

DAD ACADEMY

RAISING
COURAGEOUS
CAPABLE
CONFIDENT
KIDS

JEFF HAMILTON

© 2025

Dad Academy: Raising Courageous, Capable, Confident Kids

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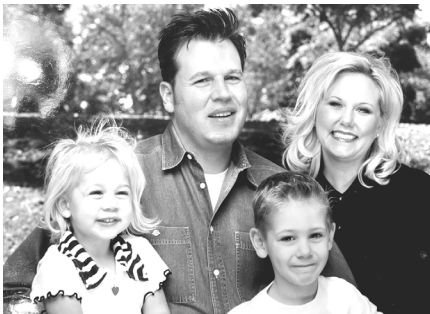
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Dedicated to...

POP

for showing me what a dad is and
along with Mom, guiding me discover who God has made me to be



JAYME

for marrying me and giving my life meaning

BEAR (JUSTIN) & SIS (JORDANNE)

for making me a dad giving my life a greater purpose

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Mea

I became a father at 24, living in a low-income apartment and relying on public assistance. Fatherhood doesn't come with a manual, and I quickly realized how unprepared I felt. My wife and I were just barely making ends meet, covering our bills month to month. On top of that, I was still processing my own childhood trauma. **I had to figure out how to break the cycle and ensure that my past didn't negatively impact how I raised my own children.**

One of the biggest lessons I learned through Dad Academy is that I don't need to have all the answers—I just need to be purposeful about my parenting.

I grew up in a big family. If we went somewhere, we went as a family. It felt like we were always on the move—either in a basketball gym or on a baseball field. Unfortunately, that sense of togetherness ended when I was in seventh grade. My dad was an alcoholic, and his struggles led to verbal and physical abuse toward my mom. When she entered a new relationship, my father spiraled even further into addiction, and our family fractured. I ended up living with friends and family members who, thankfully, became strong male role models in my life. Some of these men I still call “Dad” today. They taught me core values like loyalty, hard work, and discipline—lessons that have shaped the man and father I am today.

One of the biggest lessons I learned through Dad Academy is that I don't need to have all the answers—I just need to be purposeful about my parenting. I've always planned for work, for coaching, for just about everything else in life. But I never thought about planning as a dad. **Sitting down with my spouse and creating a parenting plan changed everything for us.** It gave us clarity, direction, and a shared vision for how we wanted to raise our kids. As the father of two boys and a girl, I'm focused on what I can do to support the dreams of my children, how I can challenge them, push them, motivate them, and love them through it all.

Dad Academy reinforces how important it is to be intentional in all aspects of fatherhood. One of my favorite traditions that has come out of this journey is our morning prayer time. Every day on the way to school, we pray together as a family. We take turns, but we never force anyone to pray. Sometimes, my children will volunteer, even my five-year-old, and I love hearing his little prayers. In fact, on the busiest mornings, it's often him who reminds us to pray. That is legacy.

Dad Academy hasn't just strengthened my relationship with my children; it has also given me a new perspective. Perhaps the most unexpected blessing is that it has helped me restore my once-broken relationship with my own father. I can now proudly say that, at the time of this writing, he is 10 years sober. And for that, I am incredibly grateful.



INTRODUCTION

WHY DAD ACADEMY

On March 1, 1996, I entered a new season of life as I held my newborn baby boy. My wife Jayme and I had taken some parenting classes to help prepare us for the first few months with a newborn. **But as I felt the weight of holding my son in my arms, my soul felt another weight - that of immense responsibility.** I remember feeling overwhelming love and joy, followed by a serious concern about my ability to be a dad. Those same feelings appeared again on May 5, 1998 when my daughter was placed in my arms.

In the fall of 1999, my wife and I relocated across the country for work. I needed to find a way to supplement my income until the startup I was founding got off the ground. I also wanted to find a way to build relationships in our new community. So, I found a flexible job with a well-known coffee

shop chain. But my first day on the job wasn't at the store. Instead, it was in a classroom where I spent the next week learning about coffee and the culture of the company.

Let me connect some dots in the story...I was required to undergo forty hours of training before I was qualified to push the "brew" button on the automated coffee maker in the store, but the doctor just handed me my babies and wished me good luck? There had to be a better way.

I had an advantage over most men. My wife and I were both raised with loving dads who were great examples of what a father should be. And while neither of them would say they were perfect, **their consistent presence in our lives gave us confidence in our identity and abilities.**

The first decade of my career was spent working with adolescents and their families. I saw the struggles that many families experienced first-hand as they navigated the challenges of the pre-teen and teenage years. **I witnessed the impact that unhealthy marriages have on children and the effect of dads not being present in the home.** I also saw families that were winning at home. Much of that had to do with a father's presence and engagement in the lives of his children.

I had a mental catalogue of things to do and not to do as a dad through the various seasons of life that my kids experienced. While I did my best, I was far from perfect. What I did try to be as a father was to be an intentional one. And I watched my children grow into independent, confident young adults. After they graduated from high school, I thought that there were some things to offer to men who may not have had the advantages I did, or who wanted to be more purposeful in their parenting.

A man once said, *"Being a father is the most important thing I will ever do and if I don't do this well, no other thing I do really matters."* It's proven that in the lives of children and in communities that #dadmatters. You, Dad, matter. So let's get to work in changing our families....for good.



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Nick

I can still remember the moment I realized my definition of family was shaped more by separation than

togetherness. Both of my parents came from divorced homes, and their own marriage followed the same heartbreaking pattern. For what felt like at least a year, my parents were split, and I lived with my mom, siblings, and grandparents—my mom’s mom and stepdad. Stability felt fragile, as if the smallest disruption could send everything crumbling. When outside influences upset my parents, our world would shrink. Isolation became normal. I learned early on that love sometimes felt conditional and that conflict often led to withdrawal rather than resolution.

As a father, I strive not to repeat my parents’ mistakes, yet I often find myself slipping into familiar patterns. When life feels overwhelming, my instinct is to withdraw, much like my parents did. I’ve caught myself trying to control my family’s environment rather than nurturing them through challenges. Fear of failure sometimes drives me to overcorrect, creating distance rather than connection. I want to provide my children with security and peace, but I’ve realized that my desire for control can sometimes create an emotional gap between us. The hardest part has been recognizing that love

One of the most powerful lessons I’ve learned is that my presence as a father matters more than I ever realized.

isn't just about protection—it's about presence, even in the messiness of life.

Through Dad Academy, I've learned that fatherhood isn't about perfection—it's about partnership. I must truly partner with my wife, working together rather than in isolation. More importantly, I've realized that I can't lead my family well if I'm relying solely on my own strength. I must be led by the Holy Spirit, allowing God to guide me as I seek to create a home filled with wholeness and peace. Rather than withdrawing when challenges arise, I'm learning to lean in, to communicate openly, and to love unconditionally.

One of the most powerful lessons I've learned is that my **presence** as a father matters more than I ever realized. It's in the small moments—the bedtime stories, the prayers before school, the shared laughter at the dinner table—that true connection is built. My kids don't need me to have all the answers; they just need me to be there, fully engaged, showing up day after day.

My goal is no longer just to avoid repeating the past but to build something new—a family built on faith, love, and unwavering commitment. I want my children to grow up knowing that home is a place of refuge, where they are seen, heard, and deeply loved. **And for me, that starts with being the father God has called me to be—imperfect but present,** learning as I go, and trusting that with His guidance, I can lead my family well.

CHAPTER

0

1



Leaving a Legacy

**Starting with The
End in Mind**

“

Every father should
remember that one day
his children will follow
his example instead of
his advice.

CHARLES F. KETTERING



LEAVING A LEGACY

Starting with The End in Mind

There are two roles most men will play for the majority of our lives - husbands and dads. Yet, being a dad is the only job we have that comes with absolutely zero training. Everything we learn is on the job. Men are most successful when the terms are defined, the expectations are clarified, and the goal is in sight. The Dad Academy process is designed to help you find success as a father, or grandfather, and to help you be a better man to everyone in your circle of influence.

DAD IS DESTINY

There's a saying that "dad is destiny," and without diminishing the significant role of mothers, research proves this out. *Research from the University of Pennsylvania indicates that children who feel closeness and warmth with their father are twice as likely to enter college, 75% less likely to have a child in their teen years, 80% less likely to be incarcerated, and half as likely to show signs of depression.*¹ Other studies find an active nurturing and style of fathering is associated with better verbal skills in children, intellectual functioning, and

¹ Booth, A., Scott, M. E., & King, V. (2010). "Father Residence and Adolescent Problem Behavior: Are Youth Always Better Off in Two-Parent Families?" *Journal of family issues*, 31(5), 585-605.

academic achievement among adolescents. *In an analysis of over 100 studies on parent child relationships, researchers found that having a loving and nurturing father was as important for a child's happiness, well-being, social, and academic success as having a loving and nurturing mother.*² Some studies even show that a father's love was a stronger contributor to important positive child well-being outcomes. If these findings are true, and the research proves they are, then men need to learn how to be the best dad they can be. Unfortunately, there's not a lot of practical training on how to be a dad.

When my children were in pre-school, I was hired for a part-time job at Starbucks. At that time the onboarding training process took thirty hours to be qualified to pour coffee for somebody (see the Preface). What if fathers were required to invest that kind of time, not only in an orientation class, but also had a tool to help them strategize going forward as their children grew that gave dads confidence that they were informed and equipped to be the best that they could be? That would be an investment that will benefit men and their families for the rest of their lives.

PROMISES OF DAD ACADEMY

I want to make four promises to you about Dad Academy.

1. When you've finished this book, you'll understand your mission as a dad.
2. You'll know how to prepare your kids for adulthood.

² Ronald P. Rohner and A. Veneziano, "The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence," *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 382-405.

3. You'll be able to define your family culture and create memories that will last a lifetime.
4. If you complete the guidebook section at the end of each chapter you will develop your own personal dad plan and a year's worth of intentional memory making moments.

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL FOR YOUR FAMILY?

So the "how" begins with having what our end goal is in sight. What are we shooting for? The question I want to ask you today is: what do you want for your kids? What are your hopes and dreams for your family and your children? Other generations before us simply expressed that they wanted their children to do better than they did. With that in mind, **what does "do better" mean for you?**

Your Turn

I do know that every dad simply wants their kids to be happy and to be successful, and in order for those things to happen, someone is going to have to show them how to get there, and that's you, Dad.

In fact, that's the whole job of being a dad. Fatherhood is about the leadership you provide to your family. It's not just about management. It's more than just doing the things right. It's learning how to do the right things. When it comes to our kids and our families, the right things are not just about setting goals or accomplishing things. It's really understanding and determining what's important: identifying the life skills you'll pass on to your children and the values that you're going to live by.

DEFINING YOUR MISSION AS A DAD

The Bible offers helpful direction for fathers. In the ancient wisdom book called Proverbs, the writer says, *"Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he'll not depart from it."* Another version says it this way, *"Teach children in a way that fits their needs, and even when they're old, they will not leave the right path."*³ Dads, this reminds us of our purpose, that we have a responsibility to train our children. This means helping them learn how to live life with courage, to develop skills that will make them feel competent as they navigate through life, and to cultivate a clear sense of self and confidence. This training happens not only by creating intentional learning opportunities, but also by being available and accessible in the everyday rhythms of life. They may pick up what we know, but they will become what we are.

Have you had people tell you that your children resemble you? That was a common comment I received from people even into my adult years. It's not

³ Proverbs 22:6 (Easy-To-Read Version).

that I looked like my dad, but many of my mannerisms, from the way I talk to literally the way I walk (this kind of ex-athlete stroll), resembled his. I tend to process decisions like my father. All this is from the imprint he made on my life.

There's a saying that says "more is caught than taught", and this is especially true from a child's perspective. They learn what is important by watching us, observing what we do, and how we respond to situations and to relationships. Eventually they're going to embrace those values, because they're going to repeat what they see. Children are trained in what is important by what they see repeated over and over. These are the values of their family.

The training of our children also needs to be individualized to meet their needs. Dads can't just be one size fits all. This means that dad's not just about being fair, being equal, but it is about him being just. **You know, the statistics tell us that the most important thing you can do with your life is to be the best dad that you can be, and that is your life's mission.** If the Bible is our guidebook, then we also have a model in Jesus.

Jesus had a mission statement: *"For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."*⁴ What was important to Jesus? What did Jesus train his followers to do when a choice had to be made? What guided his choices? Here, Jesus defined his life's purpose as serving, as giving his life away. He modeled this belief by his behavior.

⁴ Mark 10:44-45; Matthew 20:28 (NIV)



**Fatherhood is
leadership, not
management. It
not only doing
things right, but
doing the
right things.**

Jesus lived out his values. Because he believed that serving was important, he gave his disciples a practical example of service. They came to dinner one night. Jesus put a towel around his waist, took the bowl of water that was near the door, and bent down, (as was the custom in that tradition), and washed the disciples' feet. *Now, this task was usually performed by a servant in the house, but in this case, Jesus became the servant.*⁵ Then he told them, through his example and his words, that their greatness was going to be found in serving. I often wonder if every time the disciples put on their shoes, they were reminded about their life's purpose, and how they were going to find greatness and significance because of Jesus's example. **Your mission must be connected to action.** Your values are based in a belief about what is truly important in life. Your values will be transferred by both your words and your actions. Let's be clear - a father's mission is to transfer their values and skills to their kids. So consider these questions:

1. What's important for you to pass on to your kids?
2. How do you communicate it and how do you model it?

DEFINING FAMILY VALUES

The first thing we're going to have to define in our dad plan journey is our values. You might be asking, what are values? For this purpose, values are the belief behind your behavior. They're the why behind the what. A man's values develop over their lifetime, until they become subconsciously integrated into

⁵ John 13:1-17

every area of our lives. These values are shaped by our life's experience, both positive and negative. They're shaped by the things that inspire us, stimulate us, and motivate us to action. Values may be reflected even in the things that capture our attention, like our interests or hobbies. I describe the feeling associated with these things as being like *"when I do this, I feel the most like me."* That's why when we make a choice to do some things, to think a certain way and to avoid other things and feelings, it's because those choices are based in our values.

"DAD WINS"

While I'd like to think the best of my intentions will be the thing that my family picks up on, the truth is our actual behavior reveals our values and programs our family to respond to them. During the pandemic, my daughter, who had just graduated college, was at home with my wife and me. I was working on some things on my computer and I heard my wife and daughter chatting in the kitchen about what we should have for dinner. I heard my daughter suggest that we add broccoli as a side dish. My wife said, "You know Dad doesn't like broccoli." That's true (for a number of reasons). They continued on with the conversation and I continued on with my work.

The next day there was similar scenario, where the girls were chatting in the other room. I don't remember what they were talking about as my focus was on the sporting event I was watching. I do remember my daughter commenting

to my wife, "That's not Dad's kind of thing." Since I didn't know what they were discussing, I let it go without jumping in.

Again, the following day my daughter and wife were talking and I was working in the other room. I can't remember the topic of their conversation, but I remember what my wife said to my daughter - "that's not something your Dad would like." Immediately I heard another voice, an internal one that whispered "Dad wins." I broke, because I knew that was one of the default values of our home. Everyone in my home knew what I liked and didn't like. Rather than my desire to serve my family's needs, our family had built their decisions around my preferences because I had unintentionally set up our culture for there to only be one winner - me. I realized that there needed to be a change, and the change had to start with me. So I've been working to build my life around what was important to the most important people in my life.

Being a dad is making choices based on a set of values that help you to determine what is important and directs our response.

We must come to the realization that every decision a man makes is actually two decisions; the decision to do something is also the choice not to do something else. So, it is important to understand how

**Values are the
belief behind
your behavior.
They're the
"why" behind the
"what".**

to make choices that reflect our values, that we put into action.

YOUR VALUES ARE BASED IN YOUR CHOICES

There's a leader in the Bible named Joshua. Joshua received the leadership of the people from his mentor Moses, and led the nation into a new destiny and identity. At the end of his life, Joshua said this to the people that he had served for his lifetime: *"If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourself this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served back before you didn't know God or the gods of the culture of the land. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*⁶

Notice the importance that Joshua gave to the choices that would have to be made by the heads of families, usually the fathers. Every father has to make choices. But a father's choices are important because they have a direct impact on all those who are entrusted to your care. In Dad Academy, you will learn how to make the choices that are necessary to accomplish your mission and prepare your kids for the life that you hope and dream for them.

DISCOVERING YOUR VALUES

Every part of our life, the roles and responsibilities we have, our interests and hobbies, our life goals and measurement for success is integrated by one's values. Values are not what you want (aspirational), they are what you do (actual).

⁶ Joshua 24:15 (author paraphrase)

These values serve as the core for our lives. In determining your values, two questions must be answered:

1. **WHAT** is important? and,
2. **WHY** is it important?

The “what” is often the measurement, while the “why” speaks to the motivation. For example, you may consider “hard work” to be a value. The question then needs to be asked: why is it a value? Is it because you work hard to receive recognition or validation? Or is it because hard work is a reflection of one’s character, diligence, and dedication? If it’s the latter, consider rephrasing the value as “diligence” or “industriousness” or “faithfulness.” These words reflect an approach to life more than simply a desired intent.

When your values are defined you’ll have a better sense about who you are and what it is of true value that you have that you have to pass on to your kids.

REFLECTION

Questions ★ ★ ★

1

What values do you want to pass on to your children, and why are they important to you?

2

How do your daily actions and decisions currently reflect the values you want to instill in your family?

3

Think about a moment when your child mirrored your behavior—was it a positive or negative reflection? What did you learn from it?

4

How can you model leadership in your home, not just by managing tasks, but by shaping the culture and values of your family?

HOME

WORK

Identify Your Core Values

Discovering your core values is a vital step toward becoming a more intentional father. Your values serve as guiding principles, shaping your decisions and behaviors. Here's a structured process to help you identify and define your personal values:

Step 1

Understand What Values Are

- Values are the beliefs behind your behavior—they are the “**why behind the what**” you do.
- They have been shaped over a lifetime through experiences, inspirations, and motivations.
- Values are not **aspirations** (what you wish you lived by), but **actual behaviors** (what you consistently do).

Step 2

Reflect on Your Life Experiences

Think about your **positive and negative life experiences**. What lessons have shaped who you are?

Identify moments where you felt the most like **your true self**—activities, hobbies, and roles where you felt most alive.

Consider what **inspires you, stimulates you, and motivates you to action**.

Step 3

Answer Two Essential Questions

WHAT is important to me?

(This is the external measurement—what you see and do.)

WHY is it important?

This is the internal motivation—what drives you.)

Example: If you think “hard work” is a value, ask **why** it matters. Is it for recognition? Or because it reflects your **diligence and dedication**? If it’s the latter, your true value might be **“Diligence” or “Industriousness.”**

Step 4

Create Your Personal Values List

Write down a list of 10-15 words that represent values you live by. Use precise words that describe an approach to life, not just a desired outcome. Group similar values together and narrow the list to 3-6 core values.

Step 5

Define and Personalize Your Values

Write a **clear definition** of each of your top values in your own words. Think of a **real-life example** of how you live out each value.

Example: Value: Generosity - “My life is about serving others with the skills and resources that are available to me.”

[illegible]

Step 6

Define and Personalize Your Values

Assess how well your daily life reflects these values. Are your choices and priorities in alignment?



OR



Identify any **gaps** between what you say you value and what you actually do.

Are these values consistently demonstrated in the roles and relationships in my life?



OR



Brad

I've realized my job is not to teach them to be like me; my job is to help them become more of who they already are.

Growing up in a pastor's house, I remember lessons my dad taught me about fatherhood. But I also see how many lessons and ideas I inferred about fatherhood by being a son to my dad, and as they say, "more is caught than taught." He taught me about facing fears and persevering through challenges, he handed me a faith and encouraged me as I made it my own, and he stressed the importance of family. But I also remember him being gone a lot, once for so long once I couldn't recall his face without looking at his picture in the hallway. I remember that his service to others often took precedence over us. And I remember feeling like I couldn't have the relationship I wanted with him because other people needed him more. This "close but distant" relationship influenced my perception of fatherhood.

I knew I wanted to pass on what I was taught, and I knew I had to be intentional about what would be caught.

Parenting is the single most heart filling and gut-wrenching thing I've done. Being intentional about what gets "caught" has helped me position my parenting away from authoritarianism and towards relationship building with each of my kids. My path to fatherhood wasn't the traditional one; when my wife and I married I was instantly gifted with two girls and two boys. The girls

didn't need a father - their dad is alive and well, and their relationship is solid. All they need from me is to know I'm there for them and to see their mom loved well. The boys' father passed away when they were two and a half years and six months old, and I'm beyond grateful to be their dad. We had one more boy, completing our family. Their personalities are all very different, they absorb information differently, they give and receive love differently, and they experience life in ways unique to them. I've realized my job is not to teach them to be like me; my job is to help them become more of who they already are. **Our family "blends" well because we don't consider it blended.** There are no "steps" or "halfs" in our family. There are only brothers, sisters, and love.

Dad Academy is a toolbox, a seed packet, an instruction manual even, on intentional parenting for dads. It reminds us of what we already know, provides creative new ways of thinking about things, and it inspires with exercises and assignments geared towards dads becoming more and more intentional in their parenting. **Dad Academy is about helping dads help kids become the men and women they were born to be.**

CHAPTER

02



Parenting Partnership

**Honoring Your
Parenting Partner**

“

Live in such a way that
if your children are ever
asked for the definitions
of kindness, integrity, and
loyalty, they'll answer,
“my parents”.

ALI B MOE



PARENTING PARTNERSHIP

Honoring Your Parenting Partner

Being an intentional father is like building a house. It takes planning, preparation, hard work, and some help from others. You are building a structure your kids will be able to build their lives on. It all begins with the foundation. For dads, that foundation is understanding the values you have built your life around so that you can intentionally pass them on to your children. What you pass on to your kids is whatever is at the center of your life, not your roles or your responsibilities, but your personal values. And what we don't often understand is that values are not what we want to be, but they actually reflect who you are and what you do.

WHAT'S AT YOUR CORE?

If you are a Christ-follower, you may think that God is at the center of your life. But God is not the special surprise that's hidden inside the Tootsie Pop. It's not where if you dig deep enough, He'll eventually be found like oil under a well. No, in fact, the Scripture says that Christ is all and he's in all.⁷ So, Jesus is

⁷ Colossians 3:11

not just at the center of your life. He’s integrated into everything in your life. If you’re a Christ-follower, he’s already in everything that you’re doing.

Part of the process of unpacking your values is to discover what God has placed at the core of who you are . **What are those things that make you, you?**

Your Turn

Values have a profound effect on those around you, because what’s at your center shapes and drives your behavior and defines your life’s mission. To recap, your mission as a father is to intentionally pass on the values and skills you have to them. Preparing them for life is your purpose as a dad.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DAD

Research reminds us of how important dads are to kids. When a dad has a healthy relationship with his daughter, they are less likely to be sexually active.⁸ When fathers have a healthy relationship with their sons, these young men are less aggressive, less defiant, and more socially mature. In fact, studies show that in most families, it’s also the father who contributes the most to children

⁸ Regnerus, Mark D. and Laura B. Luchies. 2006. "The Parent-Child Relationship and Opportunities for Adolescents' First Sex." Journal of Family Issues 27: 159-183.

becoming self-reliant, self-disciplined, and self-motivated.

Brett Copeland, a clinical psychologist in Tacoma, Washington, writes that fathers encourage competition, the ability to take risks, and what we call having courage. **Dads encourage independence and achievement in the lives of their children.** This is not to discount mothers: they encourage equity, sense of security or comfort in a family, and collaboration, the idea of working together.

Both parents' developmental contributions are required to build strong kids. Yet what we discover is Dad's unique assignment. Dads build self confidence in children through encouragement, like pouring courage into them - "You got this! You can do it!". Along with encouragement, Dads provide affirmation. Every child inherently wants to make their father proud, and it's our responsibility and privilege to let them know they have. Lastly, fathers provide a child's framework for evaluation: Was I successful? What was done well? What are ways to grow? Dads who provide love-based feedback build a child's sense of worth.

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a dad.**

THE THREE C's OF PARENTING

Dad, you are responsible for your child's sense of self confidence. They get their sense of value and worth from you. That means that you are responsible to help your children develop these three qualities: courage, competence and confidence. These are the three Cs of what a dad is going to pass on to his children. Moms complement that self-confidence by building awareness of others. Mothers do this through another three Cs they are uniquely equipped to build into the life of their children, compassion, comfort and cooperation. Together, both parents help anchor a child's sense of worth and of value.

As a father, you are responsible to cultivate courage, competence, and confidence in your children.

Obviously, the roles of father and mother are complementary and necessary for a child's well-being. Unfortunately, without a dad, the other awareness that moms cultivate becomes a self-centeredness, because the child becomes then the center of that world. With an overbearing or completely disengaged dad, self-confidence becomes self-consciousness, because you're always aware that you're being evaluated because you're looking for affirmation from the one who is the model and the example in your life.

DAD AS LIFE-GIVER

To illustrate the interdependent roles of a father and mother, one only needs to consider the roles of male and female in the way that life is conceived. Dad is the seed: the life-giver. Mom is the host: the life-nurturer. I want you to pause to think about this important question - **“What are you bringing or giving life to in your children’s lives?”**



Whatever you as a dad direct your energy and effort towards will produce life.

Just as in conception, there are three elements to fertilizing the potential within your children. The first is **quantity**. Think about this, it takes millions of sperm to fertilize one egg, while you only need one to do its job, you don’t know which one will take. As a father there are millions of minutes to spend with your child in their lifetime. Some people will say, it’s not it’s not quantity, it’s quality. But really, isn’t it both? You need to be able to offer your best as often as you can, with the belief that some of it is going to produce good results.

**Whatever you
as a dad direct
your energy and
effort towards
will produce
life.**

Not only is there quantity in the process of giving life, but there's also **timing**.

There are moments that are more important than others. There are times when the egg of life is receptive to what you have to deposit and bring to it. And as a dad, I'm not always able to identify which moment is the right time. For example, having a conversation critiquing your child's athletic performance in the car ride home following a game isn't very productive in most cases. But when your child casually initiates a conversation with a question, that might indicate an opportunity to go deeper. The only way to make the most of those opportunities is to be present for them as the moments arise. A Brigham Young University study says although participation in family leisure activities is important and needed, it was a father's involvement in the everyday home based, common family leisure activities that held more weight than the large, extravagant out of the ordinary types of activities.⁹

When examining how families function and what produces health, it's not only about the big moments, but it only makes a difference when it's combined with the everyday, ordinary interactions that really complements and brings life to your kids. **It is so important for you to look for teachable moments when your kids, their ears and eyes, most importantly, their hearts, are open.** When children are small, you get to create and define those moments. With your teens, you have to respond to the moments as they appear, because

⁹ CBuswell, L., Zabriskie, R.B., Lundberg, N., & Hawkins, A.J. (2012). "The Relationship Between Father Involvement in Family Leisure and Family Functioning: The Importance of Daily Family Leisure." *Leisure Sciences*, 34, 172-190.

it's usually on their schedule, not ours. I've found that going for a walk or hike with my daughter created opportunities for us to connect. When her feet were moving, the conversation was flowing. Similarly, activity was the key to heart-to-heart conversation with my son. The goal is to find times when their hearts are open and responsive to the opportunities as they present themselves.

Now, we've spoken about quantity. We've talked about timing. The last element is **persistence**. You just keep loving them until eventually you break through that hard shell and are able to fertilize the life that's in them. A seed's life is never done. In fact, Jesus says it this way, "unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it never can produce life". It is crucial for us to understand those three life-giving principles.

It's not only important to understand the roles of dad and mom, but also to consider the relational dynamic between dad and mom. If you're going to be a good father, you're going to want to know how to best partner with your child's mother as you raise your kids. To be a good partner requires us to step into and understand mom's world a little bit.

REAL LIFE OUTSIDE OF PARADISE

To do so, let's start with a discussion about the very first mom, Eve. According to the Bible, after Adam and Eve have sinned and been expelled from the Garden, we get our first look at what life is like outside of paradise. The author

of Genesis captures the moment like this: *"Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain and said, 'I have acquired a man from the Lord.'"*¹⁰ This is the first description of marital intimacy in the scripture, and the result of this kind of intimacy is procreation. Life is given. Yet Eve's response is that God and I have done something special. Maybe she sees this as an opportunity to reform the mistakes that she sees in Adam. We read from the sacred text that God makes humankind in His own image. Could it be that without a sense of relational integrity, women form children into their own image? Women have a different set of values, a different set of priorities, and when those needs are not met in their lives, they want to make sure that they are met in the lives of their kids.

When God gave Eve to Adam, they were helpmates; they were equal partners. God's direction to them was to be fruitful and multiply, to subdue the earth, to fill it, and to have dominion over it. When Adam and Eve take things into their own hands and violate the relationship, God confronts them. In that moment Adam could have taken responsibility, but didn't. Instead, he blamed the woman; it was Eve's fault. Adam deflected accountability not only for his own actions but his responsibility to the relationship with Eve (and God) when he replied to God's question with *"She gave it to me."*¹¹ What do you think resulted from Adam's response? Did it build trust? Did it build security? Did it build confidence? Or did it damage the partnership that God intended between Adam and Eve?

¹⁰ Genesis 4:1 (NKJV)

¹¹ Genesis 3:8-13

I want to tell you that **you can redeem your family by taking responsibility for it and by being a helpmate to your children's mother**, whether you're married to her or not. No more excuses, no more blame, no more running from responsibility. The reason why understanding what's at the center of our life is so important is because those things influence your relationship with your kids and shape the relationship with their mother.

THE CO-PARENTING CHALLENGE

Maybe you find yourself in one of those difficult situations where you are co-parenting with another parent, where your kids are not under the same roof as a family. Maybe you're trying to be a dad and co-parent with your spouse to her own children from a previous relationship. Both scenarios are challenging. And they are complicated by the trauma of divorce.

Most people don't consider the impact that divorce has on dads. *Many people are surprised to learn men are more likely than women to become depressed, to develop a stress related illness and other difficult situations, or even to die by suicide, after their divorce.*¹² In fact, most divorced fathers are extremely lonely, overwrought and disoriented. This is a consequence of having lost connection, daily contact with their children. With the loss of daily engagement with their children many men become disconnected from their sense of purpose and passion in life.

² Kposowa A.J. (2003) "Divorce and Suicide Risk Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health; 57: 993.

There are some qualitative conclusions that suggests that women who did not have a secure, loving relationship with her own parents while she was growing up are more likely to be overly indulgent and overly submissive in raising her own children, regardless of their income, education or marital status. This could be because they're trying to compensate for parental wounding in their own childhood.

Men, it's difficult to come to this conclusion, but the reality is that when you are absent from the home, you have abdicated your right to define your relationship with your kids, mother and your children on your terms. This is why it's so important for us to be clear on our mission and our values; that way our choices and your behavior reflect it.

Again, in the Scripture, we have this directive, *"Husbands...be considerate as you live with your wives."*¹³ Guys, I think there's some important things for us to consider as we work together and partner together in raising our children with your children's mother, whether she's your spouse or your ex. If it's your ex, there are some things you're going to have to consider about her current status in life. One issue that must be considered is what was the relationship with her parents? Was it healthy? Is it challenging? What are some of the issues that you need to be aware of, because those things are going to get transferred over to you? You need to be able to understand how she feels about the divorce. Does she feel guilty? Does she feel hurt? Does she still feel rejected? Does she still

¹³ 1 Peter 3:7 (NIV) also (CEV) "If you are a husband, you should be thoughtful of your wife."

**As a father,
you have been
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your family.**

feel anger? You need to consider her employment situation, the ability for her to provide the kind of security she wants her kids to be able to have. You need to understand her life responsibilities, the obligations that she has, both to her finances and other relationships in her life, if you're living with your kids.

Now, if you are husband and wife living together, raising your children, here are some things you need to consider in the relationship: Is your relationship secure? Does your wife feel safe? Does she consider you to be someone trustworthy, a partner who carries an equal load with her? Do you understand what her needs are emotionally, financially, relationally? Are the household responsibilities shared, or does too much of it weigh on one of you? Most importantly, is there anything undone, commitment met, or responsibility not fulfilled?

As men, we like to give ourselves credit for our intentions, but we're actually judged by whether or not we fulfill our obligations. Those things hinder our ability to partner and to have the influence in raising and producing the kind of children who grow up feeling self-confident and who are aware and relate well to others.

The consequences of divorce increase the challenges parents face. As Fritz shared in his story, there's a stark difference between children raised in a home with both birth parents and the emotional impact of being split between two

households. For those who are separated from their kids' mothers, here are some suggestions on ways you can begin to rebuild that relationship. Number one, you need to honor her as your children's mother. This is not to say that this will be easy because there's probably some inner conflict. There's likely some challenges that remain unresolved, because that's what may have contributed to the disintegration of the relationship originally. Often, mom will control how you relate to your kids. Your responsibility is to adjust the way you relate to her, so that you can do your best job as a father.

**Husbands...be
considerate as
you live with
your wives.**

WHAT MAKES A FAMILY

Now, if you are living with your wife, you need to understand that you and her were a family before you added kids, and that's why that relationship between husband and wife needs to be the priority. **Guys, don't forget you are a husband first, and a dad second.** When your kids see you honor their mom, treating her with respect and value, it gives them a sense of security. It validates the other half of who they are.

Let's leave with this thought found in the scripture. It says "*all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*"¹⁴ The Greek word translated as "submit" is "hupotasso." It doesn't just mean to come under authority or describe a

¹⁴1 Peter 5:5 (NKJV)

hierarchy. One of the ways it was also used was to describe a puzzle piece that's been cut and designed to fit in a specific spot. And when that puzzle piece is placed in where it has been cut for, it "submits" to all of the other pieces around it. There's a process for us to understand that, **as a dad, you have been cut to fit specifically into the lives of those members of your family.** When you're missing, it leaves a hole; the picture is unfinished, and your sense of connectedness and purpose is lost.

But when everything is in its place, everyone and everything is connected and the picture of becoming the father you desire to be starts to take shape.

REFLECTION

Questions ★ ★ ★

1

The chapter states that *mothers cultivate compassion, comfort, and cooperation* while *fathers create courage, competence, and confidence*. Have there been moments when you felt the need to compete with, rather than cooperate with, the child's mother? What was the underlying concern, and how could you shift toward a partnership mindset?

2

How can you and the child's mother intentionally work together to bring out the best in your child? What is one practical step you can take to better support her role while also embracing your own?

3

Reflect on a recent interaction with your child. Was it "life giving?" If you could redo that moment, what would you do differently?

4

How does your current daily or weekly routine reflect your priorities as a father? What small adjustments could you make to be more present and engaged?

HOME

WORK

Identify a Distraction

Write down one major distraction (e.g., work, technology, stress) that takes away from your fatherhood engagement. Develop a plan to reduce its impact for one week and reflect on the results.

THE DISTRACTION

THE PLAN

Understand Her Needs

Reflect on what the child's mother needs from you to feel supported as a co-parent. Write down three things you think she values most in your role as a father. Then, ask her directly what she needs from you. Compare the lists—what did you get right? What surprised you?

1

2

3

WHAT SHE NEEDS FROM YOU

Identify a Shared Goal

Parenting works best when both parents align on key values and goals. Write down one parenting challenge or decision you need to work through together. How can you approach it in a way that strengthens teamwork rather than creating tension?

ONE PARENTING CHALLENGE

THE NEW APPROACH

Show Appreciation

Write a short note (or express verbally) something you appreciate about how the child’s mother parents. Notice her strengths and acknowledge them.

Reflect on how this changes the dynamic between you both.

Sean

I discovered that being a father wasn't just about providing for my family; it was about being present.

My upbringing was shaped by the presence of a strong father and a caring yet tough mother. For my sisters and me, **Dad chose**

to be a father figure who was feared and respected first. He carried an air of authority in our home, ensuring discipline and structure, but at the end of the day, his love for us was undeniable. He would do anything to help us achieve our dreams. He always was the first person our extended family called when they faced challenges, despite the occasional harsh response. Through him, I learned the importance of respect in the home. But I also learned something else—where I needed to bring more empathy and understanding into my own parenting journey.

When our first little girl was born, I quickly realized that my life was no longer my own. The days of thinking only of myself or doing what I wanted whenever I pleased were over. Parenting isn't about taking the easy route; in fact, it's quite the opposite. I discovered that being a father wasn't just about providing for my family; it was about being present. It was about slowing down, creating memories, and forming connections that would last a lifetime.

I had to learn to stop rushing through life, moving from one task to another.

Instead, I learned to pause, take a breath, and cherish playtime after work.

What seemed like small moments became the foundation of my relationship with my daughter. Those moments meant everything to her, and they became everything to me too.

Dad Academy was so helpful in helping me reflect on my values and understand the kind of father I want to be. We all have morals and principles that guide us, but they only become useful in parenting when we take the time to lay them out and truly understand what drives us as men. **Fatherhood requires a plan, a vision for our families that sets our children up for success—not just in life but as people.**

As a fairly new father, connecting with other dads through Dad Academy was a game-changer for me. Hearing their experiences, sharing struggles, and learning from men who had walked this path before me gave me the tools I needed to become the best father I could be. I know the impact of being an intentional, present, and faith-focused, values-driven dad will ripple through my children's lives for years to come. And for that, I am forever grateful.