



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD



KYLE CLAUNCH

FATHERHOOD  
FOR THE GLORY  
OF GOD



KYLE CLAUNCH

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	5
PART I: THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD FIRST .....	7
PART II: GOD AS FATHER TO HIS COVENANT CHILDREN .....	10
PART III: PREPARING FOR FATHERHOOD .....	16
BY PROGRESSING IN GODLINESS	
PART IV: EXERCISING HEADSHIP .....	22
AS A FAITHFUL FATHER (EPH. 5-6)	
CONCLUSION .....	29
ENDNOTES .....	31

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

*“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*

- The Apostle Paul,  
Ephesians 6:4



# INTRODUCTION

“I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

As a seasoned pastor, I had spoken those words many times before. But this time was different. I didn’t merely speak those words as a pastor to a church member. I spoke those words as a father to my son and the lovely lady who, in that moment, became my daughter-in-law.

Something profound happened in that instant that was deeply personal for me. A new household was formed with a new head. For my son’s entire life up to that moment, he had been a member of my household, under my headship in the home, subject to my authority. Now, he is the head of another household. “A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,” Moses wrote in Genesis 2:24. “Leave and cleave,” the old adage says, based on an older translation of that verse. The best way I know to describe how that moment made me feel is *heavy joy*. My emotions were heavy for the profundity of the event and for the realization that there are no do-overs for the years of fatherhood leading up to this moment. I felt joy because my son becoming a godly man — who would be a faithful head of his own household — is one of the great goals to which all of my fatherly efforts had been directed for many years.

In the days surrounding that event, I reflected a great deal on fatherhood. Had I been the kind of father I ought to have been for my oldest son? Had I modeled godliness, humility, faithfulness, purity, and love such that my son would find in my life a model for holy living moving forward? Having reached this point, what might I do differently in my care and leadership of my other children?

My reflections turned up things that I would file away under the category of regret and other things that I believe I did right. But more than anything,

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

such reflection has pressed me into the hope of the gospel of Christ. I am not a Christian because I believe I am able to follow a formula for perfect fatherhood (or perfect anything else). I am a Christian precisely because I cannot follow the formula of perfection, the law of God. All of my best efforts fall woefully short of the standard of God's holiness: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But while I fall sinfully short of the glory of God as a father, I rest in the knowledge that God, the gloriously perfect Father, gave his only begotten Son for me (John 3:16). Because Jesus suffered for my sins on the cross and rose again on the third day, I have forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. The gospel of Christ prevents me from debilitating self-loathing, on the one hand, because I am justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the Law, including my labors as a father (Rom. 3:28 and Gal. 2:16). And the gospel compels me to live out my calling and my duty as a faithful father on the other hand because I know that God has given me his holy Spirit to work out the daily reality of my salvation, including my labors as a father (Phil. 2:12–13).

In this field guide, I want to help you see how the task of being a father is patterned after God's fatherly care for his covenant people so that, as you try to be a good father to your own children, the Holy Spirit will help you find comfort, confidence, and strength in the redeeming love he has shown you in his Son, Jesus Christ.

## 1

# THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD FIRST

## ***Human Fatherhood Patterned after Divine Fatherhood***

God is named Father in many texts of both the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah prays, “O LORD, you are our Father” (Isa. 64:8). Addressing the reality of a broken world where some face life without the help of a good human father, David reminds us that “God in his holy habitation” is a “Father of the fatherless” (Ps. 68:5). Jesus taught his followers to address God as “Our Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:9). Paul said that Christians, who have the Spirit of God, call God “*Abba*, Father” (Rom. 8:14–17 and Gal. 4:4–6). This is the same way Jesus addressed God in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before he was crucified (Mark 14:46). *Abba* is an Aramaic word that is easy to pronounce, and, much like the English word *daddy*, it was a word learned very early in a child’s development of speech. It is hard to imagine a more intimate or basic instinct for the Christian than referring to God by the revealed name of Father.

It would be natural for us to think that the name Father is applied to God as a metaphor for the intimacy, care, direction, and provision that good earthly fathers provide for their children. On this supposition, the idea of fatherhood would be true of human creatures first and more properly. The name Father would only be true of God by way of a fitting figure of speech. Some have taught that this is the way we should understand fatherhood in reference to God. However, Scripture explicitly states that the analogy between divine fatherhood and human fatherhood actually runs the other way.

In Ephesians 3:14–15, Paul says, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” The word translated “family” by the ESV Bible is the Greek word *patria*, which means “fatherhood.” The ESV even provides a footnote suggesting that the phrase “every family” could be translated as “all fatherhood.” Consider the passage again, this time with the alternate translation: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom *all fatherhood* in heaven and on earth is named.” Paul is demonstrating the fact that God does not

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

reveal himself as Father because of some correspondence between himself and human fathers. Rather, God gives the name father to humans as an analogy, a reflection, of who he is. Human fatherhood is to be learned and patterned after divine fatherhood, not the other way around.

If all fatherhood derives its name from “our Father in heaven,” then a brief consideration of the significance of Father as a name for God can be instructive as we consider how to be faithful as those named after the true and everlasting Father.

### ***In What Ways Is God a Father?***

There are two ways that the Bible applies the name Father to God: (1) the first person of the holy Trinity is the eternal Father in relation to the second person of the Trinity, who is the Son, and (2) the one triune God is named Father in relation to creatures with whom he is in covenant. Let’s briefly consider both of these ways of calling God Father.

#### *1. The eternal relationship between God the Father and God the Son.*

This eternal relation takes us right into the heart of the mystery of the Trinity. Don’t let this make you nervous or bothered. Is the glorious doctrine of the Trinity difficult to understand and ultimately beyond our ability to fully comprehend? Yes indeed. But that should not deter us from pursuing greater knowledge of God. Rather, it should delight us! The God we seek to know and understand is beyond the scope and reach of our finite minds. This is precisely why he is worth knowing in the first place. Reflecting on the incomprehensible depths of the knowledge of God, Paul says, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (Rom. 11:33)!

The second person of the Trinity is named the Son of God because he is begotten of the Father. The biblical word “only begotten” is used to refer to the Son’s relation to the Father five times in the writings of the Apostle John (John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, and 1 John 4:9 — the ESV renders this word as “only” in these verses, but the NASB and KJV give the more accurate translation “only begotten”). When a child is begotten from his father, that child is, by nature, the same thing that the father is. Human fathers beget human children. By analogy, God the Father begets God the Son. In other words, the fact that the Son of God is called “only begotten” assures us that the Son is exactly what the Father is, truly God. Because both the Father and the Son are truly and fully God there can be no before and after, no beginning and end, to the fatherhood of God the Father. This difficult-to-understand truth reminds us that fatherhood was something true of God before he made the world and remains true of him regardless



## FIELD GUIDE

of his relation to the world.

The eternal relation between God the Father and God the Son is similar to earthly fathers and their children in very limited ways. On this point, the dissimilarities are far more profound. Many of the characteristics of the father-child relationship among humans simply do not pertain to the eternal Father-Son relation in God. Things like authority and submission, provision and need, discipline and sin, and instruction and learning have no place in the eternal Father-Son relation. For this reason, it is really the second way that the name Father is applied to God that will be the focus of this field guide.

### *2. God is the heavenly Father of his covenant people.*

It is in this sense that we pray to God as “our Father.” If the first person of the Trinity is called Father because he eternally *begets* the Son, then the triune God is called Father because he *adopts* his people as sons in covenant relationship with himself. Because of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world to accomplish our salvation and because of the sending of the Holy Spirit into the world to apply redemption to our hearts, Christians are adopted children of God in a permanent way. In Galatians 4:4–6, Paul explains,

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

It is in this covenantal sense that the divine name of Father bears the most similarity to human fatherhood. God is Father as the covenant head in relation to his people. Similarly, though not in exactly the same ways, human fathers are called by God to a position of covenantal headship in relation to the members of their household. In the next part of this field guide, we will identify ways that God’s fatherhood is revealed to us in order to help us recognize the key roles and responsibilities that ought to be carried out by human fathers.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. Why is it important to grasp that human fatherhood is patterned after God’s fatherhood, rather than the other way around?
2. How did this section expand your understanding of God’s fatherhood and your relationship to him?

## 2

# GOD AS FATHER TO HIS COVENANT CHILDREN

Following the pattern of Ephesians 3:14–15 — all fatherhood derives its name from the fatherhood of God — we will seek to identify ways that God’s covenantal relationship as Father to his people is similar to the relationship a human father bears to his own children. The divine name “Father” reveals to us at least four truths about God and his relationship to his covenant people:

1. His authority as our Lord (2 John 4).
2. His care as our provider (Matt. 26:25–34).
3. His discipline and instruction as one training us in righteousness (Heb. 12:5–11).
4. His faithfulness as one who will finish what he started by bringing many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10).

Let us briefly explore each of these four truths, making observations about how each one teaches us about human fatherhood.

### ***God’s Fatherly Authority***

God created the entire universe, meaning everything that exists that is not God. The Bible states this plainly in its opening verse: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). God himself is created by no one. His existence is necessary, eternal, and utterly independent. As the uncreated Creator of all, God has absolute authority over all creatures. Rational creatures like us (with thinking minds and self-consciousness) owe to God true worship and perfect obedience. Christians are not only created by God, but, as we have seen, they are adopted by God into his family. God is their father, and they are his children. This covenant relationship carries many benefits and adds beautiful complexity to the relationship we have to God. But for everything our salvation and adoption adds to our relationship with God, it does not take away the fundamental reality of God’s authority.

The Apostle John wrote a very short letter (2 John) to a church and its members — “the elect lady and her children” (v. 1) — to commend them

## FIELD GUIDE

for their faith in Christ and to encourage them to press on in faithfulness to Christ. He said, “I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father” (v. 4). John understands that Christians have a special covenant relationship with God as their Father. As such, he encourages them to continue obeying their Father’s commands. He goes on to say that the obedience of Christians to God as their Father is not a matter of mere duty; it is a matter of love: “This is love, that we walk according to his commandments” (v. 6).

Just as God exercises loving fatherly authority over his children, so human fathers are placed by God in a position of authority over their children. We live in a world where the very notion of authority is despised. It seems no one wants to be *under* authority, and no one wants to *be* an authority. All talk of authority and issuing commandments reeks of arrogance and oppression to modern ears. The prevailing anti-authoritarian mindset of our age is one of the most successful lies Satan has peddled among men. If we are attentive to Scripture, we will see that authority is actually good. God has ordained a hierarchical and authoritative structure to human social order. For human lives and entire societies to flourish in the world, not only must God’s authority be embraced, but so must the God-ordained human authority structures. The most basic of these is the authority structure in the home.

Scripture is clear, in the first place, that there is a relationship of authority (head) and submission between the husband and the wife (Eph. 5:22–33). Flowing out of this is the relationship between the parents and their children (Eph. 6:1–4). Under the authority of God, a human father is to exercise authority over his wife as a self-sacrificial and loving head. He is also to exercise authority over his children for the children’s well-being before God. Assuming a position of authority in the household is not easy, but it is essential to living out fatherhood in the way God intends.

### **God’s Fatherly Provision**

During his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs the crowds concerning God’s benevolent provision for their daily needs. He says,

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet *your heavenly Father feeds them*. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and *your heavenly Father knows that you need them all*. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matt. 6:25–34, emphasis added).

In giving these instructions, Jesus reasons from the general to the more intimate. God cares in a general way for all of creation. Jesus’ example of God’s provision for the birds and the flowers is reminiscent of Psalm 104:10–18. The psalmist reflects on the streams in the valleys where donkeys drink and birds sing (vv. 10–13), the grass of the field where the livestock feed (v. 14), and the trees of the land where birds make their nests (vv. 16–17). These are all given by God to care for such creatures. But Jesus wants us to realize that God’s care for us transcends his care for the lesser creation. He who provides generally for all things in creation is the one you and I have the privilege to call Father. “*Your heavenly Father feeds*” the birds (v. 26)! *Your heavenly Father knows all your needs* (v. 32)!

Later in the same sermon, Jesus draws out the analogy between the provision that our heavenly Father gives us and the provision earthly fathers give their children. In Matthew 7:7–11, Jesus says,

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are 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!

We learn from our heavenly Father that a good father provides for the needs of his children. Of course, God has no limitations that might inhibit his provision for his children. Human fathers, on the other hand, must work diligently to supply all that their children need. This kind of consistent provision is the result of habits of self-sacrifice, deferred pleasure, hard work, and perseverance. It’s important to note here, however, that no amount of discipline, habit formation, or hard work can guarantee your ability as a father to provide for your family. Your hard work and care for them must always be carried out in patient trust and dependence on God, your heav-

## FIELD GUIDE

only Father, who alone is truly able to supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:19).

### **God's Fatherly Discipline**

Because Christians are adopted by God as sons, we should expect him to discipline us for our good. Our understanding of discipline should not be reduced to punitive consequences. It is true that good discipline involves punitive consequences, but discipline is not *merely* punitive. The difference between a consequence that is merely punitive and consequences that are disciplinary is found in the intended outcome. The intended outcome of mere punishment is retribution — a just settling of the score. The intended outcome of discipline is the instruction of the one disciplined. Discipline is intended for the good of the one who receives it.

The writer of Hebrews reminds Christians of this truth in Hebrews 12:5–11:

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reproved by him.  
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The writer of Hebrews wants these Christians to view their hardship as the loving, though often painful, discipline of the Lord, who is treating them as sons because he is a loving Father. Take note of a few things about the Lord's fatherly discipline from this passage. First, the Lord only disciplines his children. Everyone faces hardship. And everyone is under divine justice, which will be satisfied one day. But only the children of God are being *disciplined* by him. Those who are not his children will face his punishment but are not the beneficiaries of his

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

discipline. The text tells us plainly that “The Lord disciplines the one he loves,” (v. 6) and that those who are without discipline are “illegitimate children and not sons” (v. 8). This is one of the passages that helps us understand that the name Father is not merely naming God as Creator. Rather, there is an important sense in which the name Father is reserved for those in covenantal relationship to God, which is only true of those who are in Christ by faith.

Secondly, this text reminds us that our heavenly Father’s discipline is “for our good, that we may share his holiness” (v. 10). It is “painful rather than pleasant” in the short-term, but it results in “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” when we “have been trained by it” (v. 11). Again, discipline is not merely punitive, but formative. It trains those who receive it because it is intended for good, which this text defines as the cultivation of holiness.

Thirdly, this text explicitly draws the analogy between the disciplinary function of human fathers and the discipline of the heavenly Father. The writer asks the question, “What son is there whom his father does not discipline?” He goes on to say, “[W]e have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.... For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (vv. 9–10). The discipline of earthly fathers is patterned after the loving discipline of our heavenly father. Notice how the writer says that earthly fathers disciplined “as it seemed best to them,” and he contrasts this with the heavenly Father who disciplines us “for our good.” The point of this contrast is to highlight the fallible nature of human fatherly discipline. The goal of discipline for human fathers *ought* to be the same as the goal of discipline coming from our heavenly Father. But sometimes human fathers fall short of the goal. So, here again, the Scriptures are reminding human fathers that they are to be always looking to heaven for help, always relying on their truly good Father for grace in the task of fatherhood.

### **God’s Fatherly Faithfulness**

Your heavenly Father is committed to finishing the good work he began in his children (see Phil. 1:6). He is faithful. Hebrews 2:10 says, “[I]t was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.” In this verse, the writer of Hebrews tells us that God was perfecting the human life of the Lord Jesus — the “founder” of our salvation — through suffering. We must not think of perfecting as fixing something that was defective. Rather, the word for perfection is derived from the Greek word for “complete.” The point is that, in order to accomplish the goal set for him by the eternal plan of God to save his people, the Son of God had to experience human limitations, including the need to grow in both body

## FIELD GUIDE

and mind (cf. Luke 2:42), the suffering of temptation (cf. Heb. 4:15), and the physical agony, pain, and shame of a mortal life that ends in death (cf. Heb. 12:1–3). God perfected Jesus through suffering. But don't miss the reason for this! Why was it fitting for Jesus to be perfected through suffering? The writer of Hebrews says it was to bring "many sons to glory."

The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus were not in vain. Because of the suffering of the "founder of their salvation," our heavenly Father is bringing many sons to glory. He does not leave you to your own resources. He does not abandon you in your pain. Your heavenly Father, who made the founder of salvation perfect through suffering, will perfect you through suffering as well. He will remain faithful, bringing you safely to glory.

Our heavenly Father's faithfulness to us from beginning to end has a fitting analogy in human fatherhood. First, God's faithfulness to his children involves a goal, a purpose for all his loving acts and care toward them. Similarly, human fathers should have a goal for their children toward which they are leading and serving. I do not mean that human fathers should plan out the temporal details of their children's lives, such as what talents they will develop and what vocations they will pursue. Rather, I mean that human fathers should embrace God's goal for his children as their own goal for their children. Human fathers must be goal-oriented, and the goal must be the overall spiritual good of their children, that is, their holiness and eventual entrance into glory. Second, God works without ceasing until the goal is accomplished. In the same way, faithful human fathers will not give up fighting, working, persuading, fasting, and praying for the salvation of their children and their lifelong growth and development in holiness on the pathway to glory.

### ***The Importance of Beginning with God***

I hope that framing this discussion in terms of learning from the fatherhood of God helps you feel the weight and the glory of human fatherhood. Fatherhood is a vocation — a calling — that is carried out, not only *coram deo*, in the presence of God, and *sub dei*, under the authority of God, but also *imitatio dei*, by the imitation of God. God is the one who created human beings as his image bearers and gave to men the particular possibility of fulfilling that vocation in a way that corresponds to, arguably, the most basic and intimate name by which believers refer to God — Father.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. In what ways does God's fatherly authority, provision, discipline and instruction, and faithfulness inform the way human fatherhood ought to look?
2. Can you think of any human fathers who are good examples of these?

# 3

## PREPARING FOR FATHERHOOD BY PROGRESSING IN GODLINESS

Being the right kind of father is downstream from being the right kind of man. Whether you are a young man who hopes to be a father one day or are currently a father hoping to be encouraged and instructed along the way, I hope this next section gives you some idea of the qualities that characterize a godly man.

### ***What Is Godliness?***

Godliness, as an English word, is derived from two words, God and like. Thus, one might conclude that godliness means “being like God.” In a limited way, that idea is certainly contained in the meaning. The word godliness, though, encompasses more than just the limited ways in which we are “like God.” It encompasses all the ways that we are to live as redeemed people, joyfully obeying the word of God with the help of the Holy Spirit. In short, godliness may be defined as *living the Christian life faithfully according to the teaching of Scripture*. Perfect godliness is a goal we will never fully reach in this life, but it is something toward which we are always striving.

### ***The Need for Training in Godliness***

The Apostle Paul said to Timothy,

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. (1 Tim. 4:7–11)



## FIELD GUIDE

Take note of just two salient points in this passage. First, *progress in godliness is not something that happens by default*. You must “train yourself for godliness” (v. 7). The Greek word translated “train” was primarily used for athletes training for intense athletic contests. Athletic performance and skill do not automatically develop and improve. Rather, athletes devote time and attention to developing their skills and increasing their strength for the sake of excelling in competition. If an athlete stops training, choosing to trust in raw talent or past training efforts, not only will he not improve, but he will actually get worse. His strength, endurance, and skill will all decrease with time. There is no sustaining by stagnating for an athlete. As it goes for the athlete, so it goes for the Christian. Godliness is something that must be pursued actively and intentionally, even sacrificially and painfully at times, which is why Paul says, “To this end (godliness) we toil (work hard) and strive (agonize)” (v. 10).

Second, *training yourself in godliness is prerequisite to teaching others to be godly*. Paul tells Timothy to train himself (v. 7) before telling him, “Command and teach these things” (v. 11). Not only that, but Paul reminds Timothy that he himself practices these things before teaching them to Timothy. Paul writes, “To this end, we toil and strive” (v. 10). The relevance of this observation for fatherhood is obvious. Fathers must instruct their children in the ways of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). That is, fathers must “command and teach” godliness, but training in godliness is prerequisite to teaching godliness.

### ***Practical Steps to Train for Godliness***

You may be thinking, “What are some practical steps I can be taking to actively train myself in godliness?” What follows is a list of practical training exercises. Each one is a habit that needs to be formed in your life to progress in godliness. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, but representative. Training for godliness involves more than this list, but it does not involve *less*. The discussion following each item is not meant to be comprehensive, and there are other resources available from The Mentoring Project to give more detail with respect to each of the items listed below.

*1. Training for godliness includes the regular intake of the Word of God.* In Psalm 119:9, the psalmist asks, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” He answers, “By keeping it according to your word.” He goes on, in verse 11, to say, “I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Do you desire to be a godly man in order that you might serve the Lord and your family as a godly father? Then you must be a man of the Word!

Every day a flood of information, appeals, advertisements, and philosophies pours into your mind through a variety of floodgates — social media, major

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

media, music, movies, books, conversations, emails, billboards, and images. This flood is, for the most part, not reflective of divinely revealed truth, but is contrary to it. A flood shapes the land over which it washes. It carves gullies for the future flow of water; it erodes landscapes; it demolishes structures. Whether you realize it or not (and perhaps *especially* if you don't realize it), this flood of messages is shaping your mind. What hope do you have to be trained in godliness if you are not actively countering worldly messaging with divine messaging? Only Scripture can flood your mind, your whole self, with the very Word of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16–17). By committing time and attention to Scripture on a daily basis, you are carving the right kind of gullies, riverbeds even, to direct the flow of influences according to truth.

Scripture intake can happen in a number of ways. The most obvious is to pick up a Bible and read it. Have you ever read through the entire Bible? At an average reading pace, most people can read the entire Bible in one year in less than twenty minutes per day. I recommend that you find a good reading plan that directs you in daily readings to read through the entire Bible. Another means of Scripture intake is listening to Scripture. Cellphone apps often include audio versions of Scripture. This is a way to have the Scriptures flooding your mind while you drive, as you go to sleep, or anywhere else you choose to listen. This method is particularly useful when memorizing a passage of Scripture. Another way to take in Scripture is by memorizing passages and repeating them thoughtfully and carefully to yourself. Finally, you can and should take in Scripture through the public reading and preaching of Scripture in worship services.

*2. Training in godliness includes a regular pattern of attending corporate worship in your local church.*

Hebrews 10:24–25 says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” The writer of Hebrews tells Christians that meeting together for the purpose of encouraging one another and urging one another toward godliness is an essential practice of the people of God. Attending worship regularly with a local church surely does not make you a Christian. But a godly Christian surely attends worship in a local church.

If you are not a member of a local church that believes, teaches, and obeys the Bible, then that is a glaring deficiency in your Christian life and a hindrance to your progress in godliness. As such, it will be a hindrance to your faithfulness as a father. Find a faithful church, and follow their steps to become a member. If you are a part of a local church, do not underestimate the importance of that connection for your Christian life. The Lord

## FIELD GUIDE

Jesus Christ manifests his presence in a special way in the gathering of the people of God in the name of Jesus (Matt. 18:20). If you want to take godliness (and fatherhood) seriously, commit to a local church.

### *3. Training in godliness includes regular prayer.*

When Paul told the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), he was not advising that they be, every moment, in a prayerful state. Rather, he was admonishing them to continue to be people of regular prayer. We could paraphrase his words, “Do not ever give up praying.” Paul knew that the evil one seeks to beleaguer God’s people to the point that they grow weary and worldly, thus losing their vigilance. Prayerlessness is one of the first signs of waning godliness, and it surely is a harbinger of ineffectiveness in service. If you would train yourself for godliness, then you must be a person of disciplined and regular prayer.

Being a man of prayer involves a warrior’s mindset about the reality of heavenly glory and the evil of the present age in which we live. The Scriptures are very clear that the Christian life is a life of warfare against evil forces bent on our destruction (see Eph. 6:10–18, 1 Pet. 5:8). Effective and meaningful prayers are uttered by those who understand the urgency of this battle. James 4:2b–3 says, “You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” Commenting on this passage, John Piper says:

The number one reason why prayer malfunctions in the hands of a believer is that they try to turn a wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom. Until you believe that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for. Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission.<sup>1</sup>

Being a godly man and father will require you to be a person who prays urgently and without ceasing.

### *1. Training in godliness as men includes cultivating biblically shaped masculinity.*

In an age of massive confusion and delusion regarding gender and sexuality, a term like “biblically shaped masculinity” needs some definition. What I mean by that term is *the character qualities and patterns of behavior that are particularly appropriate to men, as taught in Scripture*. A man who trains himself for the purpose of godliness will intentionally seek to cultivate character qualities and patterns of behavior that are appropriate to the roles he is called upon to play as a man.

Leadership is one such quality/pattern. Because Scripture teaches that

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

God's normative design for men is that they become husbands and fathers (Gen. 1:28 and 2:24), and because God intends married men to lead their wives (Eph. 5:22–23) and children (Eph. 6:1–4) in ways appropriate to those relationships, all men should be cultivating the skill of leadership so that they can practice that pattern of behavior effectively in their homes. Furthermore, because God designed men to exercise headship in the cultivation and care for creation (Gen. 2:15–16), it is right and good for men to cultivate and exercise the skills to lead in a wide variety of ways.

Furthermore, godly men must cultivate the disciplines of self-control and gentleness in the exercise of their leadership responsibilities. In a fallen world, all men have corrupted natures that incline them toward overbearing domination — the exercise of their greater strength to gain control of others for personal gain. This is not the biblical way of leadership. Jesus warns that the leaders of Gentile nations “lord it over” those under their authority. However, the citizens of God's kingdom lead by pursuing the best interests of those under their authority, even at great personal cost to themselves. All Christians are to be characterized by the qualities of self-control and gentleness (Gal. 5:22–23), but men in particular must harness these fruits of the Spirit in their exercise of authority so that their leadership is not worldly domination but godly, goal-oriented, servanthood.

### *2. Training in godliness includes regular confession and repentance.*

We are called to perfection (Matt. 5:48). We cannot achieve perfection in this present age because sin will not be entirely eradicated from our hearts until we are glorified at the return of Jesus. In the present, there is a war within us between the work of the Spirit, directing us toward righteousness, and the power of our sinful flesh, compelling us to wickedness (see Rom. 7:22–23 and Gal. 5:16–23).

Even though we know we cannot achieve perfection in the present age, we nevertheless ought to long for it and strive for it. Philippians 3:12–14 says:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

A major part of “pressing on” and “straining forward” toward the completion of your spiritual growth and progress involves the proper response to sin. Christians commit sins. But true Christians experience the merciful, though painful, conviction of the Holy Spirit that tells us the truth about our

## FIELD GUIDE

sin, leading us to repentance. First John 1:8–9 is instructive in this regard: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The person who is training himself in godliness is a person who makes a habit of confessing sin.

I will never forget one of the most lasting impressions made on me as I read *The Chronicles of Narnia* for the first time as a young adult. On many occasions, Aslan, the great lion, would gently but firmly confront one of the Pevensie children for something they had done wrong. Inevitably the child would make some excuse, as though the sinful act was not his fault. Or perhaps, some detail would be omitted from the story to make the sin seem more civil and less selfish than it really was. Aslan would always respond with a low growl. Whoever it was — Edmund, Lucy, Susan, Peter — would always get the message. Tell the whole truth about your sin. Call it what it is. Only then can you really find joy in the forgiveness that is yours.

Being a godly man who cultivates the habits of training for godliness is the single most important thing you can do in preparation for becoming a father in the future or being a better father now. Men, train yourself for godliness.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. Are spiritual disciplines a regular part of your life? In what ways can you grow in these habits?
2. One helpful way to grow in the disciplines is through accountability. Who’s someone you could invite to help hold you accountable for these?

## 4

EXERCISING HEADSHIP  
AS A FAITHFUL FATHER

The most extensive instruction in all of Scripture regarding family relationships within the household is found in Ephesians 5:18–6:4. In 5:18, Paul instructs the Ephesian church to “be filled with the Spirit.” This phrase — filled with the Spirit — like the similar phrases in Luke and Acts, refers to a state in which a Christian is surrendered to the Holy Spirit and ordering his life according to the clear teaching of Scripture for the exaltation of Christ in everything. For Paul, the command, “be filled with the Spirit,” seems to be synonymous with the command, “Walk in the Spirit” found in Galatians 5:16–23. After commanding Christians to be filled with the Spirit, Paul gives a series of explanations of the effect of being so filled. Those who are filled with the Spirit are worshipful toward God (v. 19), grateful to God (v. 20), and willing to submit to others according to the structured relationships of authority and submission that God has built into the human social order, especially in the household (v. 21). Beginning with verse 22, Paul gives his specific instructions for households. He starts with instructions for the husband-wife relationship (vv. 22–33) and follows immediately with the parent-child relationship (6:1–4). The primary title by which the apostle addresses the man is that of “head.” Paul says, “The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church” (v. 23). Later, Paul addresses the head of the household in his specific vocation as a father (6:4), but all of Paul’s instructions in this passage concerning headship are relevant to fatherhood.

***Fatherly Headship as Loving Servanthood***

Paul instructs wives to “submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22) precisely because the husband is the head of the wife (v. 23). The instruction to wives regarding submission makes plain that the position of headship is a position of authority and leadership. However, before talking about the task of being a leader as the head of household, we need to consider the exact command Paul gave to husbands in this passage.

After reading that the wife is to submit to her husband, who is the head, we might expect to read, “Husbands, lead your wives” or some other nomenclature making the authority of headship explicit. But that is not what

## FIELD GUIDE

we find! Rather, Paul says, “Husbands, *love* your wives.” While authority is assumed, the instruction of love is the focal point of Paul’s command to husbands. Some have tried to argue from this that headship must not mean authority or leadership. But this is a failure to understand the passage and the rest of biblical teaching on the relationship between husbands and wives.

Paul commands husbands to love, not because he is rejecting the notion of authority and leadership in the role of the husband (otherwise, why would he tell wives to submit and children to obey?), but because he has learned from Jesus what true, godly leadership looks like. Godly leadership is not a matter of barking out orders so that the leader can get his way. Godly leadership is servanthood, meaning that a faithful leader will always make decisions and issue instructions for the sake of the best interests of those under his care.

The example of Jesus is most clearly stated in verse 25 where Paul says that husbands ought to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Christ did not cease to be the Lord and highest authority over his disciples by laying down his life for them. But he did show them how to exercise authority faithfully — by laying down his life. Jesus came, “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

The loving leadership of the head of household applies to the relationship of fathers to children as well. In Ephesians 6:1, Paul tells children, “Obey your parents in the Lord.” Note that children are commanded to obey both parents, indicating that the task of parenting is designed to be a joint effort of a husband and wife together. Nevertheless, it is fathers who are given the positive instruction regarding how parents are to lead the children. Paul writes, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). We learn from this that a mother’s role in parenting is one of leadership and authority over the children and one of being a helper who follows the lead of her husband, the children’s father.

This follows the pattern we see in Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:18–24, which Paul has in mind in giving these household instructions (Paul quotes Gen. 2:24 in Eph. 5:31). The man and the wife are both told to rule over the created order as image bearers (Gen. 1:28). In the creation account of Genesis 2, we learn that the woman is created to be an image bearer as a “helper” to the man while the man receives the instructions from the Lord concerning the covenantal responsibilities of cultivating and keeping the garden and not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

the same way that Adam is portrayed as the head with Eve as his helper in the Garden of Eden, so fathers are given primary instruction for the leadership of the children, and mothers are helpers in that role.

Instructing fathers specifically, Paul leads with the command, “Do not provoke your children to anger” (Eph. 6:4). This commandment shows that a father’s leadership and authority over his children is to be carried out in the best interests of the children. A father does not lead his children by exercising an attitude of indifference to their needs and well-being, nor by focusing on his own whims and pleasures. Just as the husband leads his wife by self-giving love, so fathers lead their children by pursuing the best interests of their children as defined by the Word of God. It is only after putting the interests of the child into full view that Paul commands fathers, “Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

The command, “Do not provoke your children to anger,” contains a world of insight. Your goal as a father is not to “lord it over” the children (like the Gentiles, cf. Matt. 20:23–28). Your goal is not mere authoritative assertiveness. Rather, your goal as a father is to lead in such a way that your children are directed by your discipline and instruction toward godliness. In order to lead without provoking them to anger, fathers must be attentive to their children’s needs, personalities, insecurities, besetting sins, and strengths. Knowing your children well equips you to understand how the discipline and instruction they need can be effective.

It is a fact that all children must be disciplined and instructed. It is also a fact that children are commanded to obey the authority of their parents. But the way fathers go about pursuing these results is a matter of wisdom operating through love. My discipline and instruction toward my eleven-year-old daughter may look very different than the same toward my fourteen-year-old son because the same tactics that are effective with my son may provoke my daughter to anger and vice-versa. As we move into the next aspects of headship — authority, discipline, and instruction — don’t neglect this first aspect — servanthood and love. Neglecting the first principle will short-circuit the rest.

### ***Fatherly Headship as Authoritative Leadership***

The God-given position of head is a position that entails authority. As a head of household, a father must exercise authority over his children. Not every man is called or equipped to be a leader with authority in his workplace, his church, or his community. Different men are given different gifts and abilities to work and serve effectively in different ways. Those who are gifted in areas of leadership and occupy such positions outside the



## FIELD GUIDE

home are not necessarily more manly or more godly than those who do not. But when it comes to the home, God equips *all men* who are the head of household to be leaders, exercising authority. If you are a married man, you are the head of your wife. If you are a man with children, you are in a position of authority over them.

If a man refuses to exercise authority in his home, he is refusing to obey God. Some men need to be reminded that godly authority is conducted in selfless love rather than selfish domination. Other men need to be prompted to actually embrace the position of authority to which they are called. Men, do not neglect your responsibility to obey God by exercising authority over your family.

### ***Fatherly Headship as Discipline***

When Paul instructs fathers to “bring up” their children, he identifies two means for accomplishing that end: discipline and instruction (Eph. 6:4). Let’s take each in turn. I argued earlier in this field guide that discipline is more than mere punishment. It has the ultimate wellbeing and formation of the one being disciplined in view. We are disciplined by God “for our good” and in order that we might “share his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). Thus, discipline is instruction of a particular kind. Specifically, discipline is the kind of instruction that takes the form of punitive consequences. For, in the same passage that tells us discipline is for our good, we are told, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant” (Heb. 12:11).

The book of Proverbs has a great deal to teach God’s people about fatherhood because much of the contents are written by King Solomon to his son. Those words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are meant to be instructive to all fathers and all sons. One of the oft-repeated themes of the father-child relationship in Proverbs is discipline. In particular, Proverbs identifies two distinct kinds of discipline: the rod and the rebuke.

In Proverbs, “the rod” refers to a stick or staff used to strike someone as a form of punishment. Generally speaking, Proverbs teaches that the rod is intended for the back of fools, that is, people who lack wisdom or sense (see Prov. 10:13 and 26:3). In Proverbs, wisdom is the fruit of an appropriate fear and knowledge of God (Prov. 1:7, 9:10). So, foolishness is the opposite of knowing and fearing God. By the wisdom God granted him, Solomon knew that foolishness (sometimes translated as folly) is ingrained in children from the beginning. Solomon’s father David once lamented, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). Ever since the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, all children have come into this world “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1–3). For

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

this reason, Solomon understood that the rod, which is generally a good means of punishing fools for their folly, is a perfectly fitting instrument for the discipline of children as well. He wrote, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him” (Prov. 22:15). In another Proverb, we read, “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol” (Prov. 23:13–14).

In these passages, God’s Word is instructing fathers to use corporal punishment (or spanking) in the discipline of their children. Contrary to the folly of the vast majority of advisers in the world today, God’s Word teaches that spanking a child does not result in the child’s harm but in the child’s ultimate good, potentially aiding in the miracle of saving his soul. Of course, the use of corporal punishment can be harmful if done by a parent without self-control and in a vengeful spirit. But a father who is intentionally imitating God’s fatherly care for his children will discipline his child for the child’s good, keeping in view the goal of long-term formation in holiness. An intentionally administered spanking on the back end of a child is a divinely given method of discipline that seems painful for the moment, but in the long-term, it “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11).

The other form of discipline identified in Proverbs is the rebuke. While the rod is a physical form of punishment, the rebuke is a verbal form of punishment. A rebuke is a spoken word of disapproval in response to a wrong done. A rebuke identifies sinful behavior and calls it what it really is — despicable in the sight of God and shameful in the sight of man. A rebuke is only effective when spoken to one who cares about approval, one who has a conscience sensitive enough to feel an appropriate sense of shame. In other words, a rebuke assumes some degree of wisdom in the heart of the one rebuked. Proverbs 13:1 says, “A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer (another word for a fool) does not listen to rebuke.” Or consider Proverbs 17:10, which says, “A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.” For this reason, a rebuke tends to be more effective as children age. Ideally, as a child matures, the use of “rebuke” as a disciplinary measure increases in effectiveness so that the use of the “rod” as a disciplinary tool can decrease proportionately.

### ***Fatherly Headship as Instruction***

In addition to discipline, Paul identifies “instruction” as a means to bring children up in the Lord (Eph. 6:4). While discipline is a kind of instruction that uses punitive measures, the word translated “instruction” in this verse refers specifically to teaching with the use of words. Discipline takes place

## FIELD GUIDE

in response to sin, but instruction can take place at any time. Fathers have the particular responsibility to oversee this process.

The Scriptures are full of admonitions to parents to teach their children. Parents are to teach their children wisdom for living in this world, and more importantly, they are to teach their children who God is and who they are in relation to God. The fifth commandment tells children to honor their father and their mother (Ex. 20:12). This commandment assumes that parents will teach their children about God and how to live rightly in his world. This is why the commandment in Exodus is associated with the promise of long life in the land. The logic of the command and promise is not difficult to discern. Parents teach their children the law of the Lord. As children obey their parents' teaching, they are obeying the Lord's commands, which are taught to the children by the parents. The result of keeping the Lord's commands is long life in the land.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 makes this logic explicit by calling on parents to teach the law of the Lord to their children: “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” Notice that Moses gives specific instructions concerning when and how the Word of the Lord is to be taught to children. First, at the end of v. 7, he says, “when you lie down, and when you rise.” These are the activities that bookend the day. The point of this expression is to say that a parent's task of teaching children is something that continues throughout the course of the day from beginning to end. There will be no shortage of opportunities for parents to teach their children the ways of God if only we will pay attention and keep the Lord's Word always on our own hearts (v. 6).

Secondly, Moses says that this instruction is to take place “when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way.” The phrase, “when you sit in your house” is likely a reference to formal instruction in the home when everyone is gathered for this purpose. In the ancient world, times of formal instruction involved the teacher sitting down to address his audience (quite different from our habit today in which formal speakers stand before an audience). Probably what Moses has in view are times when the family gathers for the purpose of the reading of God's Word and some measure of instruction from the Word. Some today refer to such times as “family worship.” Whatever you call it, what's important is that you do it. Parents have a duty to see to it that their children have habits of receiving from them the formal teaching of God's Word. The phrase “when you walk by the way” likely refers to the kind of teaching that takes place in the midst

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

of daily life.

When Paul tells Christian fathers to “bring up” their children in “the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), he is teaching that this parental responsibility of discipline and instruction is a burden that falls more squarely on the shoulders of fathers than anyone else. Certainly, mothers engage in discipline and instruction, but ideally, it is the father who should be responsible, by example and by leadership, for cultivating a home in which such discipline and instruction is the norm.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. Which aspect of fatherly headship — between loving servanthood, authoritative leadership, discipline, and instruction — could you grow the most in? Assess with your wife (and maybe your children!) how you’re doing in these areas.
2. How are you able to put Deuteronomy 6:6–7 into practice in your family?



## CONCLUSION

As my oldest son walked back down the aisle with his new bride, the pensive analysis of my role as a father went into full swing. My profound conclusion after days of such introspection? I am not the perfect father. While there are many examples of my fatherly actions conforming to the guidance I've offered here, there are also countless examples of my failure to conform to these things. In fatherhood, as in all things, I have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). At times I have exercised authority selfishly instead of in love; at other times I have abdicated authority, preferring instead to ignore areas where my leadership was needed. At times I have disciplined my children out of sinful anger and selfishness; at other times I have neglected to discipline them out of laziness. At times I have missed opportunities to instruct my children while I walk with them in the way; still other times I have neglected to gather them together for formal instruction as I sit in the house.

If you have any experience as a Christian father, I imagine you would feel compelled to make the same confession. Perhaps your situation seems even more dire. Maybe your family does not fit the pattern described in Ephesians 5–6 (a husband and a wife with their children living with them in the home). Maybe you are a single father for any number of reasons. Maybe your children do not live with you presently but are regularly cared for by someone else. Whether it is the repeated shortcomings of a sincere Christian father or a more pronounced pattern of brokenness in the home, the fact remains: As Christian fathers, we fall woefully short of what we ought to be.

In light of this fact, I close with two words of admonition. First, though we acknowledge that we will fall short of the ideal of Christian fatherhood, we must never grow weary of striving toward it as a goal. What Paul said about perfected godliness is true of fatherhood as well, “Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13b–14).

## FATHERHOOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

Secondly, the gospel of Jesus Christ gives the good news of forgiveness of sins and tells us why we are able to call God our Father in a special, covenantal way. As you seek to imitate the covenantal fatherhood of God, you do so as one who has been forgiven by him for all your sins. You seek to imitate God as one who knows your limitations and feels keenly the fact that you are *not* God. So, in your weakness as a father, look to the one who is not weak as a Father. In your failures, look to the Father who does not fail. In your fatigue, look to the Father who does not grow tired or weary. May the one true and living God give you grace to be the kind of father your children need, a father who leads them to the Father.



# ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/prayer-the-work-of-missions>



THE  
**MENTORING**  
PROJECT

**KYLE CLAUNCH** is the husband of Ashley and the father of six children. He has more than twenty years of experience serving in vocational pastoral ministry in the local church. He is currently an elder at Kenwood Baptist Church where he regularly teaches Sunday School and serves as an instructor for the newly formed Kenwood Institute. Kyle is also Associate Professor of Christian Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY where he has served since 2017.

