

A Dad After God's Own Heart

JIM GEORGE



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From a Dad's Heart

Dear Dad,

At last! After having written books on being a *man* after God's own heart and a *husband* after God's own heart, I have finally written one about being a *dad* after God's own heart. And I want to alert you right away that I didn't write it because I'm an expert on parenting or because I was always successful as a father. In fact, *trying* to be a good dad is where my journey toward becoming a good dad began.

One day at age 30, I woke up, looked at my two little daughters just a year apart in age, and realized I didn't have a clue about what it meant to be God's kind of dad. Fortunately, about that time, I had started reading my Bible and was beginning to get some idea of what was required of a father.

Next I found several men in my church who agreed to help me understand and fulfill my role as a dad. After several decades of growing spiritually, I wrote the two books I mentioned a moment ago—one for men, and one for husbands. I even wrote books for teen and tween guys¹ about their priorities. But I remained hesitant to write a book on being a dad. You see, the jury was still out on my parenting. Were my efforts fruitful? Were my grown-up girls walking with the Lord and raising their own children to love God too?

Finally, after seeing my own children spiritually strong, walking with the Lord, and pointing their eight little ones toward God, I felt it was now okay to write about being a dad after God's own heart.

Friend and fellow dad, it's been 35 years since my wake-up call about my God-given responsibilities for my two little girls. That's 35 years of learning how I could give my best to applying God's

principles for parents, 35 years of fervent prayer, and 35 years of discovering what being a dad after God's own heart requires.

Being a Dad After God's Own Heart...

...requires time. How much time does it take for an acorn to become a tall, sturdy oak tree? Years—in fact, decades! Parenting takes daily time for a lifetime. Daily teaching and training must be continuous and purposeful as you invest your life into raising children after God's own heart.

...requires personal commitment. The most effective modeling comes with a close relationship between parent and child. There is little impact without contact. Discipleship requires personal involvement. The closer your relationship with your child is, the more effective the training—and the greater the impact.

...requires perseverance. There are no quick fixes when it comes to being God's kind of dad. Rather than being a series of short-term solutions to child-raising, a dad's role is a multifaceted relationship that lasts a lifetime.

...requires focus. Effective parenting is not a casual undertaking. It takes being a faithful dad, submitting yourself to God's instructions, and actively seeking to bring up your children according to biblical principles.

...requires planning. Success doesn't just happen. You either plan to be a good dad and go for it, or you end up with whatever happens. If you don't plan a path for your children to walk, others will be glad to take control of their minds and futures.

...requires a team effort. Parenting is a team sport. If you're married, your wife, the mother of your children, is the first and best resource you have to assist you in your desire to be a solid, proactive dad. Beyond your wife, you have your church, the youth leaders in your church, and maybe some godly grandparents. Allow them to

assist you, but realize that *you* are the one who is ultimately responsible to God for your children.

...reaps the greatest of blessings. “Children are a heritage from the LORD...happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Psalm 127:3,5). A father experiences “no greater joy than to hear that [his] children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

This book is not the final answer to all your parenting problems or difficulties. It's actually more of a guide for *you* as you grow into a spiritually mature man and equip yourself to model spiritual truths for your children. To help you with these goals, at the end of this book you'll find a daily Bible reading schedule and a brief guide titled “How to Study the Bible.” I've also included study questions to help you dig a little deeper into your role of father. You can do this in your quiet time or with a few other dads or in your men's study group.

You can do it, Dad. You can be a dad after God's own heart. How can I say that? Because “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). God will be with you all the way, giving you wisdom that is from above, strength that enables you to do all things (including be a great dad), and a love for your children that knows no bounds. I'm praying for you!

Yours for the Master,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim George". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name "Yours for the Master,".

A Dad Who Has a Divine Model

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:3

Greg had assumed a posture that wasn't all that familiar—he was on his knees. He had just come from the hospital, where he had just experienced the birth of his first child, a baby girl he and his wife had named Mary Lou. The reason for including *Mary* in her name was because his wife, Margaret, had once had a little sister by that name. Tragically, this sister had died of cancer at a young age.

Now, after the birth and initial celebration, Greg had staggered home feeling quite tired. He had gotten very little sleep, and he was hoping to get some rest before going back to the hospital. The way he was feeling, you would have thought he had been the one in labor all those hours. Maybe it was the lack of sleep, or the impact of seeing that new little life, but whatever it was, Greg was overwhelmed by the prospect of being a new dad. Only now, after the months of anticipation, was Greg feeling the gravity of his new role and responsibility. He was a dad!

So, as he knelt with his arms leaning on a kitchen chair, Greg prayed, “God, I don't have a clue of what it means to be a father, a dad, or a parent to little Mary Lou. I need help. Please guide me each step of the way as I assume my new role.” Then Greg went on to pray his way through little Mary Lou's life from infancy all the way through marriage!

As Greg got up off his knees, he felt like a reassuring celestial

hand was resting on his shoulder. He believed his prayer had been heard and that God would be faithful to give him the wisdom he needed to be a good dad.

Greg felt that he had just entered into a partnership with God. If he was faithful to do his part, Greg knew God was there to lead him through the process of becoming a dad after God's own heart.

As a brand new dad, Greg was concerned about being a father. He was operating in a vacuum. He had no good role models. His dad had been killed in a car accident when he was seven, and his mother had continually made wrong choices with the men she had married since then. Greg could think of very few, if any, actions or attitudes exhibited by any of these men that could be of help in raising little Mary Lou. He shuddered to think where he would have been if Jesus hadn't entered his life and transformed him into a child of God.



Why is it that for many of us, it takes a major event to provide a wake-up call for spiritual growth? For Greg it was the responsibility of a first child. For others, it may be the death of someone close, or a divorce or a disabling condition. Greg got his wake-up call, and thankfully, he has begun to start thinking in the right direction. But how? How—and where—is he going to find a model of what a father should look and act like?

The Impact of a Role Model

The effects of nearly 20 years of growing up under a parent (for our purposes, a dad) will leave a lasting impression on a child. The imprint of that modeling isn't always visible, but the results of a father's influence will show up in the child at some point in the future. If Dad had an anger problem, guess what? His children will have trouble containing their anger. If Dad physically abused his children, guess what? The next generation of moms and dads will most likely treat their own children the same way. Or, as an overreaction, they may go to the other extreme and completely withhold discipline of any kind whatsoever.

Even in the Bible we don't find a lot of good human role models for dads. So let me make my point with a classic negative role model in a dad named Eli.

In Eli we see a case of "like father, like sons." Eli was a priest of Israel during the last days of the Judges (1 Samuel 2). As a priest, he was allowed to take a portion of certain offerings from the people for his services to them. Unfortunately, he abused this privilege and took more than his portion. Here is God's indictment of Eli:

Why do you scorn my sacrifices and offerings? Why do you give your sons more honor than you give me—for you and they have become fat from the best offerings of my people Israel! (1 Samuel 2:29 NLT).

Did you notice the connection between father and sons? God spelled it out: "You and they have become fat from the best offerings of my people Israel." Eli was guilty of taking more of the sacrifice than he was allotted, which had made him fat. He was guilty of despising the offerings the people were giving to the Lord. And guess what? Eli's boys were following in their dad's footsteps (see 2:12-17).

Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD. And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. Then he would thrust it into the [cooking vessel]...and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there (verses 12-14).

For a priest to take part of the offering was permitted. But the sons of Eli went beyond what was prescribed by the Law of Moses and demanded meat from the people before they cooked it. If the people balked, Eli's sons would say, "No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force" (verse 16). God did not take this offense lightly: "The sin of the young men was very great before the

LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD” (verse 17). Tragically, Eli was a participant in this, for as God said, “You give your sons more honor than you give me” (1 Samuel 2:29 NLT).

What a chilling thought to realize that your children are observing your life, logging your activities, and repeating your actions, whether good or bad. I know from personal experience that what I observed from my own father’s behavior served as both a positive and negative influence on my role as a husband and father. Modeling is truly a powerful force!

God, Our Father

Are you beginning to understand the importance of presenting the right kind of model for your children? And are you wondering where can you find this right kind of model? The Bible is an obvious first place to look. Hopefully, your spiritual understanding is much further along than Greg’s. Unlike Greg, you may be aware of what the Bible says about the model you have in your loving, caring, giving, and guiding Father in heaven. The Bible presents many verses about what a strong, consistent model you have in God the Father. And you are doubly blessed if you have an earthly father who has also provided a constant model of godly fatherhood.

But for those of us who don’t have this kind of legacy to fall back on, we, like Greg, are forced to look around for others who can model what a father should be for his children. So where do we start?

Of course, the first place is your Bible. There, you find that God is the ultimate model of what it means to be a father.

God is the ultimate model of what it means to be a father.

God is often spoken of as “the Father” in the Bible. He is called “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:14). Probably the most famous reference to God as Father came in the most famous of prayers uttered by Jesus

Himself. Jesus began this prayer by saying, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9).

God the Father is a person; therefore, He has character qualities that theologians refer to as *attributes*. These attributes are what identify and distinguish who God is as a person.

Some of God's characteristics belong only to Him, such as His infinity, eternity, immutability, omnipresence, omniscience, and sovereignty. These qualities cannot be passed on to His creation. But other characteristics, like love, truth, holiness, patience, and kindness, can—at least in a limited sense—be found in man, who was created in God's image. These are called the “communicable” qualities of God because they can be expressed by man. And hopefully that includes you and me as dads.

The Father of Those Who Believe

Having God as your heavenly Father and emulating His attributes to your children presupposes that you are His child. As the saying goes, “You can't impart what you do not possess.”

To be personally related to God as your Father can only come through putting your faith and trust in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This has to be the starting point in your quest to be a dad after God's own heart.

If you are not a child of the Father, it's going to be difficult for you to live out His character before your children. Oh, you can still be a decent dad without God's help, but without God's character abiding in you, being a dad after God's own heart just isn't possible.

So if you truly desire to be God's kind of a dad, then now is the time to make sure you have access to God's power through a relationship with Him. To do that you need to think about your sin, because sin is what separates you from a holy God. *Sin* is anything that you do that misses God's perfect standard of holy behavior. Have you ever told just one lie, even “a little white lie”? According to Scripture, whoever attempts to keep all of God's law “yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10). And we are told in Romans 3 that “there is none righteous; no, not one... there is none who does good; no, not one” (verses 10,12). This means all of us. Everyone has sinned and fallen short of what God calls for.

But there is hope! The Bible gives clear instructions on how to deal with your sin. So if you are a new dad like Greg or a seasoned veteran who truly wants God's help in raising your children, then read these verses from the Bible. They form what is called “the Roman Road” toward a relationship with God the Father because

all these verses come out of the book of Romans. Follow what the apostle Paul says as he leads you down the Romans Road toward salvation through the Father's Son, Jesus Christ:

Romans 3:23—"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

We were "all" born with sin. You might not want to admit it, but you have sin in your heart. You are under the power of sin's control. Oh, maybe you do a few good things in your life, but unless you are perfect, you are still a sinner. Step 1 for you is to admit that you are a sinner.

Romans 6:23a—"The wages of sin is death."

Sin is a dead-end street. It ends in spiritual "death." We all face physical death. But spiritual death is worse because it separates you from God for all eternity. The Bible teaches that there is a place called the lake of fire, where lost people will be in torment forever. It is the place where people who are spiritually dead will go. Step 2 for you is to understand that you deserve not only physical death, but also spiritual death for your sin.

Romans 6:23b—"But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Notice the little word "but" in the line above. There is an answer to your sin problem. Salvation is a free "gift" from God to you! You can't earn this gift; rather, you must reach out and receive it. Step 3 for you is to ask God to forgive you and save you.

Romans 5:8—"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid sin's penalty. He paid the price for all sin, and when He took all the sins of the world on Himself on the cross, He bought—He purchased—you out of slavery to sin and death. The

only requirement is to believe in Jesus and what He has done for you. Jesus did all this because He loved you. Step 4 for you is to give your life to God the Father through Jesus Christ, His Son.

Romans 10:9-10—“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved.”

If you’ve already done all of the above, thank God and live for Him! If you have put your faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior, you are a child of God, and God is your Father. And, as a bonus, you can be an outstanding model of a believer in Christ. Strive to live a life of obedience to His commands, and you will be a dad after God’s own heart.

You Can Do It, Dad!

If you are a dad, you are part of an exciting exclusive club. However you came to be your children’s dad and whatever the circumstances, you are their dad. Being a father is one of the greatest privileges God extends to you.

But this role also bears the greatest of responsibilities. Your children are yours to influence for good or evil. Your example will mark them for life. Maybe you need to do like our friend Greg did—get down on your knees and ask God to give you His wisdom to do whatever is necessary to be a dad after God’s own heart. And even better is to do this every day.

Small Steps That Make a Big Difference

1. *Love your wife.* The most important step you can take as a dad is to love your wife. This may not be your easiest step. But it will be the one that goes the farthest in modeling God the Father’s love for His children.

2. *Affirm in your heart that you are in the faith—that you are in Christ.* If you are, you have access to all the help you will ever need to be God’s kind of dad.

3. *Make sure you are growing spiritually.* God wants you to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Because spiritual growth is a command, that means you have a choice. If you want to be a dad after God’s own heart, you will want to choose to grow spiritually. So carve out some time each day to spend with your heavenly Father.

4. *Don’t make excuses for not reading your Bible.* Getting into God’s Word is an obvious step for all things spiritual—including being a dad. I’ve heard a lot of men say, “I have to be at work really early.” Or “I don’t understand the Bible.” Or “I don’t know where to start.” Yet if something is truly important to you, you’ll find a way to fit it into your busy schedule, and you’ll take time to learn how to do it. Not only does a Christian man, husband, and father *need* to spend time with God daily, but he should *want* to.



*To the child, the father is God’s representative;
this makes the father’s task sacred and serious.*

*We fathers are to deal with our children
as God deals with us.²*

JOHN DRESCHER

A Dad Who Walks in the Spirit

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit,
and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

GALATIANS 5:16

Previously we left Greg mulling over the prospects of finding a model to pattern his life after. Because of his budding-but-baby level of spiritual maturity, Greg didn't realize what resources he already possessed as a Christian—resources that could make him a great dad. But as he pulled into the hospital parking lot with a carload of balloons for the baby and chocolates for his wife, he was ready to do whatever was necessary to become a dad after God's own heart. Greg couldn't wait to tell his wife about his spiritual breakthrough. And when he did, she was thrilled about this newfound spark of spiritual interest. As the two of them talked, Margaret suggested that maybe one of the older men at church—like Bill Wilson—might be able to give Greg some direction.

As he thought about it, Greg liked this idea a lot. Yes, their church was definitely a place to start looking for help with learning about being a dad after God's own heart. Greg was a little sad when he realized he should have had this wake-up call long ago, but he was excited that he was now on the right track. Thank goodness his little Mary Lou was only one day old!

Greg planned to call Bill Wilson immediately to see if he could start meeting with him. He could hardly wait to begin the process of a “manly spiritual makeover.”

The Father's Gift of the Son

If you attend a church, chances are you'll find men there who can serve as excellent role models for learning how to be a godly dad. It probably won't take you long to pick these men out of the crowd. They wear their role well. New dads and dads who need help and advice can go to these men and learn from their insights, experiences, and yes, even their mistakes. But while you are looking for these real-life models, don't forget that your ultimate example of fatherhood is God the Father. He is and always will be your supreme role model.

Just as your children possess part of your essence—your DNA—you as a new creation in Christ possess God's presence in you. As a believer, God's Holy Spirit dwells in you (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:14). The Holy Spirit's job is to teach and guide us (John 14:26). It is the Holy Spirit who gives you the ability to be a godly model for your children. He gives you all the spiritual resources you need to be God's kind of dad. This internal power will exhibit itself in what is called "the fruit of the Spirit." This fruit is described as godly character qualities in Galatians 5:22-23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

The Fruit of the Spirit

Throughout the Bible, "fruit" refers to the external evidence of what is within. Any person who has received Jesus as Savior has the Lord living within, and that indwelling of God's Holy Spirit will evidence itself as good "fruit"—the "fruits of righteousness" (Philippians 1:11). Here are a few facts about the fruit of the Spirit:

- This godly behavior is expressed as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- Every fruit of the Spirit is commanded in Scripture. "Walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16).
- Every fruit, therefore, because it is commanded, requires a decision, a choice. Will you or won't you "walk in the Spirit"? If you choose to do so, "you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (5:16).

— Every fruit of the Spirit is illustrated in the life of Christ. Walking by the Spirit means being controlled by the Spirit, acting like Jesus. Jesus walked moment by moment in and by the Spirit; therefore, His life habitually and totally exhibited godly behavior. He loved perfectly, He lived in constant joy, and so on.

This godly behavior, or fruit of the Spirit, is what your children can expect from you and will see in you when you are walking with Jesus and following the Spirit's leading. It's like this: Your children can't see Jesus, but they can see you. From you, they can learn what Jesus is like. Are you acting like Christ?

Here's what your life will look like when you are walking in the Spirit:

You will exhibit love—Love is self-sacrifice. This simple definition crystalizes what the Bible teaches about love. "Love is not an emotion. It is an act of sacrificing self. It is not necessarily feeling love toward a particular person. It may not have any emotion connected with it."¹ Here's how the Bible describes love: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). From this verse we see no emotion, but we definitely see that God's love involved sacrifice.

This is a book about you as a dad, and your role in the lives of your children. If you want to be a successful father, then the first person who should receive the overflow of your love for God is your wife. If she knows that she is your first love after God, then you and your wife will model God's kind of marital love to your children.

God's kind of love is not the love portrayed by the world. The world's kind of love is usually defined in terms of emotions, and is frequently fickle depending on our feelings. It is conditional and says, "If you love me, then I'll love you." It's also transitory, for it says, "I don't love you anymore," or "I've fallen out of love with you."

By contrast, God's kind of love is unconditional. It says, "I love you regardless." It's a love that is steadfast no matter what.

When a dad is walking by the Spirit, his love is enduring, impartial, and willing to sacrifice for the good of his children. His love isn't just an emotion; he will show his love through his actions:

What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:9-11).

Dad, yours is to be a love that willingly sacrifices yourself for your children. This love may even require at some point the ultimate sacrifice of your life for them. But for now, God is asking you to be a daily living sacrifice for your children. For example, love will sacrifice a round of golf with the guys or watching The Big Game on TV to attend a son's ball game or a daughter's recital. When you put your children first, you will make a tremendous impression on them.

You will exhibit joy—When life is good, things are going well on the job, and the problems are few at home, praise and thanksgiving flow freely from your heart and lips. When the sun is shining brightly in your life, you are *happy*. But when life turns black and stormy, praise and thanksgiving don't flow quite so easily. This is where people get confused about the distinction between *spiritual joy* and the human emotion of *happiness*.

When you put your children first, you will make a tremendous impression on them.

Happiness is an emotion you have when you are experiencing good fortune and success. *Spiritual joy*, however, is what you experience when you choose to follow God's advice and "in everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18) no matter what happens—even when things go wrong. A more accurate definition of *joy* is "the sacrifice of praise."

Like love, joy is a sacrifice. Even in the times when you don't feel like praising God or thanking Him, when you commit to doing what God says in spite of your circumstances, you will experience joy. That's why it's called a *sacrifice*. During the times when you would rather stay stuck in your anger or discouragement, inner joy enables you to choose to look beyond your pain and make your praise a sacrifice to God.

Dad, ultimately the difference is this: Worldly happiness is based on your circumstances. And it's easy to let circumstances affect you to the point that when you walk through the front door of your home, your poor family doesn't know what to expect. Depending on how your day went, sometimes you walk through the door happy...and other times you walk through the door in a lousy mood. Commit yourself to sacrificing your attitudes and disappointments and walking through that door filled with the Spirit's joy. God's joy is in no way affected by what happens at the office. Your family will always look forward to your homecoming when you arrive with Christ's attitude of joy.

You will have peace—Peace is defined as “the sacrifice of trust.” You and I make the sacrifice of trust when we face pain and stress in our lives and choose to trust God instead of stressing out. When circumstances in your life tempt you to worry or be filled with dread, you can choose to either give in to these responses, or place your trust in God. You can ask the Lord to fill you with His peace, or you can let anxiety fill your heart.

Do you know what happens when you choose to make the sacrifice of trust even in the midst of tremendous chaos? The apostle Paul describes the results:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

Dad, I know you recognize that your job as a father to your children is incredibly important—yet also incredibly difficult. God is asking you to be a rock of strength and calmness regardless of what's happening to you and your family. When things get rough, many dads bolt and run away or delegate many of their duties to their wives. But when you do that, you fail to be the role model God has called you to be. The right response, then, is to trust God to give you His wisdom and resources in your time of need. Then when the crises arrive, your trust in the grace of God will give you the peace of God.

You will exhibit patience—Another of the characteristics of walking in the Spirit is patience. God's Word instructs you to "clothe yourselves with...patience" (Colossians 3:12 NIV). Patience is choosing to wait and do nothing. It has the ability to wait and wait for a long time!

Patience is a key to harmony in parenting relationships. It is a practical first step to getting along with the people under your own roof. Patience is a tall order—for example, you have to choose to wait before overreacting to the behavior of your children. That doesn't mean you won't eventually do something about their behavior. It just means your first response is to wait and make sure you make the right choice about how to respond. To show patience is to exhibit Christlike conduct.

You will exhibit kindness—While your patience waits and does nothing sinful (like get unreasonably mad, yell in anger, or kick the dog), kindness now plans for godly action. Like all the other fruit of the Spirit, kindness desires godly action and looks for opportunities to do something constructive. From a human standpoint this may not sound too manly, but Spirit-filled kindness is concerned about people. It's a matter of the heart.

Every time you show care for the well-being of your children, you demonstrate kindness. As a parent, you have a responsibility to train and discipline and correct your children's behavior. And a dad after God's own heart will make sure he disciplines out of kindness. To do that is an indicator you are filled with the Spirit. Spewing out threats, yelling, making rash statements, putting your children down or belittling them, and inflicting physical punishment that harms your children are all deeds of the flesh. These responses are a sure indicator that you are sinning. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, your actions will reflect Christlikeness. Your kind, calm actions and wisdom marked by genuine, loving concern will show that you are a dad after God's own heart.

You will exhibit goodness—Goodness does everything it can to help others. It follows through on the concerns of kindness. Goodness takes the giant step from good intentions to actually doing

everything it can to serve others. John Wesley, a famous preacher from the past, understood this principle of doing everything. In fact, he is said to have chosen to make it a rule for his life, and determine that he would make every effort to put the following words into practice.

Do all the good you can,
by all the means you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
in all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
as long as ever you can.²

As a father, you have a legacy to leave behind. Can you imagine your children's every thought of you being the memory that you always had their best in your mind and did them good all the days of your life?

You will exhibit faithfulness—*Faithfulness* means choosing to do what you should do no matter what. Every day brings opportunities to do something you don't necessarily want to do. But faithfulness will do it regardless of feelings, moods, or desires. Doing what? Whatever it takes to be God's kind of dad. "Do it!" must become your battle cry as you struggle daily with your areas of weakness. For many men, tiredness heads the list. For others, it's laziness. But when you make a decision to do what you should, and you look to God for His strength and purpose in doing it, He will give you everything you need to have victory over tiredness, laziness, or any other challenge that comes your way.

Do you realize that faithfulness is a great rarity in our world? When you choose to be faithful, you exhibit the power of the Holy Spirit to a watching world—and especially your watching kids. Being faithful means choosing to get up each day and put on your "fathering" clothes regardless of how you feel. It means choosing to be a dad after God's own heart, with all its responsibilities, for one more day.

You will exhibit gentleness—Gentleness, or meekness, requires that you trust God. Therefore, gentleness chooses to "take it." Gentleness

doesn't mean weakness, but actually has the idea of "strength under control." A man who is characterized by gentleness is willing to endure unkind behavior and suffering. He places His full trust in God's wisdom, power, and love. In the eyes of the world, gentleness may look like weakness, but it actually shows the greatest kind of strength!

When you act in gentleness, you exhibit Christlike character. Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are the gentle [humble, meek], for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5 NASB). Then He proceeded to live out this meek and gentle spirit. In fact, He described Himself as "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Remember the first time you held your firstborn child? You were oh-so-careful with that new little person. That same attitude and care is still needed for each of your children no matter what their age. They still need the gentle touch of a loving dad.

You will exhibit self-control—In times of temptation, a man who walks by the Spirit chooses to "don't do it!" In other words, you don't give in to wrong emotions, to cravings, to urges. You choose not to think or do what you know is against God's Word. You choose not to excuse or baby yourself. You refuse to take the easy way out. You don't rationalize your wrong cravings in an attempt to make them legitimate. Rather, you resolve to say, "No!"—no to wrong thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, including those in the sexual realm.

Don't start your day until you are committed to being controlled by the Spirit.

Your determination to avoid thoughts or actions that dishonor Christ, shame your wife, and alienate your children should be ever constant. Satan would like nothing better than to destroy your family through your lapses in good moral judgment. Don't start your day until you are committed to being controlled by the Spirit. Your family needs your godly example, your self-control. "Don't do it."

The Art of Walking

Now that you've got a basic understanding of the fruit of the Spirit, what does it mean to "walk in the Spirit"? In simple terms, walking in the Spirit means living each moment in submission to

God. It means seeking to please God with the thoughts you choose to think, the words you choose to say, and the actions you choose to take. Walking in the Spirit means wanting to do the right thing and letting God guide you each step of the way.

Unfortunately, as you and I both realize, walking in the Spirit isn't easy. I'm sure you've noticed that as a believer in Christ, you still struggle with sin. Even the apostle Paul—who did mighty things in his many years of service for God—struggled. He confessed, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not” (Romans 7:18 NASB). So what's the solution? In three words: *abide in Christ*.

To abide in Christ means to remain or stay near to Him. A Christian will abide in Christ—He will stay near to Jesus and will bear spiritual fruit for Jesus. Here is how Jesus Himself put it: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Abiding requires some choices:

Choosing to spend time in God's Word is one step—actually Step 1—you can take every day to abide in Christ. “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). No other literature in the world has the power and force that's available to you in your Bible.

Choosing to spend time in prayer is another act that makes it possible for you to commune with Christ and abide in Him. You cannot keep your distance from Jesus if you are talking to Him! Prayer is a vital link between you and God. Just as a umbilical cord is a fetus's lifeline to its mother, prayer is your lifeline for maintaining an active relationship with Jesus. To abide in Christ and be a dad after God's own heart—a dad who walks with God—do all you can to strengthen your prayer life.

Choosing to obey God's commands also enhances your quest to abide in Christ. Obedience was an essential part of Jesus' own constant communion with the Father, and He says it's essential for you too: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just

as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

Choosing to deal with sin means choosing obedience. Abiding in Christ requires keeping short records with God. When you sin, make sure you confess it right away, being assured that God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Once you have dealt with your sin, you will once again be walking in the Spirit.

You Can Do It, Dad!

I wish I was with you right now to give you a hearty pat on the back. I know you are busy—what dad isn't? The very fact that you are taking time out of your schedule to read a book about being a better father says a lot about you and your heart.

God wants you to grow spiritually in Him—to grow as a husband, and to grow as a dad. We've discussed making choices, and we've talked about how important it is for you as a father to walk by the Spirit—to be a Spirit-filled man of God.

I thank God that you are on His path and moving forward. You can do it, Dad, so don't get discouraged. All growth takes place one day at a time. Just be a man and a dad after God's own heart today... and then wake up tomorrow and every tomorrow and do it again... and again.

Here's how to walk by the Spirit:

One foot in front of the other
 One thought at a time
 One sentence at a time
 One response at a time
 One decision at a time
 One minute at a time
 One day at a time
 And when you fail, stop (it),
 admit it, confess it, apologize for it, and go on.
 Leave it behind. Learn from it, but leave it.³

Small Steps That Make a Big Difference

1. *Seek a mentor.* A mentor can help you with your walk with God, your spiritual growth, and your role as a parent. Having a mentor is like having a personal trainer or coach who can assist you with your spiritual training. Pray and ask God to help you find someone who exhibits the spiritual maturity you desire for your own life. I know from experience what a great help a mentor can be. It's like the proverb says, "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17 NASB).

2. *Join a men's group.* A men's Bible study or accountability group may be the place where you find a mentor as you observe the different men in the group. If the men are studying from a book, make sure you buy and commit to reading it and participating in the discussions. The more you are involved with other men who are pursuing spiritual growth, the more you will grow.

3. *Memorize Scripture.* Pick some important or favorite verses from the Bible and memorize them. And don't forget to have your children memorize them along with you. You'll be building some great memories while you learn God's Word together. The psalmist wrote, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). Wherever you are and whatever is happening, you'll have God's Word right there in your mind and heart whenever trials or temptation come your way.

4. *Pray—and pray some more.* When you pray, you're acknowledging God as an active participant in your life. Taking time each day, as well as moment by moment throughout your day, will strengthen your spiritual life. This, in turn, will strengthen your marriage and the kind of influence you have on your children.



*One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.*⁴

—GEORGE HERBERT