A FATHER’S WALK
A Christian-Based Resource for Single Fathers

BY MATT HAVILAND
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Dedication

This book is dedicated first, foremost, and most importantly, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to the glory of God our Father, without Whom I would not even be here to write this. Words cannot express what You have done in my life and how much I truly love You … but You already know.

To Olivia
I simply could not ask God for a better gift than allowing me to be your dad. I cherish every day we share together, and I promise to give you my all—forever. You simply are the best daughter anyone could ever ask for, and I thank God every single day for you. I love you with all of my heart, and you will always be my little girl.

Love,
Daddy
Passionate, exciting, encouraging and most of all inspired by God, *A Father's Walk* will bless all who read it.

*A Father's Walk* is an extended roadmap for single dads who may from time to time find themselves between a rock and a hard place, single dads who may be facing difficult decisions in their lives right now or dads who may just need an encouraging word. This book is for you! I call *A Father’s Walk* an extended roadmap because when you read it, you will also discover that it lines up with the principles of the Holy Bible—our ultimate roadmap.

We live in day and age where the world has come up with labels such as absent dads and dead-beat dads, and we have allowed these words to enter our homes, our relationships and, for some, even our hearts. But the buck stops here! We are no longer going to accept the labels that this world is trying to hand out. It is time for fathers to rewrite history and take our rightful places in our homes, in our communities and most of all in the lives of our children. The devil’s tactics have been the same from generation to generation—divide and conquer. It’s time to make up our minds as men of God and men of standards at all costs. Sure, the devil is going to try and paint a picture of you being a worthless dad or a dead-beat dad, but don’t allow these distractions to cause you to lose focus. The Bible tells us in James 1:8 that “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” Remain rooted and grounded in
God’s Word and keep your mind fixed on being the best dad that God can create you to be.

Matt Haviland promotes two main things in *A Father’s Walk*. The first thing is that a dad should always maintain an active and faithful relationship with God; and secondly, a dad should always maintain an active and faithful relationship with his child(ren) at all costs. As you read this book, my prayer is that your life as a single dad will never be the same again! I really appreciate this book because it was written not by someone who was looking for a platform, but rather someone who is down “in the trenches.” After reading *A Father’s Walk* I am convinced that as a dad, if I keep my relationship with “The Father” and my relationship with my children intact, my father’s walk will indeed be a walk to remember! Again, *A Father’s Walk* will bless all who read it.

In His Service,
Pastor Daniel R. Jackson
Senior Pastor, Divine Cathedral of Faith
Tampa, FL
Introduction

One of the greatest gifts a man could ever be blessed with is the role of fatherhood. For some of us, however, that may be foreign, even scary. Fatherless children and single fatherhood are two of the greatest domestic challenges America faces today. I grew up in a home without my dad present. Without a positive adult male role model to follow, many of us, as single fathers, may be facing a variety of challenges, obstacles, fears, and doubts. This book is written with one purpose in mind: to help a generation of children grow up WITH their fathers by equipping and serving all single dads through Jesus Christ. Also, I hope to help single dads cope with the everyday pressures of single parenthood and to help reduce negative influences by keeping fathers involved with their children.

For over five years now I have been a single dad—experiencing many victories, and some crushing defeats. I have reacted at times to situations with anger and vengeance. Other times I have handled things like a seasoned veteran. Parenting was designed to be a two-person system. When one parent is removed from the equation, the full burden falls on the other. Being a single parent means you give your kids your all, whether you feel like it or not. Even married parents tire, get stressed and have bad days. As a single parent you become the mom AND the dad at the same time; it’s a full time job! I was never married to my daughter’s mom, and the pregnancy was very difficult, both physically and emotionally. Once my daughter was born, I knew something had to change.
When my daughter was about eight months old, I decided to try out a new church. I had struggled with addiction to drugs, alcohol, and sex for years. I didn’t want to be “that dad”—one whom his daughter would be ashamed of and resent. Plus, her mom and I were not on good terms, and I knew if we were going to do this, something had to change in that regard as well. As the pastor spoke, I felt the Lord tugging at my heart. After the service ended, I responded to the altar call and received Jesus into my life once and for all. Since then, He has done amazing work in my life. I am a better dad and more involved than I ever thought would be possible, and I have been blessed with multiple ministries.

God has done more for me in the past five years of my life than I did in the first 30. I now truly realize that it wasn’t until I had reached my breaking point—the point where I realized that I could not continue on the same path and make it—that Jesus gave me a new life in Him, and it just keeps getting better! Now don’t get me wrong, I still go through some tough times, struggles, and trials, but I am now more equipped than ever to deal with them head on. I am writing this book for you. We may never meet, but I understand many (maybe not all) of the issues you are dealing with. I’ve been there; some I’m still going through. I am here today to give you hope—to let you know that if you will trust Jesus Christ with all of your heart, He will confirm and establish you. His Word promises that.

Come to Me all of you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. —Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB)
Dads, the time is now more than ever. You may have full custody of your children, or you may have been separated from them for a while now. Finances may not be a problem, but chances are they are. Your relationship with your children’s mother may be wonderful and civil, or you may need God involved more than ever. Whatever your situation, whatever you are going through, and no matter how much hope you may have lost, it can change TODAY. Let’s take this walk together. Let’s follow God’s Word and trust His will be done—not ours. It’s time to step up and become the dad you were always destined to be!

In Jesus’ Name,
Matt Haviland
March, 2012
Chapter 1

A Father’s Love

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. –John 3:16 (NASB)

I chose to open this book with the most well-known scripture for one reason in particular: that as fathers, we must first know how loved we are so that we can then love our children the same. God our Father loved EVERY SINGLE ONE of us so much, that He sent Christ to die in our place once and for all. Our debt was paid in full on Calvary; now it is our turn to accept His love with our hearts wide open. For some of us, that could be very difficult. As single dads yourselves, many of you (myself included) came from a home without a father. It’s hard to grasp the concept of an “Abba” Father—one who loves us unconditionally and will never leave or abandon us. (Deut. 31:8; Josh 1:5) Although some of you may already be there, I’m guessing a good portion of you reading this book are not. Believe me, I completely understand how you could think that an all mighty, all knowing, Creator of the universe could not possibly love you, especially with everything we’ve done
wrong, right? What you have to know is that type of thinking is completely opposite to the Gospel, and is not how God sees it. He loves us: always has, always will. WE are the ones who have to change our thinking (Romans 12:2) and begin to open ourselves up to the reality that our heavenly Father DOES in fact care about every single detail of our and our children’s lives. This may come with time and some serious work on our part, but take it from a guy who has been on both sides of the tracks, and trust me when I say that following Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is by far the greatest thing we could ever do! I pray this book is just one more tool that the Lord puts in your life to help you get to that level of relationship with Him that He so desires. Once we’ve accepted the fact God loves us enough to send Jesus to die in our place, we move onto another level—laying our lives down for our children.

*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* – 1John 3:16 (NASB)

Being followers of Christ, and as fathers, our children are relying on us nowadays more than ever. Kids are screaming for attention in so many ways, and often the cries go unheard. They are acting out through a variety of disastrous methods, sometimes hurting themselves or others. A loving word, hug, or act from dad will mean more to a child than we could ever know. Even at 35 years old, I would absolutely be floored with emotions to hear the words “I love you” or “I’m proud of you” come from my dad. It’s never too late dad—tell your kids what they mean to you. Get involved in their lives. Find out what their interests are and where their dreams can take them. If you do these things and keep Jesus as your ultimate example, love God with everything you’ve got, and listen to what your kids are saying, you will become more of a
father than you ever thought you were capable of. I know, because that’s what happened to me.

**Salvation**

Before we can even begin to talk about accepting the concept of God’s love for us and the road to healing, we need to discuss what the Cross and being a follower of Jesus truly is. When Christ went to Calvary, He went as the ultimate sacrifice—a perfect offering to sin. He was fully God and fully man at the same time, a perfect lamb without blemish. As human beings, we are born into sin in dead bodies. God is absolutely holy, and absolutely no unholy being will be able to enter into His presence in Heaven, or here on Earth for that matter. When Jesus died, He cleared the way for us, acting as a gate for us to have fellowship, communion, and worship with God—just as we are. Jesus took the full load of every single sin we have ever committed or will commit, cleansed us, and made us pure and holy in God’s eyes. So, even though we are still in “dead” and fleshy bodies, our slate and past can or has been wiped clean once and for all. Some of you may have made the decision to follow Jesus already. Others of you (such as myself) may have given your life to Him at one point, but walked away from Him and are ready to come back. Finally, as a single father, and as I mentioned in the above paragraph, many of us may not have ever received any sort of fatherly love growing up, so that is totally foreign to us. **Let me assure you that accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior is the best decision you could ever make,** and He will take you to a level of love and understanding that you never knew existed. Romans 5:8 states, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we
were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (NASB) Paul follows it up in 2 Corinthians 5:17 with, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (NKJV) Did you get that?!? No matter what you’ve done, no matter how bad you’ve screwed up, no matter what you think about yourself, God will erase your past and make you a **NEW** creation!

My testimony is a perfect example. I shared a portion of it briefly in the introduction to the book, and will throughout the chapters, but it has been said to me before that our own personal testimonies are our best witnesses. Dad, no one knows your story better than you, so please do not ever compare yourself to anyone else. You have a God-given purpose in life, something that no one else can accomplish. The goal is to discover that gift and potential, then allow God to accomplish His work in your life. Yes, I hit rock bottom; I even attempted suicide in February of 2001. I have overdosed twice, was nearly killed in a car accident, have been arrested, and that’s just the main stuff! There are countless stories, experiences, and examples beyond that. But just when I thought all was lost and I seemed destined to walk in uncertainty forever, God began to pull at my heart. I began a roller coaster journey over the next six years (the roller coaster was due to my inconsistency, obviously not His.) Eventually, I allowed Him to break me; I accepted Jesus into my life once and for all, and the reformation process could finally begin. I can now stand before you with confidence, look someone straight in the eye, and tell them to their face that day was the defining moment in both mine and my daughter’s life. And here I am today, writing a book to other fathers about God’s greatness and His gift of salvation to everyone, pretty cool, huh? I am a new creation, someone who God can finally begin to work with for His purposes. I say the same can go for you.
With that being said, I would like you to stop reading here for a few minutes, and begin to pray. I want you to ask God to help you search your heart, to hear Him speak to you. Forget about what your circumstances are; block out all of the negativity, unforgiveness, and distractions. It may be scary, but try to expose yourself to Him. He knows everything anyway, so trust Him and begin to let go. Once you have, I want you to pray this following prayer:

*Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner. I have chosen so many other paths in this world, but none of them was to follow You. Today my Lord, I make the decision to follow You once and for all. I believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that You are the Son of God. I believe You died on the Cross, rose from the grave, and are now seated at the right hand of the Father. Today I choose to lay my life at the Cross. Every sin of mine, every defect of character, and my entire past is now Yours. I am a new creation by Your blood. Jesus, accept me, just as I am. Cleanse me. Make me the man, the father, and the disciple I was called to be. I thank You that You have heard my prayer. In Jesus Christ’s Name, Amen!*  

If you just prayed that prayer, let me be the first to welcome you to the Kingdom of God! Even now as I am typing this, my eyes are beginning to water with tears of joy. You just made the most important decision you possibly ever could have, for you and for your children. By accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are saying, “God, my life and my children’s life are now in Your hands.” Honestly, where else would you want them? I’m telling you fellas – this is an amazing ride, so get ready for what God can and WILL do in your life, if you let Him.
Discipleship

So where do we go from here? The next move you should make is to get yourself plugged in to a church and home group, soon. Trust me, the enemy is really upset about your salvation, and he will do anything he can to throw you off track. That is why it is imperative for you to surround yourself with other godly men and believers quickly. I will discuss this more in chapter 10, but for now, here are five basic steps that will lay a strong foundation for you. Whether you are a new Christian or have been walking with the Lord for years—we ALL can use a good brush up on the fundamentals! These five points are: finding a home church, reading Scripture daily, praying daily, tithing regularly, and fellowshipping with other Christians.

A good home church gives you a place to belong, provides the resources for fellowship and growth, and your pastor will lead you in Scripture reading and prayer. Reading Scripture and praying daily provide a foundation for the rest of your day. If possible, I recommend doing one or both early when you wake up, or mix it up and do one when you wake up and the other before bed. Develop a routine, and stick to it. Make sure you give God His due time as well. What I mean is, you will only get out of your quiet time what you put into it. The more time you spend in His presence, the more you will grow. I recommend starting with one of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) in your reading. As far as prayer goes, don’t worry if you don’t know what to say, just speak what’s in your heart and let the Holy Spirit lead you. As you spend more time doing this, your understanding of Scripture and your prayers will strengthen. Tithing is a test to how much we really trust God with our resources. Did you know that Jesus speaks more about money and possessions than any other topic?
Obviously, our stewardship of our resources is of great importance to the Lord. Although we will discuss finances directly in later chapters, I want to lay out the groundwork. Malachi 3:10 says, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” (NIV) Finally, fellowshipping with other Christians. Guys, there’s definitely strength in numbers. Having a good, strong support system of other mature believers is one of the best ways you can keep yourself in check. I will discuss accountability and mentoring as well in later chapters, but for now, I would suggest you seek out a small group or bible study at or through church.

I mentioned in the introduction to this book that I am writing this with one purpose in mind: To help a generation of children grow up WITH their fathers by equipping and serving all single dads through Jesus Christ. I am doing this in great humility—that God would use someone like ME to advance His Kingdom in such a powerful way! I am writing with passion and excitement, because if He does anything like He has done for me in your life—wow!!! There is so much power in the Cross, let’s get ready to discover it together. Who knows? I may even discover more about myself (I pray I do) along the way.

**The Power of the Cross**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.* –Acts 1:8 (NASB)
I speak on a somewhat regular basis at homeless/addiction shelters here in my hometown of Grand Rapids, MI. One of the points I try to hammer home constantly is the true power behind the Cross. I feel often times as I speak to the gentlemen in the crowd that they may think their life is a lost cause. They may feel like, “Well, that’s a nice speech and all, but I’m too messed up or don’t have the ability to change.” I feel there may be a few of you reading this book as well that are thinking the same thing. When I first became a dad, I was filled with a flood of different emotions. I was scared and confused, but most of all, I was excited! Things have never been good or stable between my daughter’s mom and me. We were never married. In fact, I only knew her a few months before she got pregnant. Until I became a father, I was an incredibly selfish human being. I left a messy trail of hurt, even scarred people along the way. I broke many girls’ hearts in two, probably started a variety of addictions to people I sold drugs to, but most of all, I destroyed who I truly was with every single sin. People have told me in the past, “Yeah, well if I follow Jesus, I have to give up drinking, drugs, sex, and so on.” My response to that is always the same: You weren’t meant to live a life of abuse and immorality! God created us in HIS image—perfect and holy. (Gen 1:26-31) He created us to SOAR! Now, somewhere down the line we’ve obviously gotten off track. Although there are a variety of ways one can become a single father, we all have one thing in common—brokenness. Thanks be to God that He sent Jesus to save us in every way possible, the true healing power behind the Cross! The writer of Hebrews tells us (in chapter 2 and throughout the book) that we have a High Priest who has suffered in every way that we do as well. That is why Jesus can relate to us: the pain, sorrow, joy, and temptations that we experience on a daily basis, He has already been there. As we take
this journey together, my prayer for you is that He leads you the way He has led me. I pray that the Lord helps you get back on your feet, blesses you, destroys strongholds of the enemy, and makes you the godly father you were meant to be. Won’t you open your heart to receive His Divine healing and teaching today? Let’s make this a journey that is a key turning point in your walk with Christ. Understand and believe that (just like so many other examples in this world) God took a Cross, which was meant as a curse and death, and turned it into the single most significant moment in history—a moment that still has the power to change and transform lives today. You can do this; believe it. God’s Word is final and it never returns void (Isaiah 55:9-11). Now, let’s start our journey together, I am so excited!
Walking the Walk

Summary
As Christians, our number one priority should be our focus on a personal relationship with God. As single fathers, our second priority is our children. Both of these are attained, along with salvation, through the Cross. Jesus cleared the way for us; it is our job to follow and lead our kids in the same manner. As we grow in our personal walk with Christ through discipleship, the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit living within us becomes more and more evident to those around us.

Key Verses for Memorization
John 3:16
1John 3:16
Romans 12:2
2Cor 5:17

Putting God’s Word to Action
• God loves me so much that He traded Jesus’ life for mine.

• I am a NEW CREATION in Christ.

• God has provided all of the tools I need to not only make it as a single parent, but to reach new heights in ways only He can help me attain.
Discussion Questions
Think back to when you first gave your life to the Lord. What sort of thoughts, emotions, and prayers did you have then? How has God’s plan unfolded in your life?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

When building a foundation in Jesus Christ, what sort of “bricks” have you laid? Are you staying committed to times of prayer, Scripture, church, etc? Describe.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

As we go through this book together, what are you praying for God to do in both your life as a dad and in your children’s lives?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Prayer
Father, I love You and I trust You in all that I do. Lead me, Lord, to follow You and become the dad You created me to be. Amen.
Chapter 2

Loving the Unlovable

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged... – 2 Tim 2:24 (NASB)

“I hate her, mom!” I remember saying those words often to my own mom in reference to my daughter’s mother. Even though I don’t even remember the details clearly, I remember crying on my first Christmas Eve with my daughter Olivia and on my first Father’s Day. There really weren’t any specific times set for us yet concerning holidays, and it was apparent I was not going to get to see Olivia on our first Christmas together. Instead, her mom offered to let me have her for something like two hours on Christmas Eve. Those two hours also included almost an hour and a half of drive time round trip. So really, I got about thirty minutes with my daughter at my house that night. She was very young—about seven and a half months old. I remember sitting with her on my bed that night filled with so much excitement and love towards her, but with so much anger towards her mother. I had all of Olivia’s presents on my bed—mostly necessary stuff like a portable bathtub, clothes, and toys—trying to get her to open
and look at everything before it was time to go home. All I wanted was to be a dad, to enjoy a Christmas with my daughter and give her the love that I had never received on holidays. Before I knew it, time was up and it was time to take her back to her mom.

Father’s Day was just the same. Olivia’s mom and I got into an argument in the driveway after I dropped her off, and she began to cry. All I remember of that day are some very harsh words exchanged between the two of us and Olivia looking at me, balling her head off as her mom took her into the house. I don’t remember why she was crying, or what exactly happened, but it definitely is not the image I wanted to be burned into my mind. That was years ago. Olivia is five years old now and we have a phenomenal relationship. Her mom and I rotate (sometimes even share) holidays, and I always have a blast with Olivia no matter what the occasion. I regret many of the words I used toward her mother and the arguments. I would never say I hated her anymore. It took a great amount of time, prayer, and leaning on God to get me to the point I’m at today concerning all of this. Trust me, her mom and I are still not on the best of terms, and often my walk is challenged. However, I must constantly remind myself that she is a child of God as well, and that Jesus died for her also. As I mentioned in the introduction to this book, I never fully surrendered my life to Jesus until Olivia was about eight months old, so on these first few holidays I was handling all of this on my own, not exactly the best way to deal with such delicate situations. This chapter addresses a topic many of us single dads deal with on a regular basis: how to love our children’s mothers unconditionally, to model a Christ-like behavior for our children through it all, and to seek God’s Word for answers. Some of you may be on decent—even great—terms with the moms, but based on some on my previous experience, many of us are not. When
I ran a small group for single dads, one of the key rules we had was that we do NOT bash our children’s moms—period. This is key if we are to be godly fathers ourselves and raise our kids to follow Jesus. Out of all the chapters in this book, I feel this one is going to be the “make it or break it” part. If we live constantly in anger, unforgiveness, and bitterness, we are robbing ourselves of the entire plan God has laid out for us. Some of this may make you feel a bit touchy, but like I said, I’ve been through a lot of this myself, so I’m here with you. I can also tell you from previous experience that letting it go and giving our anger and bitterness to God is more liberating than I can explain. These are the Lord’s words in this book, not mine. Trust Him to open your heart to receive it.

**Showing God’s love when you’ve been wronged**

*In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

—1 Peter 1:6-7 (NASB)

If we were to sum up the entire purpose of being a follower of Christ, what do you think it would be? Obviously, one of the most important factors is forgiveness. Jesus Himself tells us in Luke 5:32, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (NASB) When we come to the Cross and ask Jesus into our lives, we repent (or turn from) all sin in our lives. We make the decision to say once and for all, “God, I am a sinner. I know that no sin will
enter into Your Kingdom, but by the blood of Jesus Christ I am eternally washed clean.” So I want you to do a quick exercise for me. I want you to think of everything you’ve ever done sinfully in your life—every way that you’ve ever forsaken the Lord. I have committed adultery, sold drugs, blasphemed, lied, stolen, and so many thousands more things that I couldn’t possibly begin to list them all. However, with one prayer and eventually being baptized as an adult, my entire slate was wiped clean. Now here’s the exercise: once you’ve made that list in your head, accepted the realization that you are completely forgiven through Christ, how could we possibly ever hold anything against anyone else?!? (See Matthew 18:21-35 for a better example) The revolution is mind boggling, but yet we still struggle. That is because according to Gal 5:17, the flesh and the Spirit “are in conflict with each other.” (NIV) Our human intuition is to react negatively, while the Spirit guides us in our walk with Jesus, learning true forgiveness of others. I would recommend you read all of Galatians chapter 5 very soon as well.

So how do we get there? Well, first and foremost, we must continue to spend time in the Lord’s presence. We simply cannot do this on our own, nor should we try. All we will do is create more tension and bitterness within ourselves, pulling us further away from God. Plus, you must remember that we are one of, if not the most important, role models for our kids. They are watching us constantly, and by the measure that they see us treat others—good or bad—they will learn from it. For our sons, that could be the difference in how they treat women, and eventually their wives, throughout life. A great song for any father-son relationship is called “Watching You” by Rodney Atkins.
In the chorus the son says back to his dad,

I’ve been watching you, dad ain’t that cool?  
I’m your buckaroo, I wanna be like you.  
And eat all my food and grow as tall as you are.  
We got cowboy boots and camo pants  
Yeah, we’re just alike, hey, ain’t we dad?  
I want to do everything you do.  
So I’ve been watching you.

For our daughters, our actions regarding how we treat and respect their moms will play a HUGE factor in how they respect and view themselves growing up, and possibly even what type of man they end up marrying.

Daughters learn about marriage from watching Mom and Dad. If parents treat each other well, this becomes the expectation. If Dad is a tyrant, then men are regarded as essentially bad.  
–Dr. Jane’s Notebook by Jane R. Rosen-Grandon

Obviously, we want the best for our children, and so does God. (Matt 7:11) We must constantly strive to better ourselves by “dying to the flesh” and becoming more Christ-like every single day. As I mentioned above, it starts with forgiveness. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:32, “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (NLT) This may take a lot of time, prayer, struggles and trials, and quality moments with mature Christians to learn—but you CAN get there! Also, we must learn to control our temper, an area where I have failed a MILLION times over. “A hot tempered
man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute.” –Prov 15:18 (NASB) We will now discuss this further in this next portion, because it is especially vital in keeping our personal relationship with God intact. If we allow the enemy to control our thoughts and emotions, he can—and will—knock us off track not only from our daily walk, but it is possible that we could do some spiritual damage to both our children and their moms as well. Words are extremely powerful, so let’s guard them closely!

Words

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. –Prov 18:21 (NASB)*

One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the gift of speech. We use our words to praise Him through prayers and songs; we can tell our kids how proud we are of them and how much we love them; and we can use our words to advance ourselves through our lives and career. However, like any gift the Lord has given us, if not stewarded properly, the gift can be devastating. It only takes a matter of a few seconds for relationships to be destroyed. Lives can be broken and reputations can be ruined. So much of this is true in how we speak to our children’s moms. I will take responsibility for the things I have said to or about Olivia’s mother. I have confessed my sin before the Lord and asked for Olivia’s mother’s forgiveness as well. I will also have to stand in account for all of my actions one day before Jesus.

As we grow in our walk, tests and trials will naturally come along the way. Let’s face it, there are many ways in which the world is not going to change. People hold grudges, they gossip,
and far too often we slash at each other with our words. Taking a Christ-like approach to a situation where tempers are flaring and emotions are running high is definitely going against the grain from a societal standpoint. However, as Christian men, going against the grain may often be the norm for us. Let’s take, for example, a time when you’ve been wronged or a situation has put you in a distressful position. Our natural reaction is to fight back, and often for me, to cut deep with my words. I promise you that in the majority of these situations, the outcome will be worse if there is a heated exchange of words. “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” –Prov 10:19 (NASB) I guarantee you I have hurt a lot of people worse with words more than I could have ever physically harmed them. Physical injuries may heal up, but harmful words can leave years of pain. That is not the manner in which we are called to react. Yes, you may be in the right. However, if we are truly modeling Jesus, we must hold to His standard. Jesus was mocked, beaten, cursed, insulted, and eventually crucified—yet He never swayed from His love for others. He understood His role, and He remained consistent all the way to the Cross. He is our ultimate model when it comes to forgiving others, enduring hardships, and living out God’s will in our lives. Spend time in the Gospels and really get to know who Jesus was. If you remain consistent in your pursuit of righteousness, He will shape and mold you to become more like Him. In fact, Jesus Himself tells us in Matthew 12:34 & 37, “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. (v34) “For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.” (v37) –NASB

God sent Jesus to die for our children’s moms just as much as He did for us—never forget that. I still struggle often with this on a regular basis, but as I allow the Holy Spirit to move in
me, I realize just how imperfect I am as well. (Matt 7:1-5) Our children need both parents, and as stated above, the manner that we handle some of these situations can greatly impact the way our children grow up, for the better or worse.

Holding to a Higher Standard

Now that we’re on the right track, let’s stay on it.

—Phil 3:16 (Message)

So far in this chapter we have touched on forgiving others and showing God’s love, even when we don’t want to. We have discussed how our behavior can shape that of our children, and finally, that words can be used to glorify God or they can do some serious damage. The overall purpose of this chapter is to bring light into an area where we as single dads often fail. I have made some major mistakes when it comes to how I’ve dealt with my daughter’s mom. Through it all, I have learned so much, not only about God’s love, but about myself as well. It is only now, over five years later, that I am finally beginning to really surrender myself in this area. I have been vigilant many times, but I have also sought after God throughout. Trust me, the amount of time, money, prayer, gossip and slander, emotional roller coasters, and legal battles I have endured have both drained me and given me new strength. How? I now can look back and analyze how I am different (for the better). Have I allowed God to make His necessary changes in me? Or, have I talked the talk or walked the walk? Guys, we never stop growing. (Phil 1:6) Even if the situation with our children’s moms eventually smooths out, we’re going to face trials all throughout life, you can be assured
of that. Follow Jesus’ model of love and forgiveness (Matt 5:43-44); do not get vengeful (Romans 12:19); and most of all, love unconditionally. I am also going to suggest that if you do not do it already, that you start praying for your kid’s mom daily. Whoa! I bet I just struck a few nerves out there, huh? Yes, Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies and those who persecute us. This may or may not be the case in your particular situation, but I am definitely in the category of “guys who pray for someone who slams me often.” Is it hard? Sometimes. But, as our flesh dies out of us and God begins to fill us with His Spirit more and more, praying for the moms (or anyone else who may difficult in your life) becomes a bit more pleasurable (yes, pleasurable) with each prayer. Isn’t it amazing how God can take the things that we so often look forward to the least and turn them into something we can’t wait to do, simply because we know that we are glorifying Him and growing in our walk when we do? I will discuss praying with our children in the next chapter, but I’d now like to plant the seed about how incredibly important not only praying for your children’s mother is by yourself, but also with our kids as well. Olivia and I do it every single time we are together. There is no other option in my book, and it is now second nature when she and I are together. Seeds, bricks, foundation—whatever you choose to call it—those prayers all add up in our children’s (and our) spiritual growth. Paul tells us in 1Cor 13:13, “But now faith, hope, and love, abide in these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (NASB)
Walking the Walk

Summary
When times of conflict arise between you and your children’s mother, it is critical how you handle these situations. Our children are always watching us, and we are to be their number one model of Jesus. We should always remember that Christ died for their moms just the same as He did for us, and hold true to that when those challenging situations arise. By sticking close to God’s Word and allowing it to penetrate our hearts, we are able to bless rather than curse others with our words and actions, thus walking in the manner to which we have been called.

Key Verses for Memorization
2Tim 2:24
1Peter 1:6-7
Eph 4:32
Prov 10:19
Rom 12:19

Putting God’s Word to Action
• Times are going to arise when your walk will be challenged—you can be sure of that. Your main focus should be how you handle those situations when they arise and you do face them.

• The same tongue that God created for us to bless Him can be used to curse others, who were also created in His image.

• The bar has been raised for us when it comes to being a follower of Jesus Christ. We should always attempt to remain under the influence of the Holy Spirit if we are to model Him.
**Discussion Questions**

Have there been times of trials between me and my child(ren)’s mother? Discuss.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Have I handled these times according to God’s Word? How or how not?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Knowing the example Jesus has set before us, how can I continue to seek Him in loving my child(ren)’s mother?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If I have not started already, will I begin to pray for her daily?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, I pray to be constantly reminded that You died for my child’s mother as much as You did for me. Bless her and keep her tonight. Amen.*
Chapter 3

Standing in the Gap

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. –Eph 6:4 (NASB)

One of the greatest gifts we can ever give our children is ourselves. As fathers, we carry an especially unique ability to lead, mold, and influence our children. We are their heroes, their protectors, and often their favorite playmates. I myself have been the target of being bounced on and tackled a thousand times over by Olivia. Once, in the small group, we were discussing the quality of time and memories we have spent with our kids. One of the guys said, “When it’s all said and done, it’s not the trips to Disney World or the big vacations that we remember the most about our parents, it’s all of the little things.” We may not be able to fly them all over the nation or world, buy the greatest of toys, or put on the best parties. However, some of the greatest adventures have come out of fighting imaginary dragons in a castle made out of cardboard boxes; some of the greatest stories are not in books, but are silly and goofy ones we make up along the way; and Hoping our kids turn out decently will NEVER compare to standing in the gap for
them and taking yourself to the altar to pray for your children and their well-being! You have been given an amazing gift—the gift of fatherhood. Often it is some of the best fun we have ever had, but more often than not, it requires sacrifice on our part.

Time With Our Kids

As a single parent, time is something we may be extremely short on. Often we work full time, share custody of our children, maintain our own house, run errands, and so on. Possibly we work two jobs, are in school, or are out seeking work. No matter what the case, if and when we have our children, time can always be a factor. When I speak of “time,” I’m talking about the good, quality time one-on-one with our kids. When’s the last time that happened with you and your children? When Olivia was younger, I would often just throw on a movie or put her down early for a nap so I could get caught up around the house or rest for a while. I did not give her my all, and I got convicted. Dad, these moments with our kids are irreplaceable. If we are not continually attentive, one day our kids will be grown and we will be standing there looking back, wondering where the years went.

*If we take care of the moments, the years will take care of themselves.*
—Maria Edgeworth

So how do we find that balance? Good question—one that we often struggle for answers to. First and foremost, we “tithe our time” to the Lord. Doing this is no different than when we give our first fruits of finances to God, but in this case, we give Him the beginning (and hopefully the end) of our days as well. God
invented time; it is His—just like everything else in the world. When we are walking in harmony with Jesus, God will literally “stretch” our days out. Our natural thinking is to get up and get right to our day—work, kids, errands, household chores, etc. We couldn’t possibly have any extra time to read, study and pray, right? Possibly, if we gave up a little more sleep, or what about skipping a few minutes at the gym? No, if we are committed to the Lord with our time, He will allow everything to fall into place throughout the week just fine. Trust me, I’ve seen it happen in my life and in others’. My recommendation is to start and end your day with quiet time—about 15 minutes or so in the morning and again in the evening—and let it develop from there. This is a time that is dedicated to your personal relationship with Jesus through prayer and reading Scripture or a good devotional. Turn the cell phone off. Inhibit any other distractions, if possible. Give God your best during this time. Please don’t let it be something you just do, check off the list, and move on with your day. At the very least, try to be completely “still” and listen to Him talk to you. I have about a 20-25 minute drive into work every morning. I still rise a bit early each day to get some good reading in, but I love using my drive time to pray and talk to God, listen to some praise and worship music, and just listen to what He has in store for me for the day. Dad, it doesn’t matter when or where you get your quiet time in. You can pray at your workbench or desk as far as I’m concerned. The important point is that you make the effort to spend time with the Lord on a regular basis.

Second, we need to take care of our physical bodies. This includes eating right, getting sufficient sleep, and exercising regularly. I was a personal trainer for over four years, and I’ve seen how people’s schedules can weigh them down into a physical funk. Improper nutrition or sleep and lack of physical activity can leave
you feeling lethargic and prone to sickness. Let me put it this way, the better you feel physically, the more you will be able to balance along the way. You simply cannot give God or your kids your best if you are constantly wiped out. I would recommend that you begin to think and pray over the areas in your life where these categories are lacking, and make the necessary changes. Start small and be realistic. What I mean is, if you are not used to working out on a regular basis or your diet is something less than desirable, do not just jump straight into a overly-rigorous workout routine or flip your nutrition plan around a complete 180 degrees. That is both very challenging and could even be dangerous. Rather, I would recommend that you seek out guidance from those individuals that are qualified to assist you in getting started, such as a personal trainer, your doctor, or a nutrition specialist. Set small goals based on your time frames, abilities, and dedication level. Once you achieve the benchmarks you originally set out to accomplish, go for a bit more, and so on. Stick with small steps, but keep it going and watch how your quality of life increases over time!

**Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. —3John2 (NASB)**

As you begin to grow in your walk with God through your quiet time and you get better at stewarding your time—combined with a healthier body—your improved well-being will translate into other areas of your life. I believe areas such as work performance and your overall demeanor will excel. Best of all, just watch how your time with your children improves—for everyone involved. You will have more energy—and I pray—value the time together much more also. Plus, let’s face it, you need to be in shape to have kids! Sports, sledding, swimming, hiking, carrying 18 grocery
bags in one hand and a child in the other, all require a strong body. By improving yourself physically, you will not only be able to participate in these activities more often, but for many more years to come!

Raising godly Children

*Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.* —Prov 22:6 (NASB)

It’s every parent’s dream for his/her children to grow up to be “somebody”—not necessarily famous, but a person of character and integrity. I believe it is human nature for us to want our kids to become better adults than we are—not fail where we did, to excel where we did not. Also, children are born so innocent and sweet, pure and free from any corruption of the world. As we watch them grow, we may hope and dream FOR them. These aspirations may not always be what God has planned for their lives. I came from an upper class white family. Although my parents were never married, I had so many more advantages in life than other kids my age, but I still fell, and I fell hard. My dad rarely used the little time I got to spend with him each week to teach me any real life lessons or instill strong values into me. Yes, we had a lot of fun, but he often wasn’t there when I really needed to have those deep talks about life. When we did discuss something serious, I actually found myself paying attention to him because I sought out that fatherly influence and instruction. Unfortunately, it was often short lived, and I couldn’t just pick up the phone and call him any time I wanted to. If I did, he was usually too busy for an in-depth conversation. I now recognize a lot of that from my
childhood and do my absolute best to make sure Olivia doesn’t go through the same thing. Not only does this ensure that I will be around when those deep life talks do come up, but I’m laying the groundwork for her to become a stronger and more stable individual as she grows. Whether they admit it or not, children do want certain boundaries and rules set in place. This gives them both a sense of security and shows that we love them. Our job as their fathers is to seek God’s guidance through His Word and apply it to their lives. The same boundaries and principles that He sets for our protection and well-being, we are to pass on to them in the love of Christ. (Col 3:20-21)

*Fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, suicide, poor educational performance, teen pregnancy, and criminality.*

Dad, the statistics are overwhelmingly stacked against any of our kids when they live in a home without us there full time. I understand many of you reading this may actually have full custody of your children as well. I also understand that being raised in a two-parent family—or a “Christian” family for that matter—does not ensure that children will be spared the negative influences so prevalent in our world today. We live in a fallen world, a world tarnished and polluted with sin. Often bad things happen to good people. As Christian fathers, we are called to be the head of the household. We have the spiritual authority over our children to pray on their behalf. God has given us that authority and He will honor it if we come with the right heart and intentions. I have heard a testimony of how a father in my church
stood at the altar on behalf of his daughter, who had a broken arm and lived in another state. Because of his prayers and obedience, her arm was healed within a matter of days! Please do not ever think for a moment that you don’t have that type of power, because you do! Generational curses can be broken and family lineages renewed through our faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. (We will discuss those topics in a later chapter) Statistics may say one thing, but “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” –1John 4:4 (NASB)

In your quiet time, pray on behalf of your children. Cry out to the living God for protection over your kids: tell Him how much they mean to you, and pray for wisdom to guide and lead them spiritually. Also, make sure to take your children to church with you. In a 1994 Swiss survey, the results were staggering: “In short, if a father does not go to church, no matter how faithful the mother’s devotions, only one child in 50 will become a regular worshipper. If a father does go regularly, regardless of the practice of the mother, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will become churchgoers (regular and irregular). If a father goes but irregularly to church, regardless of mom’s devotion, between a half and two-thirds of their offspring will find themselves coming to church regularly or occasionally.” Dad THAT is the power and influence we have over our kids’ spiritual future. Please don’t ever doubt yourself when it comes to that. As I mentioned above, though, your relationship with Jesus must be secured first.
Praying for our Kids

One of the greatest prayer times I have ever been involved in came while I was running the single dad group. We had just finished reading the book *Prayer on Fire* by Fred Hartley III. In the book, Pastor Hartley shared an experience he and his friend had when they were younger. They just sat on the floor and began to praise God, with no rhyme or reason to the prayers. The Holy Spirit took control of the room and before they knew it, a great amount of time had passed. We decided to follow this example one night in the group. I allowed the guys to get comfortable anywhere they wanted in the room, turned the lights almost all but off, and we just let the prayers fly! What began as praying for our kids also blended into interceding for their mothers. Like I said, no rhyme or reason. We did not rotate around the room; everyone was free to speak out loud whenever he felt led to, or remain quiet for as long as he wanted. We fed off of each other’s prayers, the Spirit was flowing, and before we knew it, 45 minutes had flown by! As we finished and I turned the lights up, we began to grasp the feelings of awe and peace we had just experienced. It truly was amazing!

Although this experience was wonderful (and I believe it was very effective for our kids and their mothers), praying for our kids is necessary. Praying with our children is mandatory. Remember that song by Rodney Atkins that I talked about? If you read the lyrics or listen to the song, you will see how the whole course of the story changes for the better once his son hears him pray. Remember, our kids are little (or big) sponges, they will soak up and often model any behavior (good and bad) they learn from us. By far, one of the greatest influences we can have on our kid’s spiritual lives is to pray with them. According to the research done
by author George Barna in his book *Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions*, the majority of a child’s spiritual growth is accomplished before the teen years. For those of you who have sons or daughters that are still young, get involved as much as possible in their spiritual growth. And for you single fathers with older children, don’t worry. I did not even really begin walking solid with the Lord until I was 30. Yes, God does the work, and we are called to steward.

I try to make a point to pray with Olivia as much as possible. We obviously pray before we eat, but also at bedtime and when I drop her off to either her mother or to school. In fact for over the past couple years, every time Olivia and I have parted, I lay my hands on her and speak Aaron’s Benediction over her: “May the Lord bless you; may the Lord keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you; be gracious under you; lift His countenance upon you; and give you peace. In Jesus’ Name. Amen!” (See Numbers 6:24-26) I know all of this has a positive effect on her because I see the fruit. Olivia loves going to church: she can quote several different prayers at age 5; she knows and loves certain praise and worship songs; and most of all, she actually asks me to pray with or for certain situations (her mom, friends, if she has a cold, etc.). She even recently has begun to pray for a little boy in her daycare because he does not believe in Jesus, and Olivia prays for his beliefs to change. That is enough to make me humble and throw myself down on the floor before the Cross and thank Jesus for blessing my family in such a powerful way! I am by no means telling you this to brag or gloat—I’m simply emphasizing the point that God works through us in our kid’s lives.

So where are you with all of this? If we don’t have Christ as our foundation, how can we truly expect to lead our children
against the negative ways of the world? Our children’s friends carry great weight in their lives, as does the culture of music, television, and media. Honestly, we are in a war, and the fight for our children’s souls begins with our being on the front lines. Don’t be afraid. In fact, rise to the challenge and accept God’s gift of fatherhood in your life! When we submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ, He will fill us with the Holy Spirit for both wisdom and discernment to lead us along the way. (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:5-15) Dads, now is the time for a generation of fathers to rise up and become the spiritual leaders we are called to be. I love how the movie Courageous ended, with the Resolution of fathers doing just that—standing before God and saying “I will.” Let’s make that step today and stand up to declare boldly before our Father that WE WILL lead our children in Christ, and let’s then trust our Savior to do the same with us.
Walking the Walk

Summary
God's Word tells us that we, as fathers, are called to lead our children in Christ. Often, obstacles such as time, distance, and even fear stand in the way of our reaching that potential. Overcoming any and all of these is key if we are to raise godly children and provide for a stronger next generation. We can do this through direct engagement with our children, praying with them, and keeping ourselves submitted to God's sovereignty.

Key Verses for Memorization
Eph 6:4
1John 4:4
Col 3:20-21
Num 6:24-26

Putting God's Word to Action
- Quality one-on-one time with God will lead to quality one-on-one time with our kids.
- You have spiritual authority over your children. Know it and use it.
- Take your kids to church with you as often as possible and pray WITH them every chance you get.
Discussion Questions
In your own words, what does “quality time” with your kids mean to you? What are some examples?


In what ways are you leading your kids spiritually? In what areas could you improve?


As one of the primary role models for our children, what topics do you think are the most important to focus on? Discuss.


Prayer
Father, You have called me to be a godly steward of my children for Your purposes. I ask that You would fill me with Your Spirit and lead me in becoming a great father. Amen.
Chapter 4

The Other Man

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
—Matt 22:39 (NIV)

In this chapter we are going to discuss a variety of scenarios, all pertaining to what happens when another man enters your children’s lives. This may happen in a couple of ways: your ex may have remarried; currently be dating someone; or may have a live-in boyfriend. Whatever the case, a good portion of it is out of our control, and emotions may run high. Much of your reaction could be based on your personal relationship with the Lord, your kid’s mom, and/or your children themselves. However, when it’s all said and done, we are to honor God for any means that are within our ability—the rest we must entrust to Him.

Here are a few statistics about what is commonly referred to as “blended families”:

- By 2010 blended families are projected be the predominant family form in the U.S.
• 2,100 new blended families are formed EVERY DAY in America

• 68% of re-marriages involve children from prior marriages

And so on...

Obviously, this is a MAJOR topic in our nation these days. If you research blended families, you will see that in the majority of cases, the children in blended families reside with the mother and her significant other. That is not to say, however, that dads don’t have full custody either, because they do. One statistic that was especially disturbing to me was that up to 70% of church pastors/leaders said they “don’t know where to turn” for assistance when it comes to ministering to those in stepfamily situations. Also, less than 12% of single parents attend church regularly because they feel the church “doesn’t care” about their “broken lives!” Have we really fallen so far away from God as a nation that our spiritual leaders are lost? Single parents are in need of guidance now more than ever. It absolutely breaks my heart when not only do the parents suffer the pain of brokenness, but the children as well—especially when in most cases there are organizations that are able to help. Once again, I cannot stress enough the importance of a dad who is completely submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ for his support and guidance. Let’s look into that further.

**When another man enters your children’s life**

Throughout my experience of ministering to single fathers, I have come across several situations where the mom has either remarried or is in a long-term relationship with another man.
I have even experienced another guy around my daughter from time to time. I have noticed through it all that it is typically the father who is walking with the Lord—able to handle the situation and his relationship with the kids minimally affected. I have seen men crumble in the wake of the reality of another guy in his child’s life, and I have seen others who have elevated themselves as fathers during the most difficult of circumstances. You may be one or the other, or perhaps in the middle. Remember, it is not about them (your children’s mom and whomever she is with currently), it is about you! So how do we approach this? Let’s take a look at what Paul tells us in Romans: “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” –Rom 5:3-5 (NASB) Every single time we come across a new challenge in our lives, it’s an opportunity to stop, step back, and pray to clearly discern what God is doing through it all. These verses are telling us, “Hey, wait! Rejoice! Because God is not only building us stronger from the inside (character), but He is giving us hope!” Now “hope” may be the furthest thing from your mind right now, but how often do we take one approach to a situation and twist it all around when God is up to something bigger? Come on guys, I can’t be the ONLY one, right?

Another thing we are to do is not judge. Yes, our children’s safety and protection is a front burner priority to us, but make sure you have facts before pointing fingers. And by all means, let’s not gossip! (See Prov 11:13; 16:28; and 25:10 for a few examples) This may be hard, and you may have to really pray for Jesus to remove some of your negative emotions here, but stay
strong and always stay in the Spirit. If you do fall into what I’ve heard termed “fleshing out” and lose your cool (which does happen...trust me!), try to recognize it right away and make the necessary moves to correct the situation. In other words, take the high road through humility and apologize to your kids, their mom, the other guy, etc. It doesn’t matter who’s right or wrong, what matters is the final impression of the situation your children experience. If you do screw up, use the next time you have a few minutes alone with the kids to talk with them about it. I’ve had to do that with Olivia. We discussed my mistake, I nailed it to the Cross, and we moved on from there. Don’t dwell in it—no condemnation, remember? (Romans 8:1)

Portraying a Christ-Like Attitude

As I’ve mentioned earlier in this book, and will throughout, our kids are always watching us. Being a follower of Jesus Christ is not just an action, it is a lifestyle. We are called to live differently than the world, and that often means living contrary, perhaps, to even what we have been taught. A good example of this is when I was recently witnessing to a lady I work with. I was telling her about a jail ministry I am involved in and she simply could not comprehend why people would visit a jail to help the inmates. I mean she really stood there with a dumbfounded look on her face because she simply could not grasp the concept of God’s love. I do know that she comes from a broken family and definitely lives a worldly life. My guess is that she has never really been loved, so how can she understand it? According to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, two-thirds of infants and toddlers watch a screen an average of two hours a day. Kids under age six watch
an average of about two hours of screen media a day, primarily TV and videos or DVDs, and kids and teens eight to 18 years spend nearly four hours a day in front of a TV screen and almost two additional hours on the computer (outside of schoolwork) playing video games—not to mention the time they spend in school with their friends compared to the actual QUALITY time we get with them. The point I am making here is that we only have a small amount of time in front of our kids to model Jesus, so if it’s not in our heart, chances are our actions won’t express it at the times we need to the most.

Once again, we must not judge. This includes not only the other man, but also our children’s mom, and anyone else in this world for that matter. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” –Luke 6:37-38 (NIV) These are Jesus’ words.

When speaking of others, especially those immediately involved in our kid’s lives, always try to do it with grace. Although I have held my breath in a number of situations concerning Olivia’s mom, the fact of the matter is that she IS my daughter’s mom, and Olivia loves her very much. I am not out to sabotage my daughter’s relationship with her mother, nor should you either. Remember the old saying, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.” The same rule applies here, as Paul writes, “Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.” –Eph 4:29 (Message) Wow! When I first heard that verse, it blew me away! I remember all the times I have slammed someone else, used what I like to call “locker room” talk, and so on. Not only
did I infect the ears of those around me, but if it was within the past few years, I damaged my witness as well. “Each word a gift.” Guys, often with our kids we only get one shot at something. If our children hear us bad mouth their moms, they will remember that and possibly do the same to their mom or spouse when they grow up. If we speak with edification and grace, our children will say one day, “You know, through it all, my dad never said one bad word about my mom or __________. He really walked with class and grace—he modeled Jesus.” That is exactly the standard God has set for us—one that is truly attainable. However, walking and STAYING in the Spirit when difficult moments arise comes only with maturity in the Lord. (1Cor 3:1-3; 1Pet 2:1-3)

You Are Still Their Dad!

By far, one of the hardest things to bear as a father would have to be the feeling of losing our children to another man or family. I want to give you some encouragement, though. Think of your own parents. For some of us this may bring back thoughts of fun Christmas mornings, playing with dad in the backyard, fun summer days, and so on. For a lot of us, myself included, it brings up feelings and emotions of bitterness, anger, confusion, and often a void of love or respect. Despite it all, I still find myself with a “soft spot” for my parents, regardless of everything they did to hurt me or my siblings. As children of God and as human beings, we are born with an innate sense of love and compassion for our parents. In fact, God has given us that sense because He commands us to both obey and honor our mother and father. We don’t have to like what they did, and often we may not like them, but we must honor them. Whether you are fully involved with your children
and have a wonderful relationship with them, or there is a great
distance (physically, emotionally, or spiritually) between you—
the healing power of Christ is what holds and bonds relationships
together. Kids are born with one set of parents—and you are
50% of that equation. As I mentioned in chapter 1, I would be
absolutely floored to hear any words of encouragement directed
towards me come out of my dad’s mouth. Now if he doesn’t ever
get around to that, will I love him any less? No, he’s still my dad.
He also has influenced and shaped me in a ton of positive ways to
this day—some of which I now share with my daughter.

Even if your children are living with another guy, or he is
around regularly, you are still a major point of influence in their
lives. Do not let any feeling of self pity destroy a beautiful treasure
from God! Use your freedom in Christ to model His love for your
kids, and I pray, to their mother and her significant other. Who
knows? You may even lead them to Christ! If you are on good
terms with him, that is only going to strengthen the confidence
your children have in life. Having two strong male role models in
a child’s life brings in a variety of positive dynamics. Always know
that you are their dad—they do. Regardless of whether they are
mad at you or not, they still do love you. Thank the Lord for
giving you the strength to endure and always remember to take a
minute to look at what God is doing. He may be working directly
on you in the areas you need the most!
Walking the Walk

Summary
Along with the brokenness of being a single parent, often come challenges. If and when another man enters our children’s lives, we have two choices of how we can react. As Christians, we are to follow God’s Word and portray a Christ-like attitude, even when we do not feel like it. Our children always have and always will love us, even if it does not always show. Turning over the areas that are beyond our control to God will help us rise above when we need to the most, thus benefiting our children tremendously in the long run.

Key Verses for Memorization
Matt 22:39
Rom 5:3-5
Eph 4:29

Putting God’s Word to Action
• Jesus commands us to love others.

• The stronger your walk with the Lord, the more equipped you will be to handle challenging situations when they arise.

• YOU are your children’s dad; love them and teach them in ways that only you can.
Discussion Questions

Has there ever been (or is there currently) a time when another man has entered into your child(ren)’s life? If so, what were your initial reactions?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

Are you supportive in front of your kids about the other man? In what ways do you model God’s love? In what ways could you improve?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

We all fall short of the glory of God; do not let it get you down. Given the current circumstances, how can you improve your own personal relationship with your children, built on a foundation of Jesus Christ?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

Prayer

Lord, help me to rise and glorify You in tough situations. I pray to draw close to You each and every day. For You are the ultimate Father and I want to reflect Your love to my children and to others. Amen.
Chapter 5

Finances

A truly rich man is one whose children run into his arms when his hands are empty. –Unknown

As a single father, or as a person in general, finances are often a topic of discussion. In a culture that is always telling us to buy, buy, buy, it is no wonder that we often have a desire to own so many different things. I was born into a family that was well off. In fact, I never really learned how to steward money or discipline myself financially until I lost most of what I had. I often look back at all of the “things” I was given, but never earned as a child and young adult. As I became older, I ultimately had to become responsible for my own finances, and often I failed. When I was around 25 years old, I purchased my first house—a duplex. I used some money my dad had set aside for the down payment on the house. Later, I used the rest of what my dad had given me plus accrued income from the rental and bought two more houses. I spent the money irresponsibly, but managed to keep the houses afloat. Olivia was born in 2006 and about that time two of the mortgages jumped because they were on ARMs—a total of $500
a month between the two! Add in court costs, child support, and an economy that was starting to break apart, and I had a negative swing of around $1000 per month! Eventually, I filed bankruptcy in 2009.

Making Ends Meet

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. –Matt 6:33 (NIV)

For the first time in my life, I started to struggle financially. I was still fairly young in my walk with God and did not discern a lot of what was going on around me. You see, for so many years I had placed such a high value on material things. I always had name brand clothes and shoes, nice jewelry, and my food bill every week was out of control (I ate out a lot!). I believe the Lord needed to start knocking down some walls that I had built between Him and me, and He continues to do it to this day for my benefit. So does that make things any easier? Well, yes and no. Often I still struggle to make ends meet. However, I no longer have worries or concerns about what will be provided (see Matt 6:34). I am secure in wearing items from Goodwill, discount grocery shopping, and putting some luxuries on hold if need be for now. As we continue to die to self in our walk with Jesus, worldly wants and desires begin to fade out. We walk humbly, just as He walked. I now see provision as a blessing, not something to be taken for granted. The Bible is our number one resource for financial guidance, and following God’s Word will not lead us astray, that is His promise.

So what are some of the areas that need to be addressed to keep us or get us back on track? First and foremost, we need to
take an aggressive approach toward any debt we may have. In this case, I would recommend speaking with a financial counselor (some may do it for free or bare minimum), following a Dave Ramsey series, or any godly financial class you can find at a local church. Paying debt down is a major step in breaking the financial bondage that is weighing you down! Second, get creative when it comes to saving money. I don’t know about you guys, but I was never one to look for too many sales or coupons when it came to shopping. I ate what I liked, not what was on sale; I already mentioned the name brand clothes; and I practically lived on the golf course during the summer. Listen to Paul’s words to the church of Philippi: “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along in humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both having abundance and suffering need.” –Phil 4:11-12 (NASB) Remember, Paul wrote this book, one of the most upbeat of his letters, while he was in prison! Our circumstances are what we make them; God doesn’t change—we must. Whenever possible, hold off on your wants. Start hitting the paper or coupon books for sales on groceries and other necessities, and consider options when it comes to things like carpooling and finding some extra income (garage sale, side work, etc…). You may say, “That sounds great and all, Matt, but I am really struggling here.” Trust me, I understand. The fact of the matter is that financial storms and blessings are both a part of life, God allows seasons of all different aspects to come into our world (Matt 5:45; Ecc 3:1-8). Our job is to stay committed to Him and trust Him completely by a constant dying to the flesh. Yes, it can be very scary sometimes, but so can this walk. Either we trust God’s Word, or we don’t. I have done both in my life, and
I’m here to tell all of you today that not only does His Word not fail, but often He blesses us in ways we never even saw coming.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. –Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

Providing for Your House

...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. –Josh 24:15 (KJV)

As fathers, we are called to lead our children in many ways, one of which is financially. Now, leading financially does not always mean we have the means to provide our kids with all of the toys, and “stuff” that they want (which by the way, is a lot!). No, leading financially is providing the necessities for our kids; it is teaching them how to steward their money properly; and of course, modeling obedience for our children, such as tithing and helping those less fortunate. You already know that Jesus Himself talks about money or possessions more than Heaven and Hell combined, so look to God’s Word for guidance in all of these areas whenever necessary. For example, we read in 2Corinthians 8:1-7 that the churches of Macedonia, despite the financial affliction and poverty they were experiencing, gave extremely generously—far beyond that of which they were expected. Not only did they give monetarily, but the Bible tells us that they gave themselves to the Lord first, and then to others. Now THAT is radical giving! Although this is a very strong example, it definitely lays the groundwork and sets the tone of what we are able to do as children of God. Also, always believe that He will provide
everything you will need, such as food, clothing, and shelter. (Matt 6:25-32) It is our job, however, to still give God (and our jobs) the very best that we can. If we take the attitude of “I can just goof off at work or do a half-way job and no one will notice” or “God will provide for us, so I don’t have to work” mentality, trust me, our Father will teach us the proper way through some tough love. God expects us to work. In Genesis 2, the Bible tells us that the Lord gave the Garden of Eden for Adam to tend (v 15). Both the books of Ecclesiastes and Colossians tell us to give God 100% in all that we do (Ecc 9:10; Col 3:23-24), for it is Jesus Christ that we are truly working for, not man. Finally, listen to Paul’s words to the Thessalonians: “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.” –2Thess 3:10-12 (NIV)

Dads, it is our job to work and provide for our household. Now, for those of you who may be currently laid off, cannot find work, or are on some sort of financial aid, keep praying and trust Him with ALL of your resources. The enemy and the world will try to lead you astray with all sorts of temptations to earn income. I pray you are filled with enough discernment when these arise to know whether or not they match up with Jesus’ teachings. When you trust God with all that you do, and not give in to worldly lusts and idols, He will surely bless you. (Psalm 40:4) Put your confidence in the Lord: “But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him.” –Jer 17:17 (NIV)
Godly Stewardship

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
–Matt 6:21 (NIV)

I touched briefly on tithing in both this chapter and in chapter 1, plus I will discuss it more in chapter 10. Why the emphasis on tithing and stewarding our resources? Well basically, if God cannot trust us with a little, He will never bless us with a lot. For a better understanding of this, read the Parable of the Talents found in Matthew 25:14-30. Also, we are to set an example for our kids to better themselves financially, perhaps in areas where some of us (myself included) have already fallen short. There is also the discussion of what our true needs are versus things that we want. Since we already have children, we should be very used to this concept. How many times have we denied them something they “just had to have” only to be able to provide for household necessities? Well, the same should go for us. We must learn to discipline ourselves financially so we can not only give God our absolute best in terms of stewardship, but so that He can (and will) bless us in return with even greater works. I am an avid golfer. I played in several leagues for multiple years, often league nights were some of the greatest points of my entire summer. I developed numerous golfing buddies, and the camaraderie was often unmatched. However, due to the financial turnaround that I experienced around 2008 and 2009, golf has been put on hold for a couple years now. I may get out to the driving range sporadically, but I have not played a single round of golf at all the last two years. Times have changed. Finances are more restrictive and I need to work more to provide for Olivia and me. I also had to give up working out for a while. I used the time I normally
spent in the gym to pick up extra hours at work. Slowly but surely, we are coming out of it all. The greatest part of all of this is that I can now stand and look back at where I was and how God brought me through all of it—never going without food, shelter, or clothing. The word “budget” was never in my vocabulary, but is now a common term. Dying to self may not be fun when we’re in the middle of the process, but the end result is, when done God’s way, much better than we could have ever conceived ourselves.

Take a step back and evaluate your life in terms of finances and resources right now. Perhaps you are doing fine with all of this. If so, that is great, but the question is “are you using everything you have to bring glory to God?” Is He getting the credit, or are you? Are you obedient with your money? Do you bless others when you have the chance? If so, Jesus will bless you in return. If not, the Bible tells us you are doing the same to Him. (Matt 25:34-46) Even if you are struggling financially, we are still commanded to bless those less fortunate: the orphans and the widows, the poor and the sick. Remember the widow’s mite? Finally, we are to do it all with a benevolent heart, thus allowing God to bless us with more in order to repeat the process. (2Cor 9:6-8) He will honor your very best in all that you do: work, money, tithing and giving, and your prayers. God is a Father that loves His children for who they are—not for what the world says they should be. Remember, as a father yourself, you are already an amazingly rich man!
Walking the Walk

Summary
Financial storms are a part of life. As fathers, we are called to lead our kids financially, no matter what our current situation is. The Bible is the ultimate guidebook for financial advice, but we also have other godly options at our fingertips if we choose. Whatever state of provision we are in: well off, struggling, or in between, we must both honor God with our resources and bless those who are less fortunate than we are. Most of all, always remember to give thanks and glory to our Father for everything He has blessed us with—including our children!

Key Verses for Memorization
Josh 24:15
Matt 6:33
Heb 11:1
Matt 6:19-21
Col 3:23-24

Putting God’s Word to Action
• Godly stewardship of our money and resources is a key element in the foundation of our walk with God.

• WE are the financial leaders of our home.

• Money is a test, and we are called (whenever possible) to bless those less fortunate than ourselves. (Matt 25:35-40; Heb 13:2)
**Discussion Questions**

As a single father, what are some of the greatest challenges you have come across financially? How were these opportunities approached?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

Our walk with Jesus Christ is one of faith. Has your faith strengthened through any of your financial trials? If you have not experienced one yet, do you feel your faith is strong enough to endure?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

One of my favorite passages in the entire bible is found in Matthew 25:35-40. What do Jesus’ words mean to you here? Discuss.

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

**Prayer**

*Lord, thank You for everything You have blessed me with. I pray to steward my finances for Your Kingdom, and I pray that You would give me a benevolent heart. Amen.*
Chapter 6

The Battlefield

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

— 2Cor 10:3-4 (NIV)

Have you ever had a time in your life when things just didn’t go the way you planned? Of course you have—that was definitely a rhetorical question. We live in an imperfect world, often complicated by imperfect circumstances. As followers of Christ, however, we are to excel above these circumstances, understanding that we are fighting FROM an already victorious side! For it has often been said that the Christian walk is not a playground, but rather, a battleground. Emotions may run high sometimes, pain may be evident, and stress and disappointment often follow, but a dad that is strong in his walk with the Lord is one of the most treasured assets to the Kingdom of God. We should not throw temper tantrums (yes, we dads); we need to be cautious not to seek revenge; and most of all, we must keep our children’s (not our) best interest in mind at all times.
The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. –1John 2:6 (NASB)

When Things Don’t Go Your Way

I mentioned in the introduction that I have had some great events transpire regarding parenting time, situations, and activities with my daughter. But, I have also had moments when they have turned out every OTHER way except the way I was expecting. Even recently, I was just positive that my custody time would be upgraded—no doubt about it. Well as you can guess, the whole thing collapsed and I was left with a crushed spirit—wondering how this could have happened. I mean, I’m a good dad with a decent job and a nice home, why wouldn’t my time with Olivia increase? Things had always gone my way before in court. I won’t go into the details of the “Friend of the Court” paperwork, but the gist of it was there needed to be “clear and compelling” evidence of a change in circumstances to warrant such a change. “Clear and compelling” evidence?!? Were they serious? I mean, I’m the dad—isn’t that enough? Stop. Pause. Get back into the Spirit, Matt. Although I cannot put my finger on it directly, I do know that I had a bit of arrogance regarding my push for more parenting time this time around. I also had to hold onto the thought that God is God, and His ways are higher than my ways. (Isaiah 55:9-11) I am still in the middle of all of this, but you know what? With some events that may be coming up and not having a change in custody, may actually work out better than what I had originally expected. You see, often it is our human nature to put God on some sort of timeframe or other restriction. I had a particular situation in my life, and I needed the custody change
done ASAP. Things didn’t work out for me like I needed them to, and I got anxious. As I will discuss in detail later on in chapter 9, this is another example of resistance equals growth. I learn a bit more about the legal system and how to minister to other men, with every experience such as this. That’s how we grow: we take personal experiences, apply them to the Word of God, and let our Father teach us the life lesson that is presented before us to be learned. Patience and perseverance are often very easy to talk about or witness to others, but it’s a whole new ballgame when we’re the ones putting the hard time in. Dad, that is why it is so imperative (and I cannot stress this enough) that we continue to spend quality one-on-one time with our Lord. The reason I keep emphasizing this point is because it is only when we have built this solid foundation and maturity level—one very evident from our quiet time—that we begin to reach those levels that God has predestined for us. (see Romans 8:28-30) Just like in the gym, if you want to get bigger, faster, and stronger physically, you must put in the time in the weight room. Well, if you want to grow spiritually, the same principle applies for advancing your walk. Do not wait until it’s desperation time. Rejoice in the countless gifts and blessings He has given you already and pray daily to Jesus through the Spirit to help you lay your frustrations and worries at the foot of the Cross. Peace and comfort may or may not come quickly. The same goes for the outcomes, but always remember that God is good all the time and He rewards those who are faithful to Him. (Ezra 8:22a-23; Psalms 147:11)

Now, I obviously cannot speak for all of us, and there are some situations that require professional assistance. If this is your case, I would recommend that you seek out the proper guidance, either through an organization or a local church. You can also check out some of the links on my website at www.afatherswalk.org.
Pick Your Battles

I came back to Christ when Olivia was about eight months old. I never had a good relationship with her mother (we were never married), and the pregnancy was extremely difficult. I was more confused and afraid than ever before in my life because I did not have a firm grasp on either my life, or Olivia’s. That was years ago and God has worked wonders that only He can since then. Often, however, my flesh still wants to retaliate against her mom even if she has done nothing to wrong me. Sometimes I just feel like “getting even,” but obviously that is not the right thing to do.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. –Romans 12:17 (Holman CSB)

Our kids are very sensitive subjects to us, especially in situations when we think they are being used as pawns. This is not always the case, but it does happen, and you need to be very cautious and use discernment before you start picking arguments. I’ve been there, and I have failed God in some of those times. We learn from experience, and wisdom is the beginning to understanding. (Prov 3:13, 9:10) Let me give you a couple recent examples. A week or so ago I went to pick Olivia up from our normal drop off spot. She was out of school on Christmas break, so I just assumed she and her mom would be there. Keep in mind that our meeting place is about 10 minutes or so south of where I work. I arrived on time, waited, and then waited some more. After I realized her mom was over 15 minutes late, I decided to call. Turns out they were on the complete OPPOSITE side of town, because her mom assumed I would have checked first to see where we’d meet, due to the fact Olivia was on break and just leaving daycare over
there. Needless to say, I flipped. I began to raise my voice to her mom over the phone, which obviously had a very negative effect. Her mom screamed back, with an expletive or two, and hung up on me. Boy, was I steaming! Eventually, I got a hold of her mom to determine where we would meet instead. Here’s the growth: I knew I was heated, and I recognized I needed to calm down before I saw her mom in person. I immediately called a friend (thank God he was available to talk) and filled him in on what was going on. He gave me some words of wisdom, we prayed over the phone, and he confirmed my discernment by commending me on calling immediately when I needed to. When it came time for me to pick Olivia up, her mom and I both agreed there was miscommunication and we actually apologized to each other! She even offered to let me have Olivia a little later that night to make up for the lost time. Talk about God answering prayer fast! Needless to say, I may or may not have reacted by calling someone for help a few years ago. All of those early mornings of prayer and reading Scripture really paid off, and God was glorified because of my obedience.

Another example just happened a couple of nights ago (yeah, it’s been quite a week). Remember the example of Christmas Eve I gave you in chapter 2? That was almost five years ago to the day. Olivia’s mom and I rotate the Christmas Eve/Day holidays: I get the 24th one year and the 25th the next, and vice-versa. This year Christmas fell on my weekend. According to our current court order, holidays are from 10am until 7pm, and they trump all other times. Christmas fell on a Sunday this year, so technically I did not have to take Olivia back to her mom until 10am Sunday morning. However, Olivia’s mom celebrates Christmas Eve with part of her family, and everyone else on the 25th. She requested that I bring Olivia over to her at some point on the 24th. I could have said no,
but I saw no problem in it. Here’s the kicker: the house where she wanted me to drop Olivia off is 40 miles from my home (the drive I mentioned in chapter 2)! Five years ago she said to me, “You want her, then you come and get her!” If you remember, that drive took up the majority of my first major holiday with my daughter. I guess I could have said the exact thing to her this time around, huh? Remarkably, I chose not to—not to prove myself better than she or put myself on some sort of pedestal for her family. I did it because we are called to be servants and this was an excellent opportunity to do so. I received confirmation anyway just as I was leaving the house. Olivia’s grandpa caught me as I was walking out the door, shook my hand, and said, “Thanks for bringing her out here.” He knew I didn’t have to and expressed his appreciation anyway. Everyone was happy: Olivia’s mom got her request, my daughter got to spend time with her family, and I drove all the way back home thanking and praising God for the way He has moved in my life.

You see, as followers of Christ, we must continue to die to self each and every day. When we pursue other tangents and don’t think long term, we deprive ourselves of the very peace that God has given us. (Phil 4:7) Yes, there will be times when you have to pursue other avenues such as court, mediation, and parenting time. But please, don’t be greedy or vengeful. My emotions often blinded me of what was best for Olivia. Yes, I did have to initiate court proceedings when she was very young, simply due to the fact that her mother did not want me to have any (or very minimal) parenting time. I often held moments when she had wronged me against her, and dare I say, I judged her for years to come. My mentality was “she will never change.” Funny, that’s exactly what she thought of me five years ago, and take a look at me today. So really, if God can change my heart to become more
like His, why not hers as well? That is one of the true benefits I gain in my pursuit of wisdom, but I must allow myself to gain the understanding as well—not simply turning my wheels from one situation to another and never really growing in Christ.

Ultimately, we need to be more focused on our relationship with God first, and the rest will come. One more example of this is an experience I had in the summer of 2010. My fiancée and I went to pick Olivia up on a week night (one that was not normally my “scheduled” time). When Olivia’s mom saw my fiancée, she immediately changed her mind about letting me have Olivia that night, said a few undesirable words, and took Olivia away, crying. I was mad, no doubt about it. Several years ago I would have reacted in a way that played into the flesh. However, through my foundation in Jesus Christ and along with years of experiences like this, I chose a much more biblical approach. I did not fight back. I let her take Olivia (I was picking her up the next morning anyway), and we headed back to the house. I remained calm and opened my Bible. One of the first scriptures I turned to was Psalms 55:22: “Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.” (NASB) Then we prayed the night out, and moved on.

Caught in the Crossfire

The situations recounted above are ones in which I could have easily turned things into verbal battles with no winners. In fact, had I chose to chew her mom out in front of her, I would have caused more harm to Olivia, and to myself. Satan is very deceptive in situations like this, so we must constantly be on our toes. Paul describes this to us in Ephesians 4:26-27: “BE ANGRY, AND
yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.” (NASB) Our world today is one in which family and moral values are in jeopardy, and we should not give our enemy any more ammunition than that he already has. I often work with people from broken homes and hear many stories about hearing or seeing parents fight. Sometimes the abuse has even spilled over to harm them as well. The emotional and psychological toll this can take on a child or young adult can be devastating. Far too often, it leads to a self-destructive pattern and spirit that causes years, even generations, of pain and feelings of worthlessness. According to the Center for Nonviolence in Ft. Wayne, IN, violence is described as “any words or actions that hurt and control another, cause fear or make someone feel belittled or weak and powerless.” Dad, remain in control and think about what’s best for your children. I know it’s hard, but it is OUR responsibility to ensure that our kids are brought up in the instruction of the Lord. A perfect description of remaining in the Spirit and obtaining favor from God in doing so can be found in 1Peter 3:8-9: “Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and He will bless you for it.” (NLT)

It may seem like I’m throwing a lot of Scripture at you in this book, and I am. It is for one purpose only: because God’s Word is final, just, and perfect. I have lived through many of these experiences personally, and every time I have chosen my own path, I usually have failed in the situation. But what I HAVE realized is that when I submit to the Lordship of Christ and follow His Word, I am guided in a perfect will.
Walking the Walk

Summary
As a single father, often we must face the reality that certain times and situations will not go our way, no matter how unfair this may seem. As it is in the parable of the two foundations, the dad who is grounded on Rock will not only stand firm in the wake of it all, but will not expose his children to damaging words and/or actions. There are times you may have to fight for your children, but pick your battles and use discernment at all times, being careful NOT to let your kids get caught in the crossfire. By remaining submitted to Jesus’ authority, we are guided in a perfect will.

Key Verses for Memorization
2Cor 10:3-4
James 1:19-20
Eph 4:26-27
Romans 12:17

Putting God’s Word to Action
• The amount of quality one-on-one time we spend with God is directly proportional to how we handle adverse situations.

• James 3:2 tells us that if we can bridle our tongue we can steward our entire body as well. This is an extremely important point to remember when we’re in the heat of emotions.

• One of the main ways we can model Jesus to our children is by how we treat their mothers.
Discussion Questions
In your own words, describe and discuss a time when spiritual attack fell upon you and/or your household due to a conflict regarding you and your children. How did you respond?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

The flesh tends to want to take over constantly, especially in times of high emotions. The father who is truly walking in the Lord during these times is the one who overcomes. When have you had a spiritual victory when everything could have (but didn’t) fall apart?

________________________________________________________________________

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God’s Word is (along with prayer) the most effective weapon we have for defusing a situation. What are some key verses you can hold on to when certain situations arise? What are some examples of these situations and what verses could go along with them?

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Prayer
Lord Jesus, Your Word says that ‘though my heart and flesh may fail, You are the strength of my heart and my portion forever.’ Create in me a softened heart, one filled with only Your love for others. Amen.
Chapter 7

Accountability and Mentors

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone if he falls, for he has no one to help him up. —Ecc 4:9-10 (NKJV)

Out of all of the chapters we have read so far, this is the one I have looked most forward to writing. Having both an accountability partner and a mentor has helped me grow leaps and bounds in my walk. I’m not going to lie, at first I didn’t care for either choice. I was blessed with my mentor first, and he often gave it to me straight—tough talk that a new convert didn’t want to hear. Then, my accountability partner and I teamed up, and that has had its moments, too. There was even a time just before we met that I was at the hand of some serious spiritual warfare. Through it all, though, I have not only grown in my walk, but strongholds have been destroyed, maturity has flourished, and most of all, I use my experiences to encourage others to seek out mentors and accountability partners in their lives as well. I swear by both, and pray to never go without either one—it is that important!
In this chapter we are going to go over the foundation for seeking out, teaming up with, and executing a God-centered relationship with your mentor and/or accountability partner. I understand that everyone and every situation are different, and all sorts of variables may come into play. However, the structure is the same, and consistency will be key. I pray as you read over these pages that the Lord begins to stir your heart (and it probably won’t be comfortable very often), but do yourself a favor and let Him begin His work. Any time we battle against our flesh there is always going to be conflict, and that is where the refining process can begin. That being said, are you ready? Come on dads, let’s dig our feet in and find out just where God can take us in another area of our walk—one in which we NEVER stop growing!

Seeking a godly mentor

The Bible is filled with great examples of godly mentors and their understudies. Elisha had Elijah as a mentor, Timothy had Paul, and of course, the disciples had Jesus. These are just a few examples. When seeking out a mentor, prayer is extremely important. God will put the person that He sees best fits into your life, not you. Pray first of all for His will in seeking out a godly mentor. Then, pray for discernment and favor in having the right one placed in your life. A word of recommendation: I would strongly suggest you have only one mentor and that it is another man. The reason I make these suggestions is because having one mentor eliminates the possibility of crossed teachings, and men should only be mentored by other men to avoid any consequences of emotional or sexual feelings that would inhibit God’s plan. Your mentor must be someone who is walking faithfully in the Word of God,
preferably someone who has been a follower of Christ longer than you have. Once you have been blessed with the person whom you believe is the right one, make a point to meet on a regular basis. This can be accomplished at each other’s houses, over coffee, and if time or distance is a factor, through email or over the phone.

Have some sort of game plan for when you meet. Obviously the Lord has laid it on your heart to seek out a mentor, but why? What are you hoping to gain from meeting with him? Are you looking to grow in your personal walk with God? Perhaps there are certain areas in your life in which you are lost, struggling, or that need to be strengthened. For me, it all started at lunch with a group of people—just a bunch of friends hanging out. After everyone started clearing out, my friend (he wasn’t my mentor yet) asked me and one other person to hang behind. He explained to us that the Lord had laid it on his heart to begin to minister to younger adults like us and said should we ever want to discuss this further, he was open to that. After a week or so, I asked him if he was offering to mentor me, but he threw the ball back in my court and told me to search my heart first and see if I WANTED to be mentored. After some thought and prayer, I knew it was the next step I needed to make. I was very young in my walk and needed someone to guide me. God had put this man in front of me, but it was up to me to take those first steps. Over the last several years our friendship has grown and developed in many ways. There are even times now when my mentor asks me to pray with or for him. We have a mutual understanding, and often we are the first to go to each other when one of us needs prayer. Your path, decisions, or circumstances may be different, so let the Spirit lead you both as your meetings continue to grow and expand.
Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border…
–1 Chron 4:10 (NASB) These are words from the prayer of Jabez.

Although there is very little mentioned about Jabez in the Bible, his words are very powerful here. The writer of Hebrews instructs us in his letter to “come boldly before the throne of grace.” (4:16) In other words, we are to draw near with confidence to the Lord, for we have that right as children of God and with our High Priest sitting at His right hand interceding for us.

You see, there is nothing wrong with asking God for blessings, but we need to check our motives. Is it for our glory or His? When we are seeking out these types of questions and pursuing a greater growth in our relationship with Christ, one of the most valuable tools we can ever be blessed with is a mentor who is walking strong in the Lord himself. I am not talking about someone who will set the bar so incredibly high that it is unattainable, nor am I describing someone who will lose you in such deep theological and intellectual jargon that you feel more inferior after the conversation than before you began. No, I am describing a man, whom, as I stated above, you have prayed with for discernment concerning having him mentor you and the two of you may have even have met a few times. I promise you that if you remain faithful to God in prayer and obedience and meet regularly with your mentor, you will flourish in a way you may not have thought possible. This is the same model we use when growing our own children in Jesus Christ. In a way, our mentors are like “spiritual fathers” to us, and we are definitely that to our kids. We draw our instruction directly from God and other mature Christians; we can then use our wisdom to pass on to the next generation. One of the greatest examples I can think of in my own life regarding this is the fact that Olivia will NEVER
have to be exposed to what I went through having to do with generational curses and addictions. Does that mean she is not susceptible to certain dangers? Of course not. The world can be a very dangerous place, but only if I lose focus on raising her up right in Christ. Dad, if we are to raise healthy and stable sons and daughters, we MUST remain consistent ourselves! Sure, we are all bound to fall and fail—that’s a given and part of the process of spiritual growth. My mentor has been there with me through it all—in times when I have been (dare I say) a sobbing mess, sometimes even right in church. He has prayed over Olivia and me multiple times, and sometimes the script is even flipped as I do the same for him. The point is, we always get back up, stay the course, and press on toward our cause. As we do so, we become natural leaders for our kids and many other people in our lives.

I would like to close out this first discussion with the following words and example. In John chapter 14, Jesus is telling His disciples that He must go on ahead of them to prepare a place for them before the Father. He explains to them that (as is the case for any Christian) if we have seen Him (who lives in us) we have seen the Father. Jesus encourages the disciples to believe in all that He has done and all that they will do. In fact, He even goes on to tell us that they (we) will do greater works than even He! (John 14:12) Here is an excellent statement that sums that verse up, “A master’s ceiling can become his disciple’s floor if the disciple knows how to absorb the lessons of the master’s life.” –Chip Ingram, Good to Great in God’s Eyes (p 54) Jesus is our ultimate example of what being a real man is all about, and Chip’s statement goes hand in hand with God’s promise to us. Our Savior cleared the path ahead of us, now it’s our job to start walking!
Accountability Time

As men, the two words above are probably not ones that are on the top of our “to do” lists. Like I said before, it was hard for me to get started. But now I can’t wait until my accountability partner and I meet each time! Often, schedules are a problem for us: he works late nights and I early mornings, but we make time for the meetings. The basics for finding a great accountability partner are the same: through prayer and discernment, and finding someone who will (as my mentor says) “hold your feet to the fire.” You don’t want someone who will just be your buddy (although friendship will flourish) and let you slide on your mishaps. No, find someone who will give you the answers straight up and raw, but out of love and compassion at the same time. When you and your accountability partner do start your time together, it should be, first and foremost, with a mutual understanding that everything is done according to God’s will; but then also there should be absolute discretion—no gossiping behind each other’s backs. Also, do yourselves a favor and be transparent, when you lie or hold back the entire truth from your friend, you only hurt yourself.

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

—Heb 3:13 (NIV)

Having an accountability partner not only helps you make the right (or correct the wrong) choices, it helps keep you humble. When I first started meeting with my friend, I had a major addiction to pornography. He and I discussed issues such as where my weaknesses were, what were my triggers, and how I
could stay “armored.” This was definitely something that was not pleasant to talk about, in fact, it was quite embarrassing. But the Bible tells us that there is healing, protection, and freedom in prayer. (See James 5:16-20) You see, Satan wants us to keep our sins hidden where no one else knows about them. If you suffer from strongholds such as porn, substance abuse, or anger, by all means expose this to someone trustworthy! If you don’t have an accountability partner yet, talk to a pastor and go from there. In fact, I am going to stop right here and pray for you if indeed you are a slave to sin right now and caught in some sort of bondage. This was not planned, I am just really feeling it in my heart to do so right now as I write.

Father God, in the Name that is above every name, the Name of Jesus, I COMMAND that every stronghold, chain, and sin that is holding my brother back from Your true freedom is now destroyed in the Name of Jesus! Lord Jesus, I plead Your blood over him and over his children. I pray that my brother will seek You earnestly and fervently through prayer and Your Word. Now, in the Name of Jesus, I command every demonic force of darkness and every evil principality leave my brother’s life! Satan, you are CRUSHED and you MUST go NOW underneath the feet of Jesus or to wherever He bans you. Lord Jesus, I pray that you free my brother of all unrighteousness and that he continues to seek You and Your promise out for the rest of his life. I pray all of these things in Your Name. Amen!

Well I, for one, feel better! I pray you do, too. Guys, this is the power of Christ living in us. He is constantly working within our lives for His purposes. Jesus wants everything kept in the light, because darkness cannot survive when light is brought into the picture. Take a look at what the disciple John has to say about
this, “In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” –John 1:4-5 (NASB) Keep it in the Light, guys. That is the only way you can truly move on to reach the potential God has laid out for you.

**Developing a Plan**

We discussed that prayer for favor and discernment is first when seeking out one (or both) of the godly men to be placed in your life. Once you have been blessed to have such a powerful weapon on your side to help you in your walk with Jesus, you both should come to some sort of “plan” for the structure of your meetings. Here are just a few examples of what has worked for my mentor, my accountability partner, and me throughout our meetings.

1. **Regular contact**—Aim for weekly meetings if possible. If that does not happen, at least fellowship and trade information (such as recommended readings, teachings, etc.) over the phone or through email.

2. **Always open and close with prayer**—Any time two or more have gathered in Jesus’ Name, He is in their midst. Invite Him in, ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you in your meetings, and be sure to give God all the glory.

3. **Keep the time frame reasonable**—30 to 60 minutes is a good goal, but I have been in meetings as short as 15, and up to almost two hours. You want it to be thorough and effective, but don’t draw it out to the point that one or both of you lose focus.
4. Be transparent—As I’ve stated, when you either lie or withhold the entire truth, you only hurt yourself. Besides, God knows everything you do already, so you’re not fooling Him. The Lord is looking for a truly repentant heart, not the “right” answer. It’s only when you have exposed your sin or defects 100% that you can move on and grow.

5. Discretion—This one should go without saying. Unfortunately, gossip still runs rampant in the church today as well as the world.

Dads, I pray this chapter has been both helpful and informative for you. Start your prayer concerning these topics immediately. There is something that is known as “The Law of Diminishing Intent.” Simply put, the longer you wait to implement an idea, the less enthusiasm you will have to do it. Don’t wait—make seeking out a mentor and accountability partner a front-burner issue in your life today!
Having a mentor, accountability partner, or both will help you grow exponentially in your walk with God. Prayer and discernment are vital in getting started, and commitment is required to keep it going. However, when combined with God’s Spirit in Your meetings, you both will flourish and become the men God created you to be.

**Key Verses for Memorization**

Ecc 4:9-10  
Heb 3:13  
James 5:19-20

**Putting God’s Word to Action**

- God places other strong Christian men in our lives as part of our foundation in Jesus Christ.

- As a single parent, I understand how any “free” time can be hard to come by. Pray and ask the Lord to open this time in your week to meet with your mentor and/or accountability partner.

- Make sure you really use these times together to grow in your walk. Then, when applicable, pass your wisdom on to your children.
Discussion Questions

Are you currently improving your walk with the Lord through a mentor and/or accountability partner? If so, how has it changed your life? If not, will you soon?

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Based on experiences with one or both, what have been some of the greatest gains you have made since meetings began? Describe.

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We are supposed to be our children’s greatest form of guidance, behind Jesus, of course. When we are connected to the Head, the rest of our life will come together. How has our personal time with the Lord contributed to our growing and leading our kids?

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_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are my ultimate Source for growth and healing, but I also pray for godly fellowship in my life. Help me and my brothers in Christ die daily and become more like You. Amen.
Chapter 8

The Imperishable Seed

*For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.* –1Pet 1:23 (NASB)

I am very intrigued by statistics. It does not matter what they are: sports, financial, or cultural, they all fascinate me. It must be the math geek inside of me. As the single dad ministry has grown and developed over the years, I have come across hundreds of different statistics pertaining to fatherless children, addictions, homelessness, teens, and so on. Did you know that three out of four people make up 75% of the world’s population? (That was a joke, guys!) Seriously, though, the statistics are definitely stacked against children coming from homes without fathers, my daughter included. But if there is one thing I know for sure, our God is infinitely bigger than any number or stat!

My purpose in writing this chapter is to discuss an issue that I have dealt with my whole life—how I did (and continue to) handle it, and what it means for not only my future, but Olivia’s as well. You may have come from a great and loving home; or maybe you came from a split home; or maybe, just maybe, the words
“home” and “family” are not ideas that bring pleasant thoughts to your mind. Like so many of the other topics we’ve talked about thus far, I’ve been there. I was born into a single parent family. In fact, my mom and dad had an affair, so my little brother and I were born out of adultery. Right off the bat I was carrying that huge generational curse on me, not to mention all of the addictions that run on both my mom’s and dad’s sides of the family. Not having a dad around full time often left me to figure life issues out for myself, and I am now seeing many of the repercussions here in my 30’s. It wasn’t until I became a father and a Christian that I realized just how dysfunctional my “normal” life truly was. However, once I did become a Christian, I broke the chains that had held me down so long and would have had the same impact on Olivia. Let’s look into this.

**Generational Curses**

In the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 28, the Bible discusses in great detail the topic of generational blessings and curses. Now I am not going to put the full weight on my parents for some of the choices I made in my life—that would be wrong. What I am saying is that I carried something many years that was foreign to me and I didn’t even realize it. Are you doing the same? Are we truly living in obedience to God’s Word? We know the Ten Commandments. If not, they are in both Exodus chapter 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5. Yes, that is Old Testament, under “the Law,” but does that mean they do not still hold true today? The world may choose to have them removed from schools, courthouses, and public buildings, but any house truly living in God’s will shall continue to follow them entirely. When Jesus
came to fulfill the Law, He may have raised the bar even higher, but with greater blessings to be received.

God’s Word says we shall not have any other gods before Him, we shall not commit murder or adultery, that we should honor our parents, and shall not covet. Let me ask you this: are we living within those parameters? How often do we put our jobs, money and possessions above God? That’s idolatry. The Bible tells us that if we hate our brother, that is murder (1John 3:15); and if we even look at a woman with lust (be it a glance, stare, or something more damaging like porn), we commit adultery. (Matt 5:27-28) If we do honor our parents, our days will go well. Are we truly honoring them? I’m not saying you have to like many of the things they have done, but are you showing them true godly respect? Finally, are we keeping our envy in check? I like big trucks—a full size SUV or pickup on lifts would be my dream ride, complete with chrome and a sound system, of course. However, it has taken much dying to self over the past few years to change my mentality of once having pretty much whatever I wanted to being content with what God has blessed me with today. Although I once had the fully loaded SUV, today I drive a 2001 Nissan Altima with plenty of wear and tear on it. I like what Sheryl Crow said in her song “Soak up the Sun,”—’It’s not having what you want; it’s wanting what you’ve got.’

The reason I mention all of this is not to convict or judge any of us, it’s to explain the fact that when we do keep the Lord’s commandments, our homes will be blessed. When we don’t, the curses fall upon us and our children. (Deut 28) My parents committed the sin of adultery, and ultimately, I did the same. Addictions were passed on as well. I see many of my previous sins in the shadow of my parents. Today, I don’t look at my life like that anymore. I see the forgiveness God has given me ruling
entirely over my life, and I see His righteousness has been passed on and filtered, through me, to Olivia. Proverbs 20:17 tells us, “The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him.” (NKJV) These same blessings and favor are available to anyone and everyone—that is God’s promise through the sacrifice of His Son. Claim that today for your family, repent and expose your past sins, and let God’s righteousness flow through you and into your children through the blood of Jesus!

Making Amends

_He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers… –Mal 4:6 (NASB)_

When I was growing up, my dad meant everything to me. I wanted to be just like him. That was many years ago. Although I still love my dad to this day, the perception I have of him has changed dramatically. I often see many of his characteristics in me, both good and bad. The difference is that now I look for any character flaw in me that does not line up with the image of Christ, and I seek to change to become more like Him. Last year I did something that was very difficult, at least it was to me. After going to some heavy Christian counseling, I resolved to make amends with my dad once and for all. I had known for a couple years that I had a lot of built up animosity and bitterness toward both of my parents for various reasons, and if I was ever to be truly free in Christ I needed to address those issues. The approach I took was a sort of head-on method. Whatever way you may choose is up to you. I wrote a letter, sat my dad down, and read the letter to him, shaking the whole time. I could probably count on both hands the
number of times I had ever told my dad that I loved him, and this was one of those days. The letter was quick and to the point, using only three main points: I told him I loved him; that I forgave him for his past mistakes; and I asked for his forgiveness because I had allowed what others said about him to cause me to pass judgment on him. My dad just sat there quietly as I read, then stood up and hugged me once I was done. We sat and talked for a while, and he opened up quite a bit about his past faults. I was not looking for him to change (although I did ask where he stood with Jesus), I just wanted to clear the air. It was liberating and helped me to grow personally in my walk.

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. –Mark 11:25 (NKJV)

We have talked about forgiveness several times thus far in this book, but I don’t believe there is a limit, right? (Matt 18:22) One of the main reasons I am speaking to you about making amends with your own father (or mom, family, friends, etc.) is to help you not only destroy one of the most powerful tools Satan uses to hold us back, but to break any more generational curses so that they will NOT be passed on to our kids. When we attack these issues with a frontal assault, we set ourselves free from allowing our kids to make the same mistakes we made. I know this may not be something you want to do, or it may even be scary to you, but it is biblical and our King asks it from us. Possibly you never knew your dad, or he has passed away. In either case, you can still be free by forgiving him to God and in your heart. The Lord will most definitely honor that! God created us all differently, but at the same time we are all created in His image. As Christian men
with Christ living inside of us, we have the strength to accept this calling and lay it down once and for all. (Phil 4:13)

I needed some professional help before I talked with my dad. I sought out a Christian ministry with which I was already familiar. I trusted the counsel available there; I really let the words sink into my heart, and prayed over and over until the moment had come. I practiced my letter several times, and looked for the right time to have the talk. Guys, you MUST be ready in your heart. This can’t be something you just “do and get it over with.” It has to be sincere, transparent, and from your heart—Jesus expects no less. Every case is different. I do not know what your personality is like—introvert, extrovert, bold, passive, loud, or quiet. What I do know is that our God is such a great Father that he would never let any of his kids go through tough times and not stand by his/her side. But you need to ask Him for advice. Get into the Word and spend a good amount of time in prayer—both seeking and asking Him for guidance. Maybe He will lead you to a strong Christian who can help you, maybe He will help you write a letter like you’ve never written before, or maybe He will give you a peace that only Christ can give, and send you on your way to deal with whatever is holding you back! Our Father is awesome. Walk in confidence that He knows what is best for us and our children, and that He will put you on the straight and narrow to get you there.

A New Lineage

I have often said that a new family lineage begins with me, and I mean it. When I speak these words, I am not denying my family by any means; what I am denying is the demonic DNA that I was
carrying for so many years. As the scripture above states, we are not born of a perishable seed (flesh), but an imperishable seed (eternal). When we receive Jesus into our lives as our Lord and Savior, we are literally “born again.” At that very moment, He enters into our heart and can begin the rebuilding process of our lives. What “rebuilding process” do I mean? How about erasing any and all generational curses we may be carrying (even without knowing), and a complete forgiveness of our sins, thus leading to eternal life. You see, it does not matter what type of family or home you were brought up in—it does not have to define who you or your kids are in the eyes of Christ. Adult baptism is another form (after salvation) of dying to the flesh and as they say—symbolic of a watery grave. It is a dying of the old life and self and a putting on of the new (see both Luke & John, chapter 3). When we do this, we leave out of an earthly family and enter into our eternal one, thus securing our place in Heaven with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If you have not been baptized yet as an adult, I pray you would seek the Lord and His guidance in this. Also, when we “break the chains” over ourselves, we have the authority to do the same over our kids. Claim your position in Christ, and as the earthly stewards of your children, do the same over them. Yes, as they get older they will be responsible for many of their own decisions in life, but we can remove all of the baggage (that I described in my own life) that is weighing them down. It does not matter how old they are, dad, you are their earthly father and you have that right. Remember, a good tree bears good fruit! (Matt 7:17-20)
Walking the Walk

Summary
Generational sin is very real, but so is the freedom from it that we gain in being born again through Jesus Christ. Even Jesus described those who hear the Word of God as His family, yet we are to honor and make amends with our own biological relatives as well. Through the blood of Christ and securing our position in Him, we have the ability to destroy generational strongholds over ourselves and prohibit them from being passed on to our children. In turn, we begin a new family under a new lineage—with God.

Key Verses for Memorization
1 Peter 1:23
Eph 1:13-14
Deut 28:1,9

Putting God’s Word to Action
• Despite what type of home you came from, the blood of Christ binds us into God’s family forever.

• Making amends with our fathers is vital for advancing in our walk with the Lord.

• Once we claim our position in Jesus Christ and our eternal lineage, we are able to break off any and all generational curses from ourselves and our children.
Discussion Questions

When you look at or think of your family tree, what type of emotions come with it? As a follower of Jesus, how does your family tree change?

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___________________________________________
___________________________________________

Is there still unresolved conflict and/or forgiveness between you and a family member? How will you seek to resolve it?

___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

Prior to coming to Christ, what “chains” were holding you back from becoming the man/father you were meant to be? Make a list on the left hand side of a notepad. On the right, list how Jesus has freed or is freeing you from these strongholds. What will that mean to you as a father?

___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

Prayer

Father, I know that Your Word is absolute truth. I thank You that through the redeeming power of Jesus’ blood, I am complete in You. Amen.
Chapter 9

The Spiritual Workout

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. —James 1:2-4 (NASB)

The Workout

Resistance equals growth. When I was a personal trainer that statement pretty much summed up a good portion of helping my clients reach their goals. In exercise, several factors are keys to success. These include the proper regimen, the right nutrition plan, and of course, sufficient rest. So how can physical growth be compared to spiritual growth? Simple: resistance, when supplied with the right program, equals growth.

Follow me on this: Let’s say you can already bench press 150 pounds, but your goal is 250. How would you get there? Would you simply walk into a gym without a spotter, with little experience, throw 250 on the bar and go for it? I really hope not, unless you were planning on getting hurt pretty badly! In order
to reach your goal of a 250 lb. bench press, you would start small, adding weight (resistance) along the way. You see, when muscles are put under stress, they literally tear down but respond to the trial by growing bigger and stronger. That is how weightlifting works—you tear the muscle down through stress and resistance, and it “improves” itself by growing stronger! Eventually, 150 lbs. would become easy, so you could increase the weights up to 160, then 170, and so on. As you get further along, the point at which you can no longer lift the weight on your own is established. I am going to use 200 lbs. as an example. Once we have reached, let’s say, 195 lbs. we are really struggling to get the bar up safely. Two hundred is going to be a challenge, so we need some assistance. This is where someone, known as a “spotter” comes into play. A spotter is someone who is fully capable of assisting you in your lift should you not be able to make it through on your own. If you are struggling with the weight and it looks like you may not make it through the lift safely, the spotter can grab the weight, thus taking some of the pressure off of you. Eventually with the help of a spotter, 200 lbs. becomes easy, then 210...220... and finally, we reach our original goal of a 250 lb. bench press! So how did you reach your goal? How were you able to add resistance that originally was difficult, but over time, became easier? Simple—you were conditioned for the work ahead, and your spotter helped you in the hard times. Are you following me? Every time we encounter a trial, a test, or a decision in life, it is a form of resistance that is going to help us grow. Remember when you first gave your life to the Lord, how so many things may have seemed upside down and impossible. Did those issues simply go away, or did you grow in your walk to be able to handle them better? Some problems are only temporary; however, most life experiences are ones that we will face on a pretty regular basis: stress, finances,
dealing with difficult people, temptation, and so on. The better conditioned you are (spending quality time with the Lord); the more capable you will be to handle them when they arise. When times do come up that are more than you can handle alone, your “spotter” (accountability partner, mentor, family and friends) are there to help take some of the weight off of you. Resistance, when accompanied with the right tools, equals growth.

Anyone who has ever exercised on a regular basis also understands the importance of good nutrition. In some ways, the old saying “You are what you eat” is true. If you work out faithfully but eat junk food constantly, you will only get mediocre results. In order to grow as disciples of Christ, we must CONSTANTLY fill our hearts and minds with the best food of all—God’s Word. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 4: “It is written ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’” (Matt 4:4) It is the Word that we must draw upon in times of trial and resistance—times when we are “hungry” for more that life has to offer, times when we are “starving” spiritually and for those times when we need the strength to fight back when the enemy is attempting to break us down! (Ps 119:101, Heb 4:12) Get into a good routine when it comes to reading Scripture. If possible, set aside 15-60 minutes a day when you can have uninterrupted time to yourself for getting into the Word. Use this time for Scripture memorization, study, and even take some notes. Whatever helps you to absorb verses so you can pull them out at the proper times—go for it. I am a morning person and do most of my reading in the early part of the day. For me, it builds a foundation for the rest of my day and gives me a peace before I head off to work. I will suggest, though, that if you are not a morning person, try to do it a little later in the day—maybe lunch
time or something. The reason I suggest this is because reading Scripture will not be as effective if you are still half asleep. I also try to do a bit more reading just before I go to bed. So, essentially, I make an attempt every day to let the Bible be the first thing I read when I wake, and the last (or close to it) part of my day before I go to sleep for the night. Try out different routines and discover what works best for you. Above all else, make sure you get started right away, because it’s too difficult to grow without the proper food!

The final portion of our spiritual workout is getting sufficient rest and applying what you have learned. A major part of this will come from both your quiet time with the Lord and the ultimate workout challenge—the renewing of your mind. When I used to train my clients, many of them had either never been in a gym before, or already had preconceived notions of what working out was like. In both cases, I had to help them “unlearn” what they thought they already knew about exercise and send them in the right direction. I wonder how many Christians are still set in the mindset of what a walk with Christ is supposed to look like, completely unaware of the work that lies ahead? We are called to great heights as both followers of Jesus Christ and as fathers. It is in these quiet moments with the Lord, a time when we (literally) are on the floor on our face quiet and still, that He can do His best work with us. If we let Him, strongholds can and will be broken, worldly ways will begin to die, and the true building can begin!

**Surrender and Submission**

When I first came to Christ in 2001, my entire world was completely upside down. I had just survived an intentional drug
overdose, capping off over six years of heavy addiction. After I was released from the hospital and the fog began to clear, a friend of mine invited me to attend church with her. I agreed and quickly fell in love with the place. Then, on a Wednesday night in March of 2001, I made a decision and walked down to the altar and prayed my way into Heaven. I still remember the emotions I had that night: feelings of joy, comfort, and for the first time in years, the hope that comes with freedom. I called so many people that I knew that night, telling them that I had just gotten “saved.” But what did that mean? I recall as I began walking to the altar and meeting my prayer partner down there thinking to myself, “What did I just do?!?”

I can say with confidence that I am probably not alone in those thoughts—becoming a new Christian, knowing that something had just died inside of me, but that something far greater had just been born. I still get emotional to this day thinking about that night. Remember when you first surrendered yourself to the Lordship of Christ. Can you recall that same feeling of transformation and being “born again?” Today, I am a prayer partner at my church. The altar call is by far one of the best parts of my week. Words cannot explain what it’s like to be on those front lines as I experience men, women, and children give themselves to Jesus and accept Him into their hearts. I remember one time in particular. As we (the prayer partners, pastors, and ushers) were organizing everyone who had responded to the altar call, I looked over to my side and saw a woman on her knees with her face in her hands, balling her eyes out. Although I never found out who she was, why she came to the altar in the first place, or what the source of her tears was, I would like to think it was one of the greatest spiritual cleansings I had ever experienced. Based on everything that was going on around us and the way the Spirit was
moving that morning, I felt as if she was being completely broken there on the altar. What I saw was a lifetime of “junk” coming out of her—all of the pain, the rejection, and hurt. It was as if Jesus was holding her Himself in His arms, telling her, “It’s going to be all right, I have you.” You see, when a person first comes to Christ, it is SO imperative that someone scoops them up soon and begins to disciple them. That is where I missed out. I “got saved” in 2001, but never truly surrendered myself to the sovereignty of the Lord and eventually relapsed into my addiction. I had done the bare minimum when it came to my walk with Jesus. I went to church maybe once or twice a week, did little praying or Scripture reading, and never really changed my environment. My relapse and journey away from God lasted another 4½ years until I finally came back to Him after Olivia was born.

The reason I am telling you all of this is that I am really trying to hammer home the importance of surrendering yourself at the Cross and allowing yourself to become discipled (which we will talk more about in the next chapter). As men, it is often very difficult for us to let go of our emotions and give them to someone else. If we are truly going to become disciples of Christ and live the life He has promised us, that is exactly what we must do—let it all go at the base of the Cross. Dads, there is no greater place to start over, be restored, and find out who you truly are as when you drop everything that is holding you back or down and surrender fully. Remember Jesus’ words to His disciples in Matthew 16:24-26, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (NASB)

I absolutely love the part of losing my life to find it! I will tell
you one thing, and many of you may have already realized this: The more I let go of myself, the more I become who I truly am in Jesus Christ. Surrender and submission is not easy, but the Holy Spirit will lead you in the right path, guaranteed.

Unconditional Love

Thus far in this chapter we have been through a spiritual workout, learned to eat the right “food,” planned out how to stay on track, and completely released ourselves over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Not bad, huh? So what is the bottom line to all of this? Simple—He died for us, now we live for Him. Look at Jesus’ words in the gospel of John: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” –John 10:11 (NIV) Jesus took the full load once and for all for all of us, and by God’s grace we will never have to endure the price that was paid on Calvary. We are called, however, to continue to worship Him by humbly serving others. He also tells us, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” –John 15:13 (NIV)

Can you think of anyone greater (other than the Lord Himself) to lay your life down for than your children? Our children are a gift from the Lord, (Psalms 127:3) so we ought to treat them as if they are one of the greatest gifts we have ever received. Look, God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die in our place. If He was willing to give that much up and make that great of a sacrifice, the question becomes how much do we really love and give our kids? I am not talking about money or possessions, or anything that would cause them harm, obviously. What I am asking is: Are you willing to give up things that are important to you in order
to benefit your children? Where can the extra time come from? What about the extra money (if there is any) to pay for their necessities? Where can the strength to release the fear of holding our kids, looking them in the eye, and telling them how much we love them come from? In the same way we need to be constantly held and in tune with our Father, our children need the same from us. It does not matter if they are two or 20, every human being is created for love and companionship. Unconditional love begins at the Cross, but it flows for generations when fathers love their kids and lay down their lives for their children!
Walking the Walk

Summary
We grow in our walk as we encounter various trials, combined with godly tools and resources. God’s Word, fellow Christians, and personal quiet time with the Lord all condition us for the battles and storms ahead. Surrender and submission are imperative when seeking Jesus, otherwise we simply will not grow the way He intended us to. Once these are accomplished, we learn the true meaning of unconditional love; pass it on to our children, with God’s grace, for generations to come.

Key Verses for Memorization
James 1:2-4
Heb 4:12
Matt 16:24-26
John 15:13

Putting God’s Word to Action
• Only when we supplement spiritual resistance with the right food and game plan can we truly grow in Christ.

• God’s grace is a gift available to everyone. In order to fully “work out our salvation,” we must surrender everything.

• Jesus died for us; we glorify our Father by dying to the flesh. As fathers, we are also called to lay our lives down for our children.
Discussion Questions
Using the following format, write out and discuss your own personal “spiritual workout”: Goals, Resistance that obstructs/leads to that goal, “Food” (verses), Routine (workout plan).

___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

Being completely honest with yourself, are you doing everything you possibly can—given this point in your walk—to surrender to Jesus’ Lordship? What are you doing that is matching up with God’s Word? What can be improved?

___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

What does “laying your life down” for your children mean to you? List some examples and how you can follow up on them.

___________________________________________
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

Prayer
Father, You loved me enough to send Your Son to die in my place. Strengthen me, O Lord, to die daily for Your purposes in both mine and my children’s lives. Amen.
Chapter 10

Discipleship

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.’
—John 8:31 (NASB)

I pray that this book has been a blessing to you thus far. We have covered a vast array of topics, situations, and emotions together—all of which are intended to help us grow in becoming stronger disciples for our Lord Jesus. Discipleship is vital to any Christian who really intends to seek and live the life God has laid out. It is the difference between just a Sunday morning church attendee and becoming a weapon for the Kingdom. Discipleship requires work on both ends. We must put the time and effort in and God will do His part through tools such as Scripture and prayer or through other Christians to continue to grow us. Although God is constantly using different methods to bring people to Christ and strengthen them in their walk, I would like to focus on five main areas that I believe are vital in growing any Christian as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. These are: Church, Prayer, Scripture, Tithing and Fellowship.
Church

And having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near in full assurance of faith…not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together…—Heb 10:21-22a, 25a (NKJV)

Most of us can probably name at least one person in our lives that claims he/she doesn’t have to go to church to worship God. That is true, you don’t have to, but should you? Throughout the Bible we are reminded of gatherings in temples or synagogues, much of it in the New Testament where Jesus preached Himself. Gathering together is biblical (such as the apostles gathering together in Acts chapter 2), and it also opens the doors for many other blessings. Let me ask you a question, “Did you teach yourself how to read, write, problem solve, and so on?” Of course not. Pretty much all of us went to school and were taught by someone with higher education (at the time) than we had—someone qualified for the job. We attend church to learn, grow, and receive Divine healings when necessary. Pastors, priestes, reverends, apostles—they are all educated men and women of God who have taken up the responsibility to steward their congregation for the purpose of advancing God’s people. Yes, we’ve all heard stories of rogue pastors or churches that are not sticking to what the Bible teaches, and, unfortunately, these things do happen. However, we should never allow sporadic instances such as these deter us from gathering together to worship God. Notice I said for us to worship Him, not the other way around. There are WAY too many people with the attitude of “Well, I didn’t get anything out of church today.” The question is: What did God get out of YOUR being in church today? Church is a place where we can gather with other believers at least once a week, bring our children, worship and
grow in the Lord—receiving His Word from a person entirely dedicated to ministry. I am already seeing long-term fruits from taking Olivia to church. She is so passionate about going. I know for a fact that she is learning while we’re there (she often repeats stories or sermons back to me), and she actually has several favorite praise and worship songs—ones that I listen to, not children’s music! I, too, find myself quoting sermons or phrases my pastor has spoken when I minister to others. I also notice that as I am constantly “absorbing” all of the Word and atmosphere from being an active church member, the way I live and lead my life are changed for God’s purposes—naturally. Even King David wrote, “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that I will seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life…” —Psalm 27:4 (NKJV) If we know anything about David, it’s just how desperate he always was to be in God’s presence and to draw more near to Him.

So if you are not an active church attendee yet, find someone who is and ask if you can join along. Find out what the church has to offer and make some connections with the staff. Who knows? You may have just found a new church home!

**Prayer**

*Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.’* —Matt 6:9 (NASB)

By far, and without a question, one of the (if not the greatest) weapons we as Christians and fathers have is the power of prayer. Often words cannot describe its effect; and I don’t have enough room in this chapter to even begin to scratch the surface of what prayer has done in my life and the lives of so many others I know.
I will tell you, though, that I strive every single day to prioritize prayer highly in my day-to-day activities, to the point that it becomes completely natural in everything I do. Do you pray regularly? Do you pray with your kids? These are questions that must be addressed, and if the answer is “no” to either or both, then I pray that you would begin to seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance in getting started.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:7-8 that we receive when we ask, but only with the understanding that our heavenly Father will bless us because we ARE His children. God is glorified and our prayers are answered when we pray in Jesus’ name (John 14:13); and when we do pray, we are to believe that we have already received, and that our prayers have been granted. (Mark 11:24) I have complete understanding that we, as fathers, have spiritual authority over our children, and that there is more power in our prayers for them than just about anything or anyone else’s. True, hard-nose, warrior-type prayer takes time and comes with maturity. **The way you pray is not nearly as important as the heart behind it** and the relationship you have with Him. Trust me, God will honor the ineloquent prayers of a man with a heart like David’s far more than some guy’s who can blow crowds away with his words, but has absolutely no heart behind it. Remember James’ words? “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”—James 5:16 (NIV)

Dad, do not be afraid to start praying. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, for He will never lead you astray. Come openly and transparent before God, leaving all of your fears, anxiety, and doubts at the foot of the Cross. If you already pray regularly with your kids, by all means, keep it up! Every prayer—whether it’s before bed, over a fever, before a baseball game, or whatever—lays another brick in the foundation of Jesus Christ for you and
your children’s future. Consistency is key. I’ve already mentioned how often the world has the chance to influence our children, and I’ll discuss those topics once again in the final chapter. With so many variables and inconsistencies floating around in our kids’ lives and not always knowing what they are learning apart from us, we must stay strong in our walk. If we are to follow God’s Word, it has to be all or nothing, not just conforming it to what works best for us. The same goes for prayer. Make sure, first and foremost, that your prayers line up with the Bible, and the truly important issues remain a constant topic and request when praying with your children. Remember, they are sponges and will model our worship as well, especially if that’s the only example they may have. I will close this portion on prayer with a quote by Samuel Chadwick and with the note that I will always pray in my spirit for every father or person in general who ever picks up this book. I pray that God sets you on fire in your prayer life, that miracles happen through your hands, and that generations are changed because of prayer! Please know as well, that you are absolutely welcome to contact me at any time if you would like us to pray together in person. Here are the words of Pastor Chadwick: “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.” Dad, it’s time to start making your enemy tremble, and with great reason! Knock him out of his boots and claim your position in our Lord!
I remember the old days when I was young, when we used to sit around the dinner table and read Scripture together with my mom. At the time, I thought it was kind of dull and boring, but at the same time I was curious. Our reading was very sporadic, and now that I’m older, I wish we had continued. Going back to the Swiss study in chapter 3, having dads involved in the spiritual growth of our children is vital. Psalms 128:3b states, “Your children like olive plants around your table.” (NASB) The verse here pertains to the fact that our children will flourish and grow when we, literally, have dinner around the table. Nowadays it’s so easy to eat on the run, hit a drive through, or separate and go watch TV in another room. Dad, bring dinner back to where it is meant to be—at the dinner table! Enjoy the conversation about what they learned in school that day or about their favorite movie. After dinner is done and the table is cleared, break out the Bible. It may or may not seem a little awkward at first, but I truly believe it will become a milestone in everyone’s spiritual and personal development. Go over a few verses and discuss what they mean to you; play a memory game—make it fun! In times like these, we are creating not only quality time with our children; we are educating, setting Christ-like examples, and helping them grow in a variety of ways that will only better them as adults when they are out in the world on their own.

I have challenged myself to start memorizing more verses
lately, not only for personal growth, but to stand up for my faith in Christ as well. Our children are growing up in a very challenging time for many believers, even here in the United States. There is definitely going to come a time (or multiple times) where they will be called out on who Jesus is and the authenticity of the Bible. Our leadership now will become the beginning of a strong foundation for our kids to stand on when resistance comes along. I believe in my heart that God puts everyone at an exact point in history for a reason. They are here on this earth right now because they have been appointed by the Lord to do those predestined good works, and they are equipped to handle many instances that we may or may not be. It is our job to help them unlock those spiritual gifts.

Obviously, one of the greatest and most important reasons for reading and memorizing Scripture is for spiritual warfare. (Eph 6:17) Good preparation for all of us is vital when those challenging times occur in our lives. God’s Word is infinite and when everything else is all said and done in this world—His Word is all that will remain.

The world is passing away and all of its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. —1John 2:17 (NASB)

As Christians and as fathers, we are to draw upon God’s Word in both times of prayer and times of praise. As you grow deeper in your walk, discernment will set in over various situations and you will be able to determine when something, someone, or somewhere doesn’t match up with the Bible. It will help you make godly decisions and help keep you from sin. (Psalms 119:11, 16, 105) Most of all, the Bible is a guidebook—the “owner’s manual” and a “road map” for life. It is the inspired word of God, prepared
by the ultimate Father to pass on through His children from generation to generation to generation. We must allow the Word to penetrate our hearts and minds and change us to become more Christ-like with each passing moment. For if we don’t, then it is nothing more than a bunch of really good stories and teachings. However, when we are filled with the Spirit and combine that with good, quality Scripture reading and quiet time, the Bible literally becomes alive and has the ability to change our lives profoundly!

**Tithing**

*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.* —**Heb 11:6** (NASB)

When you hear the word “tithe,” what thoughts come to mind? Is tithing a regular practice of yours—an act of obedience that you look forward to? Or perhaps you have not-so-positive thoughts about “giving” your money to the church, that it doesn’t get used in the way that you think it should be. The way we look at how we handle our money, and the fact that we may think it belongs to us are two very important issues of the heart. Tithing is both an act of worship and trusting in the Lord to allow Him to use the resources He has given to us in the first place. In doing so, He will bless us in return. It is not designed to be a religious routine that we go through once a week at church and wait until next week, tithing goes far beyond that. Look at Jesus’ words in Matt 6:19-21: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where**
your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (ESV) Yes, we are called to steward and tithe our money regularly, but tithing can also be other things, such as our time. When we set aside those moments for our quiet time with God, that is tithing our time. You are stewarding your time properly, and giving it back to the One who created time in the first place. Volunteering is also a great way to tithe your time, but just as it is the same with our money—only after we have given what is right to the Lord first. Yes, money is a test. Money is not the root of all evil, the love of it is. (1Tim 6:10) The way we handle and worship with our money, with the same open and giving heart that we have for others, that is our true act of trust and obedience.

Tithing is another great example of how we can model Jesus to our kids. Let them see you tithe whenever possible, and teach them the same. I recently began an allowance program with Olivia. We are starting with two dollars a week, but certain chores must be completed first. When the work is finished, she gets paid. However, it goes beyond that. I have decided to teach her early about tithing. Out of those two dollars, twenty cents is immediately removed and placed in the offering. The rest is up to her to do with as she wishes. I will work on savings and stewardship with her eventually, but first things first—and God is first. If you give to other charities as well, discuss with your children which ones you should give to and why. You can use these times and opportunities to share why we give, and how they line up with Jesus’ teachings. Whenever possible, quote some Scripture as well. I love what Clarence Kelland said in regard to his father: “He didn’t tell me how to live; he lived and let me watch him do it.” Dads, the way we handle our money, time, and all other resources are great teaching tools for our kids. My dad never taught me how to manage money; often it was given to
me. However, he has always had an extremely benevolent heart, and even though I had times of carelessness with it, I love to be able to bless others monetarily whenever I can. The key is to find balance between godly principles and living the life God has laid out before you.

**Fellowship**

Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.’” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town. —1 Samuel 20:42 (NIV)

So far, we have discussed not only the importance of accountability and being mentored, but also the pitfalls we as Christians can fall into when we do not have a strong support system of friends, family, and other believers. As is the case wherever Jesus is the center, friendships and relationships flourish as well. My current circle of what I consider to be my core group of friends is by far the strongest group of friends I have ever had; it is a group that may change over time due to distance and life in general, but will always remain important to me. That is just the main group; the fellowship, network, and strong acquaintances beyond that stretch out quite far as well. Now, I am not saying this to brag by any means. It has taken years for me develop this kind of foundation, but I can honestly say that over 90% of these people are good, Christ-loving individuals. If you remember, previous choices I had made in life caused me to become someone you probably would not have wanted to hang around with. I hung
out with drug dealers, trashy women, and often, criminals. It still blows my mind some of the houses and neighborhoods I exposed myself to, and the fact that I was never jumped, beaten, or killed in those areas. I frequented bars, strip clubs, and drug houses on a regular basis. However, when the drugs ran out; when I saw no way out of my life; when I was in the hospital from an overdose or car accident, were any of my so called “friends” there? Nope, not one. Listen to Paul’s words to the Corinthians in his first letter to them: “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.” –1Cor 15:33 (NASB) I had surrounded myself with a social circle based strictly on drugs and money, of which there was never enough. Thus, when those components ran out, my foundation of friends was gone until the next party time. I was all alone, and did not even know it. I even exposed my girlfriend at the time to ecstasy and deviant sexual behavior. She was a good girl, better than what I deserved. I must have thought that if I could bring her down to my level, I would not lose her. I truly was in hell.

I was raised better than what I had become. My only chance for salvation and forgiveness came through the blood spilled at Calvary. Jesus truly has performed a miracle in my life and turned me around a complete 180 degrees. A good portion of that is evident in my life today and is certainly due to some degree to the amazing group of godly men and women He has blessed me with as friends and “family.” Also, as followers of Christ we are to engage with those who are not believers, to be the salt and light of the world. We are to love others unconditionally and treat others in the same manner that we would want to be treated. However, there is a definite line between who you associate and witness to, and the foundation of friends with whom you surround yourself. This is where discernment and being keen to the Spirit play a vital role. As you grow deeper in your walk, God will
bring many positive influences into your life; some may be for a season, others for a lifetime. Cherish these relationships when you are blessed with them. I know from personal experience that it is not the quantity of people I have to fellowship with—it is the quality. Divine appointments are often at the center of these friendships as well, possibly a job offer or a great business connection. Whatever the case, always hold to Jesus’ words when fellowshipping with others; who knows, you may be that bit of light they need at that particular moment to get by. In return, God will bless you for acting the way we should, and you may have just planted a seed that will have eternal rewards for someone else!

Now obviously, this is a summary of the key points of discipleship, but I pray you get the idea. Discipleship is a life-long process, one that we should never cease growing in. I will promise you, though, that when you faithfully follow these examples and remain humble in seeking God’s will for your life, He will exalt you to a level in His Kingdom and for His purposes that you would have never reached on your own. That is His promise!
Walking the Walk

Summary
Discipleship is vital for any Christian who intends to grow in his/her walk with the Lord. Although there are many overall factors, some of the main steps in discipleship include Church attendance, reading Scripture, Prayer, Tithing, and Fellowship with other believers. When these are combined with God's Spirit in our lives, we will flourish in our relationship with Him.

Key Verses for Memorization
James 5:16
Josh 1:8
Eph 6:17
Psalm 119—the whole thing (Just kidding!)
Psalm 119:105
Heb 11:6
1Cor 15:33

Putting God’s Word to Action
• Church attendance, daily prayer and Scripture reading, tithing, and fellowship are all extremely important works on our part that come together in strengthening our walk with Christ.

• Every one of these points is a great opportunity to model Jesus to our kids.

• The difference between being a Christian who truly lives God’s plan for our lives and that of an ineffective Christian often comes down to our level of discipleship and our commitment to it.


Discussion Questions
When you look at the five key principles laid out in this chapter, what areas are you excelling in? What areas could be improved upon? Discuss.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

How do you currently, or how will you, start modeling these qualities to your children?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

How has God helped you grow in one or more of these areas: Attending church regularly, Praying, Reading Scripture, Tithing, and Fellowshipping with other Christians?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Prayer
Father, You have called me to great heights as a follower of Jesus Christ. Through discipleship, Lord, lead me in reaching that level to which I have been called. Amen.
Chapter 11

Legacy

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children…
—Prov 13:22a (NASB)

Well dads, we have made it to the final chapter. I pray you have been as blessed by this journey together as much as I have. Just as I mentioned in the opening chapter, I prayed that I would learn more about myself along the way in writing this book—and I have. I have discovered even more of what it truly means to become a godly father, and just how desperate I am for God every single day! Trust me, I am FAR from getting it down right (Phil 3:13), as I’ve actually had to go back at times to see what I wrote just to deal with the trials and tests that have come up along the way in the past several months. As I stated in chapter 9, most of these trials will come up on a fairly regular basis. We just become more conditioned to handle them as we grow stronger in our walk.

This final chapter is about legacy—what are we leaving behind for our children and the world? Every single one of us will leave a legacy behind; the one you choose to leave is up to you. During our time together as a small group, one of the assignments
I gave the dads was to create a legacy paper. I asked them write two paragraphs only: the first paragraph was to focus what their legacy would be right now. Basically, if we were to die **today**, what would our legacy be? The second paragraph was about what we would **want** our legacy to be. You see, we can only live for today, this moment, right now. Yesterday is past and tomorrow may or may not come, so we are to live each and every moment improving ourselves and others for God’s purposes. Now obviously we have the ability in many cases to correct mistakes from the past and provide for our future, but are we truly living for today? Time is a precious gift from God, one that I pray we never take for granted. So let’s get ready to close out this final segment together and lay a foundation for our children that will endure for generations to come.

**What our children truly need from us**

When we think of the great men of history, ones that have left a lasting impression, who comes to mind? History is filled with thousands of individuals who have left a lasting mark on the world, for better or worse. Often we place public figures on such high pedestals that they seem to be some sort of gods themselves. Think of it: Rich and powerful politicians, sports stars with big-league records, and music “idols” with smash hits. Now I am definitely not against anyone who holds such a title, but often the world’s perception is blinded by glamour and fame. We have public officials and CEOs running around on their spouses, and a world of drugs often mixed into the sports and entertainment world. It breaks my heart that all too often these are our children’s role models—not us.
I once wrote a blog about advertisements that were featured on a Super Bowl telecast, and how our world pollutes our kids with violence, harmful words, and sex. In the blog I explained how times like these, when our kids are exposed to this trash, is a great time to witness God’s love and Jesus’ sacrifice for us. We can use phrases such as, “I wish they wouldn’t put commercials like that on TV” or ask them if what they just saw matched up with God’s Word. In the long run, kids will forget exactly what they saw in an ad, commercial, or heard in a song, but the overall impact will remain. Sexual ads may eventually lead to a desire for greater stimulation or other acts (my personal struggles with sex and pornography began by looking at the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issues). However, dad’s words will last their lifetimes. Follow me on this. Let’s say you and your son are watching a football game and a beer commercial comes on. Often it is humorous with some one-liners thrown in, but even that can progress in the wrong direction. More often than not, these ads are filled with either moderate or aggressive sexual content, and your son is left vulnerable after he sees the ad. Dad, the next few seconds can be very critical in pulling your son back onto the right path. Turn the TV off and begin to talk to him. Pull out Scripture if needed (such as Matt 5:28), or explain to him how, as men of God, we are to treat and view women. Times like this, when dad has stopped everything and taken control of the moment, combined with hundreds of other opportunities that will come up, build that foundation of stone that cannot be shaken. The same opportunities go for our daughters, and their validation needs to come first and foremost from God, but also from us. Let them know just how beautiful they truly are, the way that He created and intended them to be. No matter what the occasion, no matter what path you decide to take, make sure YOUR impression is the one that sticks, not the world’s.
Our kids need to know that we are there for them, not just to physically provide for and protect them, but that we genuinely care for their emotional wellbeing. The self-confidence and assurance we can build in and through them this way is eternal, and will last for generations. That is part of a Christ-centered legacy! Our sons and daughters need dad to be “dad”: one who truly invests in their lives, shows genuine concern for them, and is the one they turn to for guidance and leadership when they need it the most. Seek God in all that you do, He will lead you on the right path to ensure our place in our children’s lives is for His will and purposes. In my own life, I never developed that type of relationship with either one of my parents. As I mentioned in chapter 8, I was born out of a sexually immoral relationship, but worse than that, I never received the instruction and guidance that I would need later in life to protect myself. Instead, my dad would crack casual remarks about an attractive woman who might be nearby instead of teaching me respect for her. He would tell me inappropriate jokes, and was rarely serious about any sort of life issue. Now that I look back at my childhood, I see that my dad was more of a “buddy” or “hang-out friend” than a father. I was completely unprepared for my adolescent and young adult years, and I fell hard. As I look back on examples such as this in my own life, I can now see that it is only through God Himself that I’ve become the man and father I am today. Does that make me perfect? Of course not, but it does solidify my case that Jesus is the only One who can help us reach our true potential as the fathers we were created to be. Not having a strong male role model in my life, how else could I have turned out the way I am if God’s promises were not 100% true? There simply is no other way. I now use all of the tools that have been laid out before me: Scripture and prayer; a mentor and accountability partner; church and ministry, etc.
and invest everything I have learned and continue to learn into Olivia’s life. Are you doing the same with your children? Use your time with God as a springboard for quality time with your kids. This is especially important and useful for those of us who may not have a strong grip on how to interact with them. I pray you desire and seek that relationship with our heavenly Father with the same passion and yearning that our kids have for spending time with us. Your kids are not fatherless, and neither are you, always remember that.

*I’ve learned... that simple walks with my father around the block on summer nights when I was a child did wonders for me as an adult.*

–Andy Rooney

**A World Legacy vs. an Eternal Legacy**

*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. –2Cor 4:17-18 (NIV)*

I guess in the long run, what truly matters is the way we live our lives and the impact we leave behind. When I was younger, my idea of the “good life” was having a job that paid good money, driving a sweet ride, and walking into a public place with a trophy wife on my arm. I knew that if I pursued life hard enough, I could actually make that happen. But then my life took a huge downward (nearly fatal) spiral, and everything was flipped upside down. I fell into addiction, Olivia was born in the middle of it all, and I eventually lost everything. The sad part is the fact that
despite all that was going on around me, I actually was under the delusion that I could still pull all of that off! I mean, not only was my life in crisis, but I now had a daughter to take care of as well and I was still being selfish enough to chase after the unattainable. Then I finally allowed God to take complete control of my life, and that is where the second paragraph in my legacy paper began.

Before, my life was like the beginning of a great book that would have been left unfinished had something happened to me; a book in which the best pages were yet to be written. Today, I chase after God with all that I have and my heart is so full of love and gratitude for Him that often I feel like I can’t even contain it all.

I now see that my former desires all would have faded away. Jobs and money can be lost just as fast as they were earned; cars eventually rust out; and the true value of a person is not found in their looks, but what is on the inside. I see all of that now, and I chase after eternal prizes, with an eternal legacy to be left behind.

I absolutely love this quote from Forest E. Witcraft; I use it in discussion all of the time: “A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove…but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.” Wow! I can see that every time I pray good night with my daughter, every trip to the park together, and every time I tell her how much I love her—all of it is laying another brick in my legacy as her dad. I may not change the world, but who knows? Maybe she will because of everything I have invested in her through Christ.

So where are we at in all of this, dad? Your life may be where my life and so many others’ lives were—completely upside down with no hope in sight. Let me reassure you, God has you exactly where He wants you, but ONLY if you are willing to finally tear the walls down between Him and you and let the rebuilding process
begin. This is a lifelong journey, one that will require work on both ends. Yes, you must be willing to allow God to mold you, but you (we) have to do a lot of the legwork ourselves. It is often not very much fun, sometimes even painful, but God’s ultimate plan for our lives is perfect. (Jer 29:11-13) I cannot reiterate enough (obviously) the importance of spending one-on-one time in God’s presence through reading Scripture (and other materials such as devotionals) and through prayer. It is only in these times alone that He can do His best work in us. On the other hand, perhaps you have come through some major storms and are living that John 10:10 type of life that Jesus speaks about. If so, keep pursuing Him daily, and don’t let up! Our kids are counting on us in so many ways, and it does not matter how old they are. In fact, for those of you who may have teen or adult children, now is an excellent opportunity to teach them how to lead in a world and workforce that needs their light shining through more than ever. Jesus commissions us to go and make disciples. Well, it begins at home with our children.

Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace.
–Ps 144:12 (NIV)
Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful
God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations
with those who love Him and keep His commandments.
–Deut 7:9 (NKJV)

How many of us would love to thank God that we do not have to
finish the way we began? Having the ability to finish strong in life
as a disciple and a father are two of the greatest blessings we can
receive from God. Our God is a God of grace and mercy, but also
One of love. He loves us so much that He will not only continue
to forgive us when we mess up, but He will keep strengthening
us to our maximum potential in becoming more Christ-like each
and every day! As we remain obedient to His Word, He is faithful
to not only bless us, but generations to come through us. As we
get ready to close this book out together, I pray that this has been
an experience that has not only helped you learn and grow in your
personal walk with the Lord, but also one that has equipped you
to continue to water and grow your children as well. Dads, this
world is not doing us any favors when it comes to educating our
kids on the basis of life and morals. I am not saying that everything
in the world is bad, but “worldly” influences are definitely not for
our children.

First and foremost, we must continue to recognize and secure
our position in Jesus Christ, leading our kids in the same way.
Taking everything we have discussed in the previous chapters—
from loving their mother unconditionally, to stewarding our
finances, to remaining accountable with each other—it all adds
up to closing out strong in life. I read an article once about a man
who left a very well-paying, high executive job to go and seek his calling with a national non-profit agency. A few weeks before his passing from complications of a bone marrow transplant, this man was quoted as saying that he was leaving with “no regrets and nothing left undone.” He had accomplished everything he had set out to do for God’s Kingdom. The rest was trivial. As I read the article, tears streaming down my face, I wondered how many of us have the ability to finish like that as well? Dad, finishing strong may be something as simple as telling your kids that you love them and asking for their forgiveness; or it may require some much deeper work—work that will have you digging your heels in to remain standing. Whatever the case may be, as followers of Christ and as fathers to our children, we are to give them 110%—the absolute best of our lives. The legacy we desire should be that we leave this world for the next with no regrets, and leave none for those left behind as well. Sure, all of our mistakes may not be cleaned up before we go, but the wounds sure can be closed up! Did we love our Lord with everything we had? Was the world a better place because we were in it? Will the generational blessings that we began continue because of the investments we made in our children? These are the type of questions that should come up in our quiet time—questions that touch on the issues of life and the heart.
I will leave you with this: know who you are in Jesus Christ; know that as a son of the living God, you carry a power and ability that is unmatched in this world. Know that God is constantly doing good work in you, that you can do all things through Him, and He is with you always. As a father, you have the ability to bring your children to a level that they may or may not have ever achieved by themselves. You are an amazing creation, fearfully and wonderfully made. You are a disciple called to carry God’s Word and advance His Kingdom; you are a father—a calling worthy of God’s appointed. You have the ability to demolish strongholds over your self and your children, and cement together the relationship with your sons or daughters on the Rock of Christ. Know these things; trust these things; believe these things.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. —Col 1:15-17 (NASB)
Walking the Walk

Summary
We are all going to leave a legacy of some sort one day, that is a given. If we are going to leave one built on Jesus Christ for our children, then we must remain completely and 100% sold out to Him. Our children are depending on us in so many ways, but the greatest impact we will have on them is how we lead them in Christ. No matter how we started out in life or as fathers, it does not have to end in the same way. Jesus is the ultimate Restorer and Healer; for our lives and legacy are both established and renewed through (and only through) Him!

Key Verses for Memorization
Matt 22:37
Eph 2:10
Jer 29:11-13
2Cor 4:18
John 10:10

Putting God’s Word to Action
• We create an eternal legacy by following Jesus as our supreme example.

• When it’s all said and done, times with our kids with eternal rewards are what last.

• God created you in His image and sent His Son to die in our place. Now, go and serve your King!
Discussion Questions

Write your own legacy paper. In the first paragraph, describe what your legacy would be if you were to die today—what would you leave behind? In paragraph number two, what would you want it to look like?

Now that you have a good idea of what you want your legacy to look like, what steps can you take to start achieving that? Are there areas in your children’s lives that you could or should improve upon? Talk about this.

This book has been a journey—for all of us. The cool thing is that God already had all of this planned out before the world was ever set in motion. Based on this fact, I pray you will continue to seek Him in all that you do and live your life in the Matthew 22:37 type of way. Seek Jesus out daily and constantly praise Him for all He has done for you and your children. Take your position in Christ and become the father you were meant to be!
Prayer

Father, words cannot describe the love You continue to show me every single day. Lord, I pray to leave a legacy behind for my children and for the world that truly represents Jesus Christ. May I continue to glorify You all the days of my life! Amen.
Matt Haviland is available for speaking engagements, seminars, workshops, interviews and other types of events.

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