerful children complying with creative, positive discipline. After doing the math and coming up short, my friend decided that ignoring the issue would be easier than facing it.

Is there an answer for guys like him?

The challenge this presented led me back to the Scriptures with a simple question: "Beyond this vague notion of 'leading in the home,' what is a Christian father actually supposed to do?"

God didn't offer us a point-by-point list of directives to answer that question. Instead, He gave us . . . Himself.

JUST FOLLOW HIM

God patterned the father/child relationship after His own relationship with Jesus Christ, and by extension, with all of His people. God our heavenly Father doesn't academically explain the ins and outs of fathering. He does one better—He shows them to us. To learn how to father my children, I can look at how God fathers me.

Thus began my search to determine the primary qualities of God's fatherhood. What does He do? How does He react? How does He lead?

The answers to these questions will inevitably require us an eternity to search out. God is infinitely good in any category I can name, so adequate explanation escapes me.

However, here's a twist: God didn't make Himself a Father so that I would understand fathering; God made *me* a father so that my children can better understand *Him*. As an earthly dad, I'm not only in charge of leading my family in God's way, I'm the closest earthly representation of God that my children will ever have. Whenever they think about God, as crazy as this sounds, they'll likely envision Him based on my example.

*Am I short-fused and easily angered?
Do I demand perfection without grace?
Am I absent during their most important moments?
Am I just a pushover who excuses wrongdoing?
Am I so harsh as to make success impossible?
Do I look into their eyes and care when they speak?
Do they see me laugh, smile, and enjoy them?
Do they know I'm always for them?
Are they certain I will discipline them in love?
Do they know I am their provider and defender?
Will they remember me as one who faithfully
loved them, and their mom?*

Being a father isn't about you or me. It's about God Himself. God shared with us His ability to create human life and head a new household—not just for the survival of mankind, but more importantly, so that His image and His love can be extended through us to future generations. Starting with our children!

That's why fatherhood is so critical—not just for holding households together, but for the very eternal destiny of our culture. Without great dads, we might lose our concept of God altogether; or worse, perhaps, grow up with a distorted view of Him. We might think God is angry or distant, petty or proud, weak or unfaithful . . . because we first understand our heavenly Father through the lens of our earthly one.

“But what if my fathering is already off track?” The reviving power of Jesus can turn around even the most broken of homes, and can rebuild even what seems forever crushed. All of us fathers and grandfathers can get to know our heavenly Father, and we can begin loving and living the

way He does. We can begin with the simple things, the daily choices and daily opportunities that life affords us to father precious creations of God.

That's why I want to encourage you not to give up. Don't worry about images of other dads you know—whether the T.V. dads who always have a laugh line; the super-spiritual dads who (you think) have it all together; or even your own father, who may have failed in his duty to demonstrate God's faithful love to you. Just start with a prayer to your heavenly Father, something like:



Heavenly Father, I'm just one man among millions to whom You have entrusted a great responsibility. For my part, I want to be faithful to that call. I want to be the kind of dad You intend for (names of my children) (or the kind of grandfather for _____), who shows them Your love and follows Your example. But I don't know where to begin, which is why I'm turning to You. Would You please show me the way?

In the pages that follow, we've compiled some wisdom and heart from various fathers to offer you challenge and encouragement. But more importantly, we're framing this around the five characteristics of God's fatherhood we see throughout Scripture—what I've come to call the “Father5.”

If you are like my friend who was thinking of giving up, here's my challenge: Would you look past yourself, toward God? It's not rocket science. It's not psycho-babble. It's not even particularly churchy. **Father5 is simple: God loves, provides, protects, leads, and enjoys His children. Would you like to be a dad like Him?**

Our actions can become a fresh introduction of God to our children and grandchildren, and even to the world at large—a world that, I'm sure you'd agree, desperately needs a dad.

You're it. So let's get started. ♦

Dan Jarvis parents six amazing, energetic children who give him plenty of daily fathering practice. He also serves on Life Action's leadership team and is Managing Editor for Revive magazine.

LOVE

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called the children of God!”

(1 John 3:1)



The Bible explains that “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). In other words, a primary defining characteristic of God is love, and anyone who really knows Him will be defined by that same love.

Jesus taught (and demonstrated) God’s kind of self-sacrificing, you-first love by giving His own life: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Being the right kind of dad begins with our reflection and expression of God’s love to our families. This means we begin a lifelong character study of our heavenly Father so we can begin passing down the same characteristics to our children.

This study is not “book learning” as much as it is personal experience. The closer we walk next to the Lord, the better fathers we can become.

- *Is God generous with you?*
- *Does God seek to bless you?*
- *Is God patient with you when you fail?*
- *Does God forgive you when you sin?*
- *Is God faithful to you through bad times?*
- *Does God challenge you to do the right thing?*
- *Does God lovingly discipline you?*

PERSPECTIVE: BEN SLENK

The number one way I've found to show love to my children is spending time with them. I have to give them my attention to let them know they are important. For example, last night I took my daughter out for Mongolian barbeque. I didn't have any agenda in doing that, or a speech to give. I just wanted to be with her. For me, as a father of two teenagers, these sorts of moments are really important because they foster conversation.

One of the passages we focus on as a family is Philippians 2:1-5, where it describes the way Jesus humbled Himself, and how we should have the same attitude; how we should treat others as more important than ourselves, and how we shouldn't be motivated by selfish ambition in our relationships. That's the kind of love we want to have as a family.

A few weeks back, I got pretty loud and overbearing with my son,

and as soon as it happened, it didn't feel right. I knew that my response to the problem was not loving, and I'm sure it was quite disheartening for him. I had to sit down with him shortly thereafter and seek his forgiveness because of the sinful way I responded to the situation. That kind of humility is something my wife and I both want to demonstrate for our children.

A lot of the time, loving my children means I have to take some initiative, consider their interests, do things they want to do (which may mean setting aside things I want to do). Loving them means valuing them above myself.

One intentional thing I've been striving to do is to celebrate the steps forward my children are taking in life. For example, my son recently got accepted on our church worship band, which was a big step for him. To bless him, I got him a piece of equipment to use in his new role. That not only helps him do his job, it

serves as a reminder to him that I love him and am encouraging him.

I probably only have the attention of my children for about twenty years. I hope we'll be close long after that, but the first twenty years will be my primary opportunity to pour into them. I have twenty years to help them set up the next sixty years of their lives, and beyond that, to help prepare them for eternity.

Ben Slenk is director of Life Action's team events, helping carry the message of personal and family renewal into congregations across North America. Learn more at www.LifeAction.org/events. He and Jennifer reside with their children in western Michigan.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- In terms of loving my children the way God loves me, I would rate myself a _____ on a scale of 1–10. What could I do today to add one to that number? _____
- Read this modified version of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, the famous biblical definition of love. Each of love's qualities should increasingly define your parenting, so insert your name in the blanks:

“_____ is patient, _____ is kind. _____ does not envy, _____ does not boast, _____ is not proud. _____ is not rude, _____ is not self-seeking, _____ is not easily angered, _____ keeps no record of wrongs. _____ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. [By God's grace and strength], _____ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”
- When is the last time I *told* my children that I loved them? _____
- When is the last time I *showed* my children that love? _____

PROVIDE

“Do not worry, saying,
‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’
For the pagans run after all these things,
and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”
(*Matthew 6:31-32*)



How could any description of God neglect to mention His ongoing provision for our lives? The Scriptures teach us that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father” (James 1:17), and that in Him “we live and move and have

our being” (Acts 17:28). David sang praise to the Lord: “You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16).

As fathers, then, we become a microscopic picture of the provision of God when we faithfully work to provide for our families—financially,

spiritually, even emotionally. Being a faithful provider doesn’t equal amassing a great fortune or handing our children whatever they wish. Rather, we learn to ask, “What do my children need, and how can I ensure that those needs are met?”

PERSPECTIVE: RICHARD SANDERS

As our boys got older, we made the decision to put them into Christian school, and the tuition was not cheap. We had to go without a lot and make some significant sacrifices in order to provide the kind of education we felt like they should have.

Along the way, we saw God's hand of provision in our lives, taking care of our needs. Today, all three of my boys are in the military, serving in different areas of the world.

I've never stopped telling my boys how proud I am of each of them. I think that sort of security is very important. They've always known that, even though I was a bi-vocational pastor working two jobs, I would do my best to be there for their games and important moments. They've always seen me love their mother, and they've gotten to experience a stable home.

When my sons are going through difficulties today, I try to provide a listening ear. My oldest just returned from a deployment, and I've gotten to have some very meaningful conversations with him. Beyond listening, my

wife and I also want to help out when we can, not because they "need" help but because we want them to know they are special to us.

Not everyone in our culture today has the opportunity to look back at a loving, providing father; some people don't even know where their father might be. That's why I encourage people to take advantage of advice and counsel from people who specialize in family life and family enrichment, like Dr. James Dobson and others. There is a lot of wisdom out there to help fathers.

Richard Sanders is pastor of Larkin Avenue Baptist Church in Elgin, Illinois, and a Community Service Officer for the local police force. He and his wife raised three sons, all of whom are performing military service and could use your prayers.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

AS A FATHER, I WANT TO BE SURE MY CHILD'S NEEDS ARE BEING MET:

➤ PHYSICALLY

*Shelter | Nutritious Food | Water | Heat |
Clothing | Education | Medicine*

➤ EMOTIONALLY

*Care | Stability | Conversation | Example |
Encouragement | Direction | Exploration*

➤ SPIRITUALLY

*Prayer | Personal Vision | Preparation for
Eternity | Biblical Truth | Opportunities to
Grow in Christ*

These examples are not meant to be overwhelming or exhaustive. As a father striving to be like the Father, give consideration to the specific needs your children have, and commit yourself to providing for them.

- In terms of providing for my children the way God does for me, I would rate myself a _____ on a scale of 1-10. What could I do today to add one to that number? _____

- First Timothy 5:8 issues a stern warning to men who neglect providing for their families. According to that passage, a man who does not own this responsibility is _____
- Am I spending enough time with my children to provide for their emotional needs? _____
- In an average week, what is the most meaningful quality time I get with my children, and what makes it meaningful? _____

- What are three spiritual things I have provided for my children in the past month?
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
- What else spiritually could I provide? _____

PROTECT

“You have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.” (Psalm 61:3-4)



At every stage of parenting, the “threats” change, but your child’s sense of security in you should remain constant, helping set the stage for them to have strong faith in God, their eternal Protector, for years to come.

We know that the “name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Proverbs 18:10) and that “the LORD watches over the way of the righteous” (Psalm 1:6). As children of God, we can have confidence that God takes great interest in our safety, security, and direction. Because He is our strong shepherd, we can “fear no evil,” because He is with us (Psalm 23:4).

As strong fathers, we are called to exercise the same kind of watch care over our children, extending an umbrella of protection over their lives. Our presence in the home should lead our children to relax, to breathe a sigh of relief, to know that they are being protected not only from outside dangers, but even from their own bad choices.

Here are some threats children face that require our protection and godly wisdom:

- *poor decision making*
- *wasted time or money*
- *physical threats to health*
- *bullying, hatred*
- *indebtedness*
- *sinful habits*
- *pornography, immorality*
- *misaligned priorities*
- *disasters, emergencies*
- *enemies, abusers*
- *false teachings, wrong media*
- *offenses by others*

PERSPECTIVE: TIM NEPTUNE

A big part of being a family protector is being honestly involved in our children's lives—being observant, asking lots of questions. My wife and I try hard to get past the first level of surface questions, like, “Where did you go?” and “Who were you with?”

We're more interested in a level deeper, like, “What did you talk about?” “What are things like at that family's house?” “Have you talked to your friend about the Lord?” “Do you think this friend makes wise choices?” “Do you think you made good decisions when you were with your friend?”

It is important that you stay engaged with your children enough so they have the context to tell you the truth, and if they have gone the wrong direction, you won't blow up at them. I can't say I was always perfect at that; in fact, looking back over twenty-two years of being a dad, that's one area I wish I could have improved. I wish I could go back and listen more, restrain my reactions, and try to see things from their point of view a bit better.

Each one of the threats our families face requires a parent to sit down and really discuss it. We have to talk to them about the dangers of bad influences, pornography, alcohol, etc. It's not enough to just say, “Hey, Kid, beware of all the sins out there!” You have to get specific, and you have to lovingly walk through the moral reasons these things are dangerous or destructive.

Tell them why debt is a danger to their future plans. Tell them how bad friends can corrupt their good morals. One of my teachers used to say, “Make moral deposits in your children's hearts; that way, later in life, they'll have something to draw on.”

We can also protect our children from danger by passing on wisdom from our own experiences. For example, when my father was 18, his reckless driving caused the death of another young man. I never knew about it until I was 16, and my father was handing me my first set of car keys. He sat me down and told me his story, and it made a major impact on my life. Then, years later, I sat down with my 16-year-old to tell him about the tragic mistake his grandpa had made. This kind of honesty is another way we can protect our children from having to learn some of life's most painful lessons the hard way.

Tim and Karen Neptune have raised four children while serving in the pastorate. Today, Tim serves as CEO of Leadership Outreach, a Naples, Florida-based non-profit focused on strategic planning for churches.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- In terms of protecting my children the way God protects me, I would rate myself a ____ on a scale of 1–10.
What could I do today to add one to that number? _____
- Given the life stage of my children (or grandchildren) right now, what are the primary threats they face?

- What are the rules/principles/boundaries/etc. I have in place today to help protect them from threats?

- How do I protect my children from making unwise decisions or choices that would somehow harm their future?

- When is the last time I had a truly heart-to-heart conversation with each of my children? Do they confide in me?

LEAD

“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . .
But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”
(Joshua 24:15)



God has never left His people without direction. He would lead them via the pillar of fire in the wilderness night, the voices of prophets, and even Jesus Christ Himself, who was “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being” (Hebrews 1:3).

Our Father’s leadership is not just corporate; it’s personal, as David explained: “He leads me beside quiet waters. . . . He guides me in paths of righteousness” (Psalm 23:2-3). Paul even noted that a defining mark of genuine Christianity was the leadership of God’s Spirit in a person’s life: “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

God has given us fathers specific responsibility for our households—to set the course, to pave the way, to guide the family forward. Most children (especially sons) follow after

their father’s example, emulating his values, his attitudes, and in particular, his faith. Fathers have the opportunity to intentionally feed values, wisdom, and spiritual life into the roots of their family trees.

Ideas for fathers desiring to lead children spiritually:

- *Foster your own relationship with Jesus Christ.*
- *Be an example in matters of character and integrity.*
- *Show them what’s important by your example.*
- *Decide how your family will serve God practically.*
- *Dedicate time each night to pray with your children.*
- *Talk about the values that define your family.*
- *Refuse to be angry or selfish.*
- *Set priority on church and spiritual education.*
- *Be generous; encourage your children to give also.*

PERSPECTIVE: MIKE LEE



My approach to leadership has really been informed by the idea that “more is caught than taught.”

In other words, *showing* is more important than *telling*. That’s why, when I think about my own relationship with God, I want to include my children on that journey.

I want to share my struggles with them, my questions and doubts, and allow them to participate in the process I use to make wise decisions. For example, we had to make a cross-country move to a new ministry opportunity, and both my wife and I wanted our children to understand the process and see us pray through the decisions.

For my family, we’ve spent a lot of time trying to reinforce the Matthew 6:33 principle about seeking God’s kingdom first. So many voices in culture are pressuring

them toward other priorities—toward being successful in an earthly sense, having nothing to do with serving others or being mission-minded.

Someone once challenged me with this thought: “You need to plan to launch your children out into their own lives by the time they’re 18. How many years do you have between now and 18?” With my oldest, I had four years left, and I realized I had a lot of work to do in those short years!

Since then, I’ve started looking at things backwards from age 18 and thinking of what I want each of my children to receive before they get there. Now we even have a family mission statement, which we repeat and discuss often: *Love God, love others, and tell others about God’s love.*

For a dad on the front end of this journey, I’d encourage him to begin in Proverbs. There is so much

wisdom and knowledge there that can give you tools and foundations. You can read one chapter of Proverbs a day for a month, and get that wisdom into your mind. You might even talk about it with others in your household. Proverbs are great for sparking conversation about important matters

Mike Lee serves as Life Action’s regional representative in the St. Louis area. He also directs our family-focused camp ministry in southwest Michigan. He and his wife, Dana, are raising six children, and they would love for you to check out www.LifeActionCamp.com.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

CHALLENGE:

In reality, everything a father does is leading his children somewhere (for better or for worse). Our challenge here is to lead them *intentionally* to grow in Christ (Ephesians 6:4). After all, we don’t want our children to be prepared for just the next sixty years of life, but the next sixty million!

- In terms of leading my children the way God leads me, I would rate myself a ____ on a scale of 1–10. What could I do today to add one to that number? _____
- Values toward which I lead my family intentionally (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> the priority of God’s Word	<input type="checkbox"/> fervent prayer
<input type="checkbox"/> sharing the gospel with others	<input type="checkbox"/> financial generosity
<input type="checkbox"/> hospitality in home and heart	<input type="checkbox"/> consistent church engagement
<input type="checkbox"/> a mission to live for	<input type="checkbox"/> personal integrity
<input type="checkbox"/> personal gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/> civic responsibilities
<input type="checkbox"/> asking forgiveness when wrong	<input type="checkbox"/> spiritual conversations
<input type="checkbox"/> moral purity	<input type="checkbox"/> seeking wisdom from God
<input type="checkbox"/> kindness and love	<input type="checkbox"/> vision for our future
<input type="checkbox"/> compassion to the needy	<input type="checkbox"/> global missions

Circle one area that you would like to develop in order to better lead your household.

- How do I involve my wife and children in making important decisions for our family?

- When is the last time I prayed about a decision in our family? Did I consult God’s Word for potential principles or solutions? _____

ENJOY

“The LORD takes delight in his people.” (*Psalm 149:4*)



God’s loving leadership over our lives is not merely a matter of functional pragmatism as He builds His kingdom family. He enjoys us, and cares even about the details of our lives.

When looking forward prophetically, Zephaniah said, “The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you,

he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). God is driving history toward the day when finally, in the fullest possible sense, “the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (Revelation 3:3).

Just as God desires ever richer fellowship, communication, and presence with us, so we also can choose to delight in the children He

has given us. This enjoyment might begin with their first smiles and steps, then extend forward into their play, their strivings, their accomplishments, and their dreams (even as we admittedly may struggle with day-to-day “growing pains” of children who need training and patience).

God made you a father, or even a grandfather—so enjoy it!

PERSPECTIVE: WAYNE WESTER

A paradigm shift happened for me when my firstborn daughter was about eighteen months old, in the back seat of our car, screaming bloody murder. As my wife was frantically trying to pacify her, I started smiling.

“What are you smiling about?” my wife asked. I had been praying for God to help my daughter, and that’s when I realized God was helping me. I started to thank God for the fact that my little girl had lungs and vocal chords, that she could breathe and speak, etc. These were all blessings I was overlooking because of her screaming!

Over the years, I haven’t always been thrilled with my children’s behavior, but I’ve chosen to enjoy the ride. I’ve always sought to enjoy their presence, keep their company, and even just relish the fact that they are a part of my family.

I recall one evening while I was working on my doctorate, staying late at the church. Now, I had committed to my wife that I would be available during our children’s bedtime routine each evening, and that when I had to be gone, I wouldn’t miss more than three bedtimes in a row.

On this particular night I had been overwhelmed with church work, and I also had a massive paper due at midnight. My wife called the office and gently reminded me that if I didn’t make it home soon, I would have missed five bedtimes in a row! I made all the obvious excuses, and my wife simply said, “Well, just do what you think is best.”

About five minutes later, I called back to further justify myself, but she would have none of that. She said, “Wayne, just quit typing wherever you are in that paper. Submit it as it is, and come home to pray with your daughter before she falls asleep!”

And you know what? That’s exactly what I did. I just typed “The End” right where I was and headed home. I realized that the “urgent” things in life aren’t always the most important.

Dr. Wayne Wester pastors Highland Baptist Church in Tullahoma, Tennessee, with the help of his wife, Wendy, and their two children.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

DELIGHTING IN MY CHILDREN

- Do I play with my children?
- Do I seek out opportunities to be with them?
- Do I include my children in my life choices and opportunities?
- Am I a daily encourager and cheerleader for them?
- Do my children know that I enjoy them?
- Am I striking the right balance between silly and serious?
- Does our family (and extended family) plan to have fun together?
- Do I pay attention to the details of what they love?
- Do they want more time with me, and do I offer it?

➤ In terms of enjoying my children the way God delights in me, I would rate myself a ____ on a scale of 1–10. What could I do today to add one to that number? _____

➤ During the past year, I had these fun experiences with my children:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

➤ On a daily basis, the part of fathering that brings me the most joy is: _____

➤ The main distractions in my life today that keep me from enjoying time with my children are: _____

➤ Something I’d love to do in the next couple of months to show my children how much I love and enjoy them is: _____

Take a minute to pray for each of your children, thanking God for the reasons you delight in them.

**NEW
EVENT!**

HOMELIFE

4-DAY CONFERENCE

Host a Life Action team in your church
to help strengthen families in God's Word.



Call Life Action's scheduling team at 800-321-1538,
or visit LifeAction.org/homelife to learn more.

« GOD'S WORD to DADS »



Proverbs 19:18

Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.



Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.



Proverbs 20:6-7

Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find? The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.

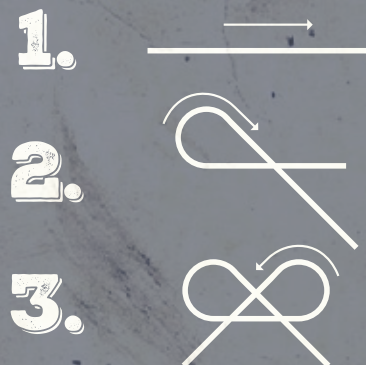


Deuteronomy 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

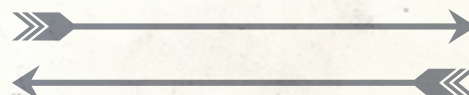
Proverbs 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.



Psalms 127:3-5

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.





FATHERING FOR ETERNITY

by Lyndon Azcuna

Dads, how do we want our children to live 40 years after we're gone? What if we expanded that time frame out even further—400 years later, or 4000?

I hope this question causes us to pause for a moment. In life's big picture, what is the legacy we want to leave?

Paul exhorts us, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1-2). Or, as has often been quoted, "Life is short, death is certain, and eternity is long."

Fathers have been given a precious treasure by God—children. We are God's stewards of

these eternal beings. The children born into our families are created in God's image to live for ALL eternity. Have you prepared them for life with God that lasts forever?

Richard Matters was a Puritan pastor in the 1700s. He imagined unconverted children, on Judgment Day, addressing their parents for neglecting their responsibility:

All this that we suffer here is through you. You should have taught us the things of God and did not. You should have restrained us from sin and corrected us, and you did not. You were the means of our original corruption and guiltiness, and yet you never showed us any competent care that we may be delivered from it. Woe unto us that we have such carnal and careless parents, and woe to you that you had no more compassion and pity to prevent the everlasting misery of your own children.

I'm quite sure that at the end of our lives, we won't regret the material things we could have enjoyed or the shows we could have watched, the games we could have won or the deals we could have closed. In that moment, we'll be thinking about our relationship with God, and how much of our lifetime we really spent influencing and loving our family and friends. And more than anyone else, we will be thinking of our children.

I'd like to share three foundational principles regarding how to impact your children for eternity.

1 | Live what you believe.

We can't give what we do not have, and we cannot lead where we have not been. How can we expect to share the truth of God's Word without living it out first? Values are transmitted from life to life.

What is it that you value? Where do you spend your time and your money?

Thomas Brooks said, "Example is the most powerful rhetoric." Values are mostly caught, not only taught. What do you expect your children to "catch" from your life? How are you showcasing eternal values?

2 | Embrace humility and repentance.

Luther opened the Reformation by nailing his "Ninety-five Theses" to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. The first statement said that "our Lord and Master Jesus Christ . . . willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

Luther was saying that a life of repentance is not only the way we enter into salvation, it is also the way we make progress in becoming like Jesus. This process should define our lives!

You see, pride is the enemy of a truly righteous life. When we glimpse Christ's glory and sacrifice, we see ourselves as completely broken and unworthy. David says this in Psalm 51: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (v. 17). Proverbs 3:34 states, "He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble."

A godly father must begin here, in humility. He must continually depend on Christ's resurrection power to live a righteous life with his family.

3 | Continue in the gospel.

If we intend to make a difference in the lives of our children, we must begin and continue with the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we miss this, we have missed the very point of life itself!

In Galatians 2:14, Paul openly confronted Peter because he had started with the truth of the gospel but was caving in to pressure from respected Jews who insisted that Gentile converts to Christ also keep the ceremonial Law. Tim Keller explains that Paul was insisting that believers must never get beyond the gospel in our Christian life to something more "advanced."

The gospel is not the first step in a stairway of truths. It's not something we can master and then move on to other things. It's more like the hub in a wheel of truth. It affects every area of our lives, every day.

This means that as a father, your responsibility to share the gospel with your children does not end when you drop them off at a church event, or even when you pray with them about their eternal destiny. The gospel is not so much a one-time decision as it is a new way of living!

How are your children hearing the gospel? How are they learning about its application in every area of life?

Fathers, are you preparing your children for life with Jesus? Will you be party to their eternal blessing? Although you cannot control their decisions, no other human being will have a greater impact on your children than you—this year, in 40 years, or even in 400.

For better or for worse, Dad, what will your legacy be? "The light that shines the farthest will shine the brightest at home" (Oswald Smith). ❖

Lyndon is a father of six who has dedicated his ministry to encouraging fathers as they accomplish their mission in Christ. He has served as Executive Director of Awana Lifeline and led a prison-based initiative, called Malachi Dads, for incarcerated fathers. He and his wife, Julia, live in Buchanan, Michigan.



LETTERS FROM DAD

Revive asked a few dads to share a piece of their heart with their children about priorities, love, or living. We picked ordinary dads from different walks of life who love Jesus. If you had to share one piece of counsel with each of your children, what would it be?

DON'T BE AFRAID

To My Boys:

"Don't be afraid." That instruction is given more than any other in Scripture. I assume that's because God knew fear would be one of the biggest obstacles we would face in life. We don't like to talk about it, and as men we certainly don't like to admit it. But it influences much of our lives and decision making. I've seen it paralyze men or lead to passivity.

I know you are facing decisions or thoughts that, if you were to admit it, are scary. What if you make the wrong choice, the wrong commitment? What if circumstances change after you make your decision? What will people think of you?

We may learn to mask our fear or avoid circumstances that lead to it, but we can't truly eliminate it. Not on our own, anyway. There have been times I've been afraid, and the only way I have found to combat fear is to counter it with the truth of God's Word. Fill your mind with it. Speak it to yourself. Then act on it. Jesus said that's the secret to a secure life as opposed to one that's unstable. Take His word for it, and don't be afraid.

*Love,
Dad*

MY HERO

Dear T.,

Today we are celebrating you turning 13. In our culture, there is a lot of talk about heroes. People look in all directions for heroes. Athletes, politicians, soldiers, police officers, firefighters, cartoon characters, and even more have all been called heroes. My encouragement to you is to save the word *hero* for only one individual, and that would be Jesus. Jesus is my hero, and it is my desire for Him to be your hero too.

Why is Jesus my hero? I can sum it all up with one word: LOVE. Jesus modeled for us what it means to love. From His words and His example, it seems like the solution to every situation in life is love. Love God, love your parents, love your siblings, love your family, love your neighbors, love your teachers, love your employer, love your future spouse, love your future children, even love your enemies.

There are many definitions for love; one that I like is, “Seeking the highest good for someone else, even if it costs you something.” Ultimately, Jesus’ love for you (and everyone) cost Him His life.

So my prayer for you, as you are on this journey of becoming a man, is to make Jesus your hero and to love like Jesus loved.

Here is a quote from a very wise man that I have learned a lot from. I hope you enjoy it:

“If I look in, I’ll be discouraged; if I look out, I’ll be distracted; if I look at Jesus, I shall have peace” (E. Stanley Jones).

I love you, T., and I am proud of you.

Dad

ABOUT THOSE BOYS

Dear Girls,

I don’t want you to think that I’m a naive Dad. I realize that you both like boys, and that some day at the mall or in class, a Tall, Witty, Electrifying, Rugged, Poetic type (or T.W.E.R.P.) will try to steal your heart. But girls, don’t waste your time or your heart. Please. If you saw what I see when I look at you . . . well, you wouldn’t be worried about snagging the first boy that looks your way!

I know you desire to someday get married and experience what you’ve watched Mommy and me have together—friendship, teamwork, abiding love, and a desire to be happy in God above all things. The problem is, the kind of guy who will join you on this kind of journey is, unfortunately, *rare*. In fact, a guy who will simply stop playing his video game long enough to have a decent conversation is rare!

So I encourage you to wait on the Lord, trust me, and know that I will help you find the right kind of man. Do you remember what kind of man I’m praying that God will give you? I used to pray it over you when you were just little girls: *May God provide you a husband who loves Jesus even more than he loves you.*

So, even as your friends start coupling off for no apparent reason, you just enjoy being a young lady who is loved by her dad. And while you are waiting, I’ll help you look for a wise, strong, godly man who will happily and sacrificially love you, for the glory of God, to the very end.

I love you both so much. Thank you for trusting me and your heavenly Father on this one.

*Love,
Dad*

THE FOUNDATION

My Dearest Children,

I want to begin by laying out the bedrock of your life, the foundation on which everything stands in your life, marriage, family, ministry, and all endeavors. This is what will set us apart from the rest of the world:

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind
and with all your strength (Mark 12:30).*

I’m not challenging you to be ordinary; I’m asking you to be a member of the most elite group of people in history—those who did not love the world or the things of the world. They sought and found Jesus and made Him the center of their universe. They loved God foremost, and the world became dim to them.

These were the men and women of Hebrews 11, and people like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, David Brainerd, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, Jonathan Edwards, George Müller, Charles Spurgeon, Amy Carmichael, Corrie ten Boom, A. W. Tozer, and John Piper. Study their love and passion for God. It is my prayer that you will live your life this way. Be people of faith, prayer, and perseverance.

Do two things every day for the rest of your life. First, study the Word of God. The Bible tells us, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but **his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night**” (Psalm 1:1-3).

Second, commune with your Lord every day. “Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:17-18).

My precious children, practice this wisdom all the days of your life. Your rewards will be great, both in heaven and on this earth.

*With great love,
Your Papa*



IS THE MAN SUPPOSED TO BE THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY?

Headship is not about bossing. It's about embracing the responsibility to facilitate the growth of everyone under your charge.

DR. RICHARD FISHER

THE EASY ANSWER IS, “YES, OF COURSE.” After all, Paul writes in Ephesians 5:23, “The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.” He then uses Genesis 2 as the basis for his teaching on headship. How do we argue with that?

We don't. But, there's more to the story.

I am married to a wonderful, godly woman. We did our best to follow God's vision by raising our children to love and follow God according to His revealed Word. Along the way, I discovered that it's one thing to announce my headship over the family in all matters spiritual, and quite another thing to understand and fulfill my responsibilities before God and my family . . . “as Christ is the head of the church.”

I remember one day “catching” Lois working with our daughter on her sharing skills. She patiently explained and modeled for her the joy of sharing. Then, she did it.

She exercised spiritual headship . . . and began to relate the “concept of sharing” to the heart of God, and how our lives are to reflect the covenant we have with God.

Titus 2 pushed to the forefront of my mind; it felt like the Spirit slapped me upside the head and said, “Duh.” I had an epiphany. *Headship is not about bossing. It's about embracing the responsibility to facilitate the growth of everyone under your charge.*

God did not call me to simply use a spiritual prod to push my wife around into my concept of “spiritualness.” Instead, Lois

is to be my partner in everything we do, including training our children and walking with God.

HUMBLE HEADSHIP

The Bible consistently reins in misguided and self-centered leadership. First Peter 5:2-4 says that spiritual leaders are not to lord it over those who have been entrusted to them, but to guide them by example with a shepherd's heart. Jesus identifies humility, self-sacrifice, and a servant's heart as key leadership elements. Would not these principles of leadership apply in the home as well?

Paul uses the term *head* in his letters to the churches in Corinth, Ephesus, and Colossae to describe the role and relationship of Jesus Christ to His body, the church, and by implication, to all mankind. Jesus plays the lead part in God's plan of redemption according to the covenants between God and man.

In these same passages (Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Cor. 11:3-16), Paul reminds the husband that God calls him to fulfill the same headship role and responsibility to his wife in the marriage covenant. Then Paul shows that his teaching on headship is embedded in the very vision of God—as part of His chosen process to restore, redeem, and develop mankind to fulfill his life's destiny—by citing Genesis 2:23-25. Paul bases the concept of headship on Genesis 1-3. There, in the beginning of all things, we can discover the meaning of headship.

Let's walk through the principles together:

Headship is tied to the vision of God and the special relationship God desires to have with all people. God created the man and woman in His image and placed His Spirit within them (Gen. 1:27). God made us vessels of His glory (Psa. 8). Men and women are God's image bearers and representatives on earth—in whom, with whom, and through whom He desires to fellowship and bring creation to its intended destiny.

God has always worked with His children to train, prepare, delegate, and move His plan forward. And God chose *man* to head up the project. Genesis 2 explains that Adam was created for that purpose.

The role of headship was designed to provide oversight in the process of maintaining and expanding order in creation. God's plan is to redeem all of creation by working through His image bearers. This process also enables God to build a true bond with His children.

Romans 8:29 (conformed to the likeness of God's Son), John 17:20-23 (being one with God), and 1 John 1:1-4 (joy found in true fellowship) address the vision of relationship God intended to experience with us. The Bible calls it *knowing God* (Phil. 3:10; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 John 2:3; 5:20).

Genesis 2-3 explains that true headship develops through an orderly process. Chaos lurks by the tree of knowledge, tempting us to use our power and delegated authority from God for selfish gain and independence, casting off the headship of our heavenly Father.

God united a man and a woman in marriage to be partners (parents) that would facilitate and guide the next generation. Adam failed to fulfill his role as Eve's head. He did not protect or redeem her from the evil one. Eve also acted to cast off Adam's headship rather than build a relationship with him and with God.

Adam abdicated his role; Eve took the lead. Deceived and selfish, the first couple sinned, separating themselves from God and opening the door to chaos and death. When God confronted them, the seeds of disunity and divorce were already entrenched in their hearts. This evil was passed on to the next generation, and God's vision of shalom—peace and wholeness—seemed in jeopardy.

Headship is committed to hope and redemption (Eph. 5:22-33). It is committed to restoring broken relationships. God is our true Head and Father. He committed Himself to redeeming His lost and separated children. He promised to send a Deliverer, a Savior to rescue and redeem us (Gen. 3:15), to restore our relationship with our Creator, and to be our true Head.

This Jesus, the "second Adam" (1 Cor. 15:20-28, 45-49), was sent to rescue humanity and lead us to victory and fulfillment. Jesus demonstrates headship as He submits to God, sacrifices for those under His watch care, gives His life in our place, and makes us partners in His redemptive plan (Phil. 1:3-11).

As the population grew, the role of family headship was passed from father to son. Genesis 4:25-26 demonstrates this. The pattern was initiated by God to Adam. Adam passed on the responsibility to Seth. Cain was Adam and Eve's firstborn. You can tell from Genesis 4:17-24 that Cain also acted as head of his family. But the headship developed by Cain's family was characterized by foolishness, selfish ambition, oppression, and chaos. The men in Cain's family tree abused the gift of headship. Under Cain, mankind was being led back into loneliness and chaos.

Headship is given by God to remind us of and keep us from entering into the rebellion and separation caused by Adam and Eve. The head seeks to redeem, guide, protect, guard the plan, and keep the vision of God alive. Ephesians 5:22ff stresses this aspect in the marriage covenant.

Headship is a team concept, not a top dog concept. It is about the one who has been charged by God to hold the team accountable and lead them forward. The man as head invites

(continued on page 26)

(continued from page 25)

his wife into the leadership team so they can become one in heart, in mind, and in daily practice. Through them, God's vision and commandments can be passed forward, as children see their parents working as a united team, training each of them up in "the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6; Deut. 6:1-9).

In summary, God created Adam. He then worked with Adam, building a relationship with him, imparting wisdom for meeting the challenges in his mission (Gen. 1:28). God then created Eve from Adam's side, to be his complement and partner in the journey of life. Together, they were to serve God and lead future generations in wisdom and truth. Families were to become reproducible teams responsible for walking with God and working with Him to redeem the earth.

REAL MANHOOD

When I was a child, our culture gave men the dominant position, but without the vision or heart of God. Consequently, many men abused their power. Phrases like, "Just because I told you so, Woman!" were used by men who thought they were functioning as "head of household." These commanding, angry, ungodly men short-circuited their families, destroyed their marriages, and warped their legacy.

Men have a tendency to act like Cain (in any era of history), but I want to be a Seth. God's directive for me to be the head of my marriage and family was never a license to do as I pleased; rather, God has invited me to lead based on His vision, with my wife and children beside me.

All of us have been called to serve God, and He has chosen to put us together in a family unit so we can seek His kingdom together. God is calling me to take the responsibility of headship seriously, to see to it that my family is among those who honor their Creator and accomplish His purposes in this world.

God is calling me to become a real man. ❖



Dr. Richard Fisher has served as a professor and regional director with Moody Bible Institute.

QUICK START

Ideas for Dads Ready to Lead



ADD Jesus to the bedtime routine.

Prayer and a Bible story or verse before bed can be your way of saying, "God matters to this family, and we make time to focus on Him." Here's an idea: Pray out loud about your desire to be a good worker, a good dad, a strong Christian, etc. Then call on each of your children to pray too.

READ the Bible (or a Bible story book).

There are plenty of great children's Bibles for any age—some with great pictures and simplified concepts—that are perfect to put on an accessible shelf in the living room. After reading a passage out loud, ask a few comprehension questions about it.

OFFER incentives.

You can encourage your teen to read a book on spiritual life or your child to memorize verses by adding some extra fun to the equation. Ideas for win-win incentives: breakfast out with Dad; a chance to direct some of the family's missions giving; an opportunity to try something new; etc. Be creative!

ASK spiritual questions.

Start conversations with questions like: "What do you think Jesus would do in this situation?" "How can we help that person feel God's love?" "What did you learn in church?" "Do you think you accomplished God's purpose for your life today?"



FROM THE HEART

Our Father

In September of 2001, Dr. Mark Ashton Smith, a thirty-three-year-old lecturer from Cambridge University, was kayaking in Southern England off the coast of the Isle of Wight when his kayak capsized in some very treacherous waters. As he held onto his kayak, he grabbed his cell phone and tried to think of who to call for help . . . or he knew it was going to be the end.

The first thing that came to mind was to call his father. It didn't matter to him that his dad, at the moment, was 3,500 miles away. His dad answered the phone, and without delay found the Coast Guard closest to where his son was stranded and relayed the mayday message.

Ironically, the Coast Guard location was less than a mile away from where the boat had capsized, and within twelve minutes, a helicopter was on the scene. It pulled Ashton Smith out of the water and rescued him.

Where did he think to call first? "Dad! I need help!" His dad was miles away, but he knew what to do, how to get help that was close at hand, how to set in motion the events that resulted in the rescue of his son.

As I read that story, I thought about how often we are like that kayaker—in peril, in danger, about to go under—and realized that our first impulse should be to call home—call our Father, the one who can help us, the one who wants to help us, the one who will help us when we call.

I wonder how many times we don't get help because we don't call. That man wisely thought, "I need to call my dad."

Jesus said to His disciples, "When you pray, pray like this: 'Our Father'" (see Matt. 6:9). Call home. "Dad, Father, I need You!"


Jesus came introducing the kingdom of God, and He introduced the way to His Father, who is the King of that kingdom. He let us know, "You can approach Him and call Him Father. He is a good Father."

It's so important to teach our culture that there is a good, wise, loving, kind, heavenly Father who can be trusted.

To help make this personal, let me ask you this question: Is God your Father?

- Have you been adopted into His family? Have you been given the right to be called a child of God because of placing your faith in Jesus Christ alone? (John 1:12)
- Are you led by the Spirit of God? (Rom. 8:14)
- Does God's Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? (Rom. 8:16)
- When you pray "Our Father," are you conscious of who you're talking to? Do you approach Him as your Abba, your Daddy, or do you approach Him, as I so often do in prayer, as someone who is distant and far off? (Rom. 8:15)

*I wonder how many times
we don't get help because
we don't call.*

 @NancyDeMoss

Like that kayaker off the coast of England, when you're capsizing with need, who do you call first? Is your first instinct to call your Father? Or do you call Him as a last resort, when everything else has failed and the line is busy everywhere else?

Our Father, how we thank You that we can approach You with confidence, with boldness, with assurance. Thank You for that radically different relationship Jesus Christ revealed to us and made possible for us. ❖

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Revive Our Hearts Radio Host



NO FATHER, NO FUTURE

Rich Swiger shares his perspective on growing up without a positive father figure in the home, and the devastating impact that had on his future.

BY RICH SWIGER

I WAS BORN IN 1968 IN A SUBURB OF BOSTON, and most of my family then (and what remains of that family now) was dysfunctional. I was the firstborn son in my family, and I had two older sisters.

My father was 6'4" and very persuasive and charming; he was also very tough. He insisted on being the center of attention. But when he got drunk, he got mean. He was also a womanizer, and he didn't stay devoted to his marriage with my mother.

When I was just a toddler, he convinced my mom to leave her family home in the Northeast and move to a backwoods area of West

Virginia. But after this move, my father was constantly leaving and cheating, and he didn't provide my mother with a car or a telephone.

We were alone, miles from civilization, when my sister got sick with pneumonia; and because we couldn't reach a doctor for multiple days, she ended up dying right next to me in bed one night. I was only two at the time. The next morning, my mother flipped out. She picked

me up, along with the dead body of my sister, and ran down the dirt road to look for help.

Obviously, that was the end of my parents' relationship. My mother sank into depression and gave herself to alcohol and prescription drugs. She would spend the rest of her life in a state of denial until addiction and cancer claimed her life in 2004.

When I was about five years old, I was put into a group home. Over the years that followed, I can recall a few times when my father would pop in and out of my life and my mother would swat that down. She would always tell me what a terrible person he was. I remember one time when I was nine that he took me to a bar and bought me a big mug of beer in some misguided attempt to bond with me.

The group home where I lived was bittersweet; ironically, some of my fondest childhood memories were made with other children living with similar or even worse dysfunctions. By the time I was about twelve, I got to move in with my mother and her new boyfriend, and I started to call him Dad. He was a nice guy and a hard worker who kept a job—but he also was a raging, dysfunctional, falling-down alcoholic who would go off the deep end frequently.

There were others in our lives who hurt my sisters and me as well, and along the way, no one really did anything about it. Suffice it to say that we had no protector. Life was very confusing and fearful, because I never really knew what would happen the next day.

School was a nightmare. I would get in fights and get bullied, spit on, and smacked around. I didn't know what to do. I became pretty good at running for my life, but it was no fun. I was completely miserable.

As I got older, I found out that you could instantly become very popular if you had a bag of weed or a few beers. I learned how to steal things, especially from cars. I would go around our neighborhood dressed in black, like a ninja, and I would steal anything that wasn't nailed down.

I started to get tougher, and I earned a reputation—so I resorted to violence and started beating people up. I got my first adult arrest when I was 18, and things went downhill from there.

All I really wanted to know was why my father had been such a jerk. I wanted to love and be loved, as any son would. But I wasn't smart enough back then to ask the important questions.

***I started to get tougher,
and I earned a reputation—
so I resorted to violence and
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I got my first adult arrest
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went downhill from there.***

And before I thought to ask him, I heard tragic news: My father was partying and playing poker with a group of people, and a guy left angry over \$4 he lost. He showed back up with gasoline and matches, and my father perished in the resulting fire.

If I could go back, I would ask my father, "What did you experience with your own dad? Did it matter? What happened to you? Why did you bring children into the world and then run away from them all the time? When I was a baby, did you ever put your arms around me and tell me you loved me? Did you have any fear of God? Did you think life was so worthless that you could just throw it away like you did . . . that nothing mattered except chasing that bottle? What were you thinking?"

To tell you the truth, this is just the tip of the iceberg. I haven't even told you about my time in psych wards and the stories of doing more than sixteen years in various prisons and jails . . . ❖



Rich met Jesus Christ in a jail in Medina County, Ohio. Since that transformative moment, he has been given new hope and a new future by his heavenly Father. He is married with children and is seeking to honor God in his life and home. He shares his story of loss and desperation in order to illustrate the truth that Jesus can work miracles in the life of anyone who turns to Him, no matter what dark secrets lurk in the past. "A father to the fatherless; a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (Psalm 68:5).

WORDS YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO HEAR FROM YOU, DAD

1. "I LOVE YOU."

Refuse to let a day slip away without verbally expressing your love. Some children grow up never hearing this simple, all-important assurance. It's your way of saying, "Son/Daughter, I care for you in the deepest way possible, and I'm here for you no matter what."

2. "I WAS WRONG, FORGIVE ME."

As a human being, you'll mess up. You'll speak before you think, or react in anger, or commit a host of other possible sins. When those moments come, quickly and calmly admit it to your children. "Son, I was wrong to yell at you. Will you forgive me for choosing to be angry?"

3. "I'M PROUD OF YOU."

From their first steps to their first jobs, children want our approval. There's no feeling quite like knowing that Dad is happy about what I'm doing; he's impressed with my work; he noticed my talents—even better, he's glad for me and proud of me! When is the last time your child heard specific words of encouragement from you?

4. "NO."

Dads are needed protectors of children, which means saying no to many of the harmful influences or bad choices they might otherwise get tangled up with. Your children need you to be a strong force of moral goodwill in the home, compassionate and firm in your resolve for righteousness.

5. "YES."

Say yes to the requests of your children as often as you can. (You likely have plenty of opportunities to say no.) They'll only be young once. If there are opportunities to share, laugh, give, go, explore, produce, do, try, bless, or start, why not? Say yes, and enjoy the fathering moments you have left.

6. "LET'S PRAY."

You are the most influential leader in your child's life, and they need to see and hear you pray. You might begin with simple bedtime or mealtime prayers, letting your children know that you also are a man under God's authority, praying for strength and wisdom to be a great dad to each of them.

7. "JESUS COMES FIRST."

Every family is tested in the area of priorities. There are always more things to do (work, sports, entertainment, school, etc.) than there are days on the calendar . . . which makes it all the more vital for you to set the pace spiritually. When a choice must be made, children need to see who #1 really is.

What other important words do children need to hear from their fathers?

Submit your thoughts to revive@lifeaction.org. Even better, share your answer on social media with #LifeAction #HowToDad.





NEXT STEP

Fatherless No More

Fathers, there is a call that goes beyond your family values, your comfort zones, or even your budget. It's a call that extends across the globe, and perhaps even across the street. It is more than a call, actually—it's a cry.

It is the cry of the *fatherless*. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress . . ." (James 1:27).

Some children are fatherless due to disease, crime, or war. Others are fatherless because of addictions, unfaithfulness, cowardice, or other evils.

In the United States, 24 million children live in a home without their biological father—that's 1 out of every 3 children. In Asia, UNICEF estimates that 60 million children have lost one or both parents, and most are struggling in poverty related to that loss. Africa, Europe, and Latin America tell similar stories; tears, trafficking, and heartbreak abound.

Millions at risk, without the love and protection of a godly father. Millions entering adulthood with no idea what it means to lead, protect, or provide . . . because they've never seen it done. And most critically, millions who need an earthly father to point the way toward their heavenly Father.

For at least one needy child in the world today, would you be that father?

The need is dramatic. Studies have shown that children growing up without active dads have higher chances of dropping out of school, ending up pregnant before marriage, or becoming trapped in poverty. Children without dads have a dramatically higher probability of engaging in criminal activity, gang violence, drug abuse, or suicide. (Feel free to browse specific statistics yourself at www.fatherhood.org. The evidence is overwhelming.)

If we are going to experience sustained cultural transformation, we must experience the transformation of families, starting in your house, and in mine. That's why at Life Action we spend so much time preaching and praying about family renewal, because it is the only way to turn a broken community around or to redeem a broken nation.

But it's not just about us; we must also open our doors to those without the family we enjoy. We must invite into our lives the most vulnerable, the most needy, and (often) the most complicated. The world needs an army of strong

Christian men, not to fight a physical war, but to rebuild manhood from the ground up, one child at a time.

There is not a single aspect of caring for the fatherless that is easy, except perhaps talking about it. Plenty are doing that. But I wonder, would you join me and thousands of other men across the world today, and answer one child's cry?

Just so you know, I don't teach this hypocritically. My wife and I have fostered thirty-five precious children in the last eight years, and we've adopted six of those into our forever family. We sponsor seven orphans in India, and we look for any way we can to bless other families trying to care for children.

I don't say that to brag, but rather to illustrate: *Anyone* can say yes to God. And that's when the adventure begins. I'm not exceptionally rich. I'm learning as I go. I make plenty of mistakes on this crazy journey. But God keeps giving grace and provision, based on Matthew 6:33.

*The world needs an army
of men to rebuild manhood
from the ground up.*

 @DanJarvisUS

You could foster. You could adopt. You could mentor. You could assist. You could disciple. You could share.

None of these things will happen on auto-pilot, however. A hopeless child isn't likely to show up on your doorstep with a note from the Lord saying, "Help this one, Mac!" It's going to take some initiative on your part.

There is a single mom in your church right now, wondering if her boys will go the right direction. There's an orphan in a village hut far from your comfortable home, wondering if anyone, anywhere, will care for him. There is a girl about to enslave herself to a ruthless man because she's searching for security she's never felt. There is a boy who just entered the foster system in your town, all his earthly belongings in a small duffel bag, wondering if he'll be safe tonight.

Any one of these kids would love to get to know you, Dad. It's your move. ❖

Daniel W. Jarvis
Managing Editor

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