

# THE GOOD DAD GUIDE

CHARLES MARSHALL



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This book contains stories in which people's names and some details of their situations have been changed.

## THE GOOD DAD GUIDE

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*This book is dedicated to the many men  
I've been privileged to know who have  
modeled the best of fatherhood.*

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I wish my father, Fred H. Marshall, were still on this earth. I miss him constantly, and his contributions to my life and this book are too numerous to count. I think he would get a kick out of reading this book, and I look forward to sharing it with him one day.

Like countless other dads, I believe that my children are the best kids on the planet. Not a day goes by that I don't thank God for placing them in my life. They constantly teach me how to try harder, reach further, stand stronger, and love deeper.

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## Introduction

Be-coming a dad is the best and most exciting thing that can happen to a man. Nothing else I've ever experienced has even come close. It's better than being a published author. It's cooler than receiving a standing ovation. It's more awesome than getting a big paycheck. It's more exciting than traveling and seeing famous landmarks. It is better than doing television or radio interviews. Seeing the faces of my children, hearing them laugh, and hanging out with them feeds my heart in a way that none of that can.

Having kids changed me in ways that I couldn't even imagine before I had them. It changed how I live and where I live. It changed the way I drive and where I park my car. It changed the reason I get out of bed in the morning. It changed what I pray and how I pray. And most of all, it changed my perspective.

Many years ago, before I was a speaker, I worked as an independent musician, traveling around the Southeast doing concerts at small churches. Back then my wife and I had no children and, as a result of my being a full-time musician, were poorer than church mice. Even when I did manage to make a few dollars, I had to invest that money in my career, buying more equipment or recording new music.

One day, when I was recording a couple of songs in an Atlanta-area recording studio, the studio owner started talking to me about the birth of his second child. He was obviously thrilled to have her and asked if my wife and I had any children. I told him that we didn't and weren't likely to anytime soon because we were so broke. He told me that having kids was awesome and encouraged me to trust God to take care of my family.

But having kids didn't look that awesome to me at the time. Fatherhood looked like a prison of responsibility, and I didn't want to get trapped. I had dreams. I didn't want to throw all of them away and become shackled with the drudgery of taking care of a family.

At the time, I couldn't see that I was scared and that I was being held captive by fear. Because I was fearful, I didn't take risks that would lead to growth and blessing. Like a slave clinging to his chains, I was holding on to dreams and desires that wouldn't compare to the freedom and fulfillment that being a dad would hold for me.

When my daughter was finally born, all of that changed in an instant. The dreams that seemed so enormously important before suddenly appeared trite and meaningless. They were small, brittle things that evaporated in an instant as my universe expanded exponentially. My world seemed limitless with possibility because it now contained a person worth fighting for. Knowing this little girl gave me purpose, strength, and resolve that I lacked before. Having a daughter saved me from becoming caught in the trap of myself.

Being a father has been the most wonderful, challenging, frightening, fulfilling, beautiful, and revelatory experience I have ever encountered. There have been many times I have literally gotten down on my knees and thanked God that I didn't miss out on being a dad.

This book is a celebration of fatherhood. My purpose in writing it is to encourage you, to let you know how important you are to the world. We fathers are told that we only exist for our genetic contribution in the creation of children—that everything else we are can be either duplicated or replaced by someone or something else. A bigger lie has never been told.

A father is a gift. He is crucial, vital, and indispensable. It is my prayer that this book encourages you to realize your importance and fulfill your potential as a dad. I hope you find in these pages the strength, knowledge, and empowerment you need to be the hero your child already believes you are.



Part 1

# PROVIDE

*My God will meet all your needs according  
to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

**PHILIPPIANS 4:19**



## A Tale of Two Laundrymen

Fred Bailey's occupation is listed in the 1930 census as "laundryman." In those times, working in a laundry was a fairly common profession. Men were needed to load huge amounts of clothes into giant washers and then transfer those wet clothes into industrial dryers that were several times larger than those found in today's Laundromats.

Then the Great Depression hit, and the laundry business plummeted. Fred lost his job, started drinking heavily, and then hit the road. No one was ever clear why he left his wife and five children. Some people said he was trying to better himself and his family's condition, so he traveled to other states in search of work. Some said he was a no-account bum who abandoned his family in their darkest hour.

About a year later his wife received word that Fred was dead.

Once again, details were sketchy and rumors abounded. Some folks said he was working a job with the phone company in Kansas and died when he fell off a telephone pole. Some whispered he was murdered in a back alley in Memphis for an unpaid gambling debt.

His family, of course, was devastated. His wife got a job and farmed out the kids to neighbors who were kind enough to watch them while she worked. The Bailey family struggled just the same as millions of other families did during that time. Clothes were handed down to younger children, feet went bare in the summer, and every spare penny was treasured.

But then a hero named Pop Wheeler showed up. Wheeler was also a laundryman and was working in a laundry the first time he became a hero. One of his coworkers had been working inside the drum of one of the huge dryers when someone accidentally turned on the machine.

The man inside was tossed around like a rag doll while everyone surrounding the machine tried in vain to switch it off. It was clear to everyone that the man's life was in danger. His neck or spine could easily be snapped if nothing were done. Acting quickly, with no thought for his own safety, Wheeler stepped forward and thrust his arm into the tumbling dryer, temporarily halting the tumbler while his coworkers pulled the repairman out. But arms aren't made to withstand that kind of force, and the dryer tore it from Wheeler's body.

The repairman's life had been saved, but Wheeler had lost his arm and could no longer work at the laundry.

Sometime later, Wheeler met the widow Bailey, and they became romantically involved. They married, and Pop Wheeler raised the widow's five kids as his own, making him a hero for the second time.

The youngest of the family was a little girl named Gwen who would grow up one day and become my mom. As I grew up, she would occasionally tell the story of her father, his drinking, and his abandoning her family. Like many of her generation, she didn't talk a lot about how that situation made her feel, but she left no doubt as to how her father's behavior impacted her family. She also left no doubt about how grateful she was that another man stepped up to become a father and provider for her family.

Back in those times, a man's career options were severely limited by the loss of an arm, but Pop Wheeler didn't use that as an excuse not to work. He found work doing whatever he could to provide for his adopted family, and as a result, they made it through one of the darkest economic times in our country's history.

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### The Takeaway

It is a father's responsibility to financially provide for his family. His effort—or lack of effort—will be remembered for generations to come.

## Build a Boat

When I read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a boy, I was transported to a world of freedom and adventure, riding the Mississippi River with Huck and Jim. I dreamed of building my own raft and setting sail on the Mississippi, just as Huck did, but my parents told me in no uncertain terms that the Mississippi River was not to be trifled with and enacting my plan would no doubt result in my untimely death. I took them at their word and came up with an alternative plan. I would still make a raft but would settle for a more manageable and less life-threatening body of water.

My main obstacle was that we were poor, but since that didn't seem to slow Huck down, I didn't see why it should be a problem for me. I drew a simple plan for a rectangular raft, with the main frame and supports built of two-by-fours and the top covered with plywood. I managed to scrape together enough two-by-fours for my project, but finding one sheet of four-by-eight plywood proved beyond me. So I moved on to Plan B, which was gathering about ten or twelve odd-sized smaller pieces of plywood and then cutting and piecing them together to make the platform for my raft. The finished product looked something like the paint job of the Partridge Family's bus.

But how would I make it float? My neighbor's dad owned a solid chunk of Styrofoam that measured roughly one foot by two feet by six feet, and I looked longingly over my fence at it every day. I begged my friend to ask his dad if I could have it, but his dad wasn't giving up that treasure for anything. Car or truck inner tubes would have been great, but those cost money too, and I was doing this project on the cheap.

I was stuck on this problem for a couple months, but then the jug

of milk at the breakfast table caught my eye. Back then, all milk jug lids were screwed on, so I wondered if they would be airtight. Holding a few sealed milk jugs underwater a few times proved that they would work as flotation devices. Then I needed to figure out how much weight one milk jug would support and how many jugs I would need to float my raft. After a few more experiments and sketchy calculations, I had my number, which turned out to be just as many milk jugs as I could cram underneath the raft. After I spent a few weeks collecting all the milk jugs I needed, I fastened the jugs to the bottom of the raft with some old bicycle inner tube strips, and I was in business. I hauled/dragged/pushed the raft to a nearby pond and was thrilled to see that my raft floated quite nicely. I spent several afternoons floating around that pond, feeling like Huck Finn himself.

I learned at an early age to go ahead and start working on my dreams, but it seems a growing number of people these days prefer to wait. I know of a young father who remains unemployed because he's waiting for a big settlement check. He can't go back to work until he gets the check because it involves a work injury, so he does nothing. And he's done nothing for about five years now. His girlfriend, the mother of his child, goes to work and pays the bills.

I know of others who buy lottery tickets, hoping to win their way to financial stability. Others still collect unemployment benefits for years rather than take a job that is not in their field.

When I see situations like these, especially with fathers, I want to ask, instead of waiting for your ship to come in, why not build a boat? Instead of wasting years and years of your life when you have youth, energy, and opportunity, why not go ahead and get started building something? My first book, *Shattering the Glass Slipper*, is built largely on this one point.

Each family decides whether the mom will work outside the household. That is a separate issue. But unless the dad has some sort of disability, he needs to be working to keep his family financially afloat. It is a dad's job to provide for his family, no matter what he has to do to get it done. Barring the immoral or illegal, a dad needs to step up, gather whatever scrap pieces he has, and start building a life raft for his family.

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## **The Takeaway**

There is no excuse for not doing whatever you can to take care of your family. Instead of waiting for the perfect solution, start working with whatever you have at hand.





## Real Men Empathize

My father was born on July 4, 1926, and belonged to the one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-equalled-or-replaced World War II generation. After surviving the hardship and struggle of the Great Depression, this entire generation willingly volunteered to go to war so they could protect their families and country from a great evil rising across the sea. My father joined the navy and served as a radio operator on a submarine. I believe at that time the mortality rate of men serving on submarines was somewhere around 50 percent. Like most veterans of that era, he was reluctant to talk about his actions in the war, saying only that he and millions of others just did their duty.

After the war, he attended the University of Georgia, where he played football and earned his degree. He landed his first job after college working as a high school football coach in the Atlanta area. He met my mom shortly afterward, started a family, and worked hard to put food on the table.

He had a lifelong passion for sports of all kinds. Whether it was football, baseball, basketball, or the Olympics—whatever and whenever sports were on—he was in front of our black-and-white Zenith, cheering loudly for his team.

Standing at six feet three and weighing about 220 pounds, he was a formidable and intimidating man. He was the type of guy who struck terror into the hearts of all my sisters' would-be suitors just by answering the door.

He wasn't hesitant to tell his kids he loved them, but he would never be caught talking about his daily struggles, such as our family's financial difficulties or the almost constant rejection he experienced when

he transitioned into a sales career. In short, he wasn't an Alan Alda, touchy-feely, let's-all-hold-hands-and-discuss-our-feelings kind of guy. He was the kind of man who felt at home among men.

So it was a welcome surprise whenever he chose to express compassion for my little trials or hardships.

Back in the early 1970s, my family was deep in the depths of financial struggle. My father had a heart attack about that time and wasn't able to work, so my mother went back to work in the office of the Gibson's Discount Center on Highway 80 in Clinton, Mississippi. Money was scarce, and whatever luxuries we possessed, we had to earn.

My sisters and I were able to get work delivering the *Southwest Guide*, a local paper that was supported largely by the tons of ads that accompanied it. Every other week, a white van backed into our driveway and unloaded mounds of circulars, newspapers, fliers, and advertisements. It was then our job to haul them inside, separate them into stacks, and put one of each publication into a slim plastic bag to be distributed to each home in our area. My sisters and I then hung big canvas bags stuffed with papers on our shoulders and lugged them around town, hanging plastic bags on every home's doorknob. We would deliver all the papers in our canvas bags, go back home, reload our bags, and then head back out to deliver some more.

It was hard work for a ten-year-old under the best of circumstances. Walking for miles bearing a heavy load in the sweltering Mississippi summer was tough, but it was the wintertime that I found intolerable. The South rarely gets snow, but it does get cold—a damp, relentless, clinging cold. On one of those bitterly cold days, I returned home after delivering a load and began readying my bag to go out again. My father took pity on me and told me he would drive me back to the point where I had run out of papers. After we arrived, he drove the car along the street while I went from house to house delivering papers. From time to time I would warm myself in the car before getting out to deliver the rest.

But the thing that shines in my memory isn't that my dad came along and helped me out, as much as I appreciated him doing so. It was the look of concern and compassion on his face each time I returned to the car. He wasn't a man of many words, but what he had, he gave me.

“Son, I’m sorry you’re having a rough time. I know how it is to have to be out in the cold and not be able to get any relief.”

That is all I remember him saying, but that was enough. Just knowing that my father cared—that he had been through this type of trial and understood what I was experiencing—just that little bit was enough to get me through the ordeal.

That is the power of empathy. When your kids are having a hard time, they don’t need a lecture. They don’t need your advice. They don’t need you to scold them. They don’t necessarily even need you to rescue them.

What they need is your understanding. They need to know that you get what they’re going through. And they need to hear from your own lips that you care.

Maybe you don’t think telling your kids that you care is really you. I have to think that sort of thing wasn’t really my dad either, but his was a generation that manned up and did the necessary thing whether they felt like it or not. And the empathy my dad showed me, not just that once but many times, remains planted in my soul today.

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### **The Takeaway**

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A father’s empathy and understanding provides emotional support and strength for his children. A little bit of understanding goes a long way with your child.