



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# FATHERHOOD: REFLECTING THE GLORY OF GOD



KYLE CLAUNCH

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GLORY OF GOD



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## FATHERHOOD

*“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, something 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 the household of another home. “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 deeply on fatherhood in the Bible. 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 spiritual leadership of my other children?

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My reflections turned up things I would file under the category of regret, and other things I believe I did right. But more than anything, 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 Biblical 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 as Father, the gloriously perfect Abba 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 Man of God 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 the fatherhood of God, so that, as you seek to practice Biblical fatherhood in your own home, 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), a pattern that also shapes The Lord’s Prayer. Paul said that Christians who have the Spirit of God call God *Abba*, Father (Rom. 8:14–17; 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 as Father 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 how we should understand fatherhood in the Bible, in reference to God. However, Scripture explicitly states that the analogy between divine fatherhood and human fatherhood actually runs the other way.

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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 that God does not reveal himself as Father because of any correspondence between himself and human fathers. Rather, God gives the name father to humans as an analogy, a reflection, of who he is. Biblical fatherhood is therefore 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)!

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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). 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. Because both the Father and the Son are truly and fully God, there can be no beginning or end to the fatherhood of God.

The eternal relationship between God the Father and God the Son is similar to that between 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. For this reason, the second way the name Father is applied to God 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 a 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.

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 reflect this pattern of spiritual leadership within their own households. This connection between divine and human fatherhood is foundational to understanding the role of a father in the Bible.

In the next part of this field guide, we will identify ways God’s fatherhood is revealed to us to help us recognize the key roles and responsibilities that human fathers ought to carry out.

## 2

# GOD AS FATHER TO HIS COVENANT CHILDREN

Following the pattern of Ephesians 3:14–15 — all fatherhood of God gives meaning to every form of human fatherhood — we will seek to identify ways that God’s covenantal relationship as God 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 are 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, noting how each one teaches us about Biblical 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 not created by anyone. 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.

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Christians are not only created by God but, as we have seen, adopted by God into his family. God is their Father, and they are his children. This covenant relationship offers many benefits and adds beautiful complexity to our relationship with God. But for everything our salvation and adoption add to our relationship with God, it does not take away the fundamental reality of God's authority. This truth lies at the heart of fatherhood in the Bible.

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 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 God places human fathers 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, nor 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, authoritative structure for 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, which is foundational to a Christian 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). This flows into the relationship between 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 of the household. He is

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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 spiritual leadership and faithful fatherhood as 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. Isn't 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 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 broadly for all of creation. Jesus' example of God's provision for the birds and the flowers echoes Psalm 104:10–18, where the psalmist reflects on streams that give drink to animals, trees that shelter birds, and fields that yield food. All of creation is sustained by God's hand. Yet Jesus presses the point further: God's care for his people exceeds his care for the rest of creation. The One who provides for birds and flowers is the One believers are invited to call Father. "*Your heavenly Father feeds*

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them” (Matt. 6:26). “*Your* heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (v. 32).

Later in the same sermon, Jesus deepens this truth by appealing to everyday family experience. In Matthew 7:7–11, he compares God’s generosity to that of earthly fathers. Human fathers, though fallen and imperfect, know how to give good gifts to their children. If a child asks for bread, he is not given a stone; if he asks for a fish, he is not given a serpent. Jesus’ conclusion is striking: if flawed human fathers still act generously toward their children, how much more will the Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.

From this, we learn that provision is a central responsibility of fatherhood. A good father seeks to meet his children’s needs. God’s provision, of course, is unlimited and never uncertain. Human fathers, by contrast, face real limits. They must labor, plan, sacrifice, and persevere to provide for their families. Faithful provision often requires denying oneself comfort, deferring personal desires, and embracing long-term responsibility.

At the same time, Scripture reminds us that no amount of diligence or discipline can guarantee success. A father’s efforts must always be carried out in humility and dependence on God. Work, planning, and responsibility are necessary, but they are never sufficient on their own. Ultimately, provision comes from the Lord. Human fathers are stewards, not sources. Their confidence rests not in their own strength, but in trusting the heavenly Father, who alone is able to supply every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

### ***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 a consequence that is 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.

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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 lightly, 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 be much more 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 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 a 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

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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 and mind (cf. Luke 2:42), the suffering of temptation (cf. Heb. 4:15), and the physical agony, pain, and shame of a

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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. This perseverance lies at the heart of Biblical fatherhood and faithful spiritual leadership in the home.

### ***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

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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 as 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?

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PREPARING FOR  
FATHERHOOD BY  
PROGRESSING IN  
GODLINESS

Being the right kind of father is downstream from being the right kind of Man of God. 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 *likeness*. 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 in accordance with 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

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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) 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 a 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 a 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

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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 faithful 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 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 future water flow; it erodes landscapes; it demolishes structures. Whether you realize it or not (and perhaps especially if you don’t), 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 channels—deep and lasting—to direct the flow of influence according to truth. This is foundational to spiritual leadership in the home and essential to Biblical fatherhood.

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 finding a reading plan that guides you through the whole counsel of God.

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Another means of Scripture intake is listening to Scripture. Many apps include audio versions of the Bible, allowing God's Word to shape your thinking while you drive, exercise, or prepare for sleep. This method is especially helpful for memorization. Scripture can also be internalized through memorizing passages and thoughtfully repeating them. Finally, Scripture should be received through the public reading and preaching of the Word in corporate worship and through family devotions, where fathers model a life shaped by God's truth and help to train up a child in the ways of the Lord.

*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 its 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 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

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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 in godliness, you must be a person of disciplined, 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. 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 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.

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Furthermore, because God designed men to exercise headship in the cultivation and care of creation (Gen. 2:15–16), it is right and good for men to cultivate and exercise the skills of leadership 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.

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A major part of “pressing on” and “straining forward” toward the completion of your spiritual growth and progress involves responding properly to sin. Christians commit sins. But true Christians experience the merciful, though painful, conviction of the Holy Spirit, which reveals the truth about our sin and leads 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 by reading *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 discipleship 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 surrenders to the Holy Spirit and orders 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” in Galatians 5:16–23.

After commanding Christians to be filled with the Spirit, Paul gives a series of explanations of the effects of such a filling. 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 Christian home (v. 21).

Beginning with verse 22, Paul gives his specific instructions for households. He begins with instructions for the husband-wife relationship (vv. 22–33) and immediately follows 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

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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 the 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 language that makes the authority of headship explicit. But that is not what 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 misunderstands both the passage itself and the broader teaching of Scripture. Paul commands husbands to love, not because he is rejecting authority, but because he has learned from Jesus what true spiritual leadership looks like.

Godly leadership is not about barking out orders to get your way. Godly leadership is servanthood. It means that a faithful leader makes decisions and gives direction for the good of those under his care. This is the calling of a Biblical husband and, by extension, of every father who leads a household.

The example of Jesus is stated most clearly in verse 25, where Paul says that husbands are to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Christ did not cease to be Lord by laying down his life. Rather, he showed how authority is exercised faithfully — through self-giving love. 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 the household also applies to the relationship between father and children. In Ephesians 6:1, Paul tells

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children, “Obey your parents in the Lord.” Note that children are commanded to obey both parents, indicating that parenting is intended to be a joint effort between a husband and a wife. 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). This verse places primary responsibility for leadership on the father, while clearly assuming the active and indispensable involvement of the mother.

This pattern follows what we see in Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:18–24, which Paul has in mind when giving these household instructions (he explicitly quotes Gen. 2:24 in Eph. 5:31). Man and woman are both created as image bearers and together are commanded to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28). Yet in Genesis 2, the woman is created as a helper corresponding to the man, while the man receives the covenantal instructions from the Lord regarding the responsibilities of the garden. In the same way, Scripture presents Biblical fatherhood as carrying primary responsibility for leadership in the home, with mothers helping and supporting that leadership in unity.

Paul’s first instruction to fathers is striking: “Do not provoke your children to anger.” This command reveals that spiritual leadership in the home is never harsh, self-centered, or careless. A father is not to lead by indifference to his children’s needs, nor by the pursuit of his own preferences. Just as a husband is called to lead his wife through self-giving love, so a father is called to lead his children by seeking their good as defined by the Word of God. Only after establishing this loving posture does Paul add the positive command: “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

The warning against provoking children to anger is rich with insight. A father’s goal is not to dominate or “lord it over” his children (cf. Matt. 20:25–28), but to guide them toward Godliness. This requires attentiveness. Fathers must know their children—their temperaments, fears, weaknesses, patterns of sin, and strengths. Such knowledge enables discipline and instruction that are effective rather than embittering, corrective rather than crushing.

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All children require discipline and instruction, and all are commanded to obey their parents. Yet the manner in which a father exercises authority requires wisdom shaped by love. What helps one child grow may discourage another. Faithful fatherhood, therefore, demands thoughtful, prayerful leadership that adapts without compromising truth. As we move forward to consider authority, discipline, and instruction in greater detail, this foundational principle must not be neglected: love expressed through servanthood. When that foundation is ignored, every other aspect of leadership in the home is undermined.

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

The God-given position of head 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 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 well-being 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,

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discipline is instruction of a particular kind. Specifically, discipline is 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 its content is 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 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, Biblical fatherhood 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

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imitating God as Father and His 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 of bringing children up in the Lord (Eph. 6:4). While discipline is a form of instruction that uses punitive measures, the word translated "instruction" in this verse refers specifically to teaching with words. Discipline takes place 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, to teach them who God is and who they are in relation to God. The fifth commandment tells children to honor your 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

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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 their parents teach them. 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 reading of God's Word and for some measure of instruction from it. 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 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 teaches that this parental responsibility for discipline and instruction is a burden that falls

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more squarely on fathers than on 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 are 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 aligning with the guidance I've offered here, there are also countless examples of my failure to do so. In fatherhood, as in all things, I have sinned and fallen 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 walking with them in the way; at other times, I have neglected to gather them together for family devotions as I sit in the house.

If you have any experience as a Man of God, 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 Biblical husband 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

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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).

Secondly, the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims the forgiveness of sins and explains why we can call God our Abba 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 of the fatherless.

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# ENDNOTES

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



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