

KEN CANFIELD



**THEY CALL ME
DAD**

The Practical Art of
Effective Fathering



This book reiterates the fact that Ken is the go-to guy for dads who want to be their very best. There is no sharper cutting-edge fathering book in the industry today.

—BILL BEAUSAY, Author, *Boys! Girls! and Teenage Boys!*

Every once in a great while there appears a practical no-nonsense book that cuts right through to the critical issues of fathering. They Call Me Dad is that book. If you want your kids to lovingly “call you Dad,” this book will set you on the spiritual, emotional, and relational path to make that a reality in your life.

—DR. JUDSON SWIHART, LSCSW; Director, Cornerstone Family Counseling Center; Author, *How Do You Say ‘I Love You?’*

They Call Me Dad is a gift to every man who is tired of theory and wants to know what being a great dad looks like. I promise you that when you put this book down, you will be motivated, encouraged, and equipped as never before to become the kind of Dad you want to be and that your kids both need and deserve.

—GARY J. OLIVER, PhD; Executive Director, The Center for Relationship Enrichment; Professor of Psychology and Practical Theology, John Brown University; Coauthor, *Raising Sons and Loving It!*

Exactly the book that today’s dads need: practical and easy-to-read, yet grounded on eternal principles and faith that take a man beyond the ‘see-it, fix-it’ approach to fathering. First-time readers will find themselves catching their breath on the fresh ideas; re-reading will be like taking a breath of oxygen in a long race or game. If our nation is going to outlove, outthink, and outlive the self-serving culture of the day, They Call Me Dad must be the map on the road less traveled. A must-read for all dads.

—BEN SILLIMAN, PhD; Associate Professor and Youth Development Specialist, North Carolina State University

TO DADS OF DESTINY,
who are being transformed
by the grace of another Father
into true heroes of their children
and their children's children and . . .

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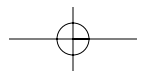
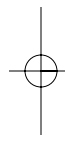
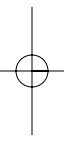
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During one of the busiest times of my life, I was challenged to write this book as a testimony to the transforming impact another Father was having in the lives of fathers across the globe.

While completing the manuscript I have been inspired by my enthusiastic publisher at Howard. The entire family at Howard Publishing, Denny and Philis Boultinghouse, John and Chrys Howard, Susan Wilson, Greg Petree, and their outstanding team have been a delight to partner with. They are committed to serving their authors, readers, and suppliers with excellence. I am grateful they secured Liz Heaney to be my editor. Liz was exceptional in shaping the structure and flow of ideas presented in this book.

Behind the scenes many people have had considerable influence on my thinking, writing, and speaking over the years. Randall Nulton labored a dozen years alongside me before passing away six months ago. He prayed and believed that the spiritual work of fathering would

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have a prominent role in shaping the fathers of this generation. Well, Randall, I believe that too, and this book is my two cents worth.

Brock Griffin has been the consummate servant to me and to thousands of other dads. Brock has collected, refined, and recorded the best fathering ideas for more than fourteen years. I rarely write anything for public viewing without Brock's input and support. So, Brock, we have another one in the can. Are you ready for more?

The National Center for Fathering creates a work environment vital to the entire fathering movement. The staff at NCF works out of a sense of calling. Peter Spokes and Ron Nichols left the corporate culture to pursue their passion, and they have produced much fruit. George Williams and Amos Johnson III are faithfully plugging away to erase the negative influence of fatherlessness from our urban communities. Bea Peters, Cathy Henton, Jeanette Ross, Steve Wilson, Alissa Lew, Lucy Bloom, and Kym Kiriakos all labor diligently, contributing their gifts and heartfelt services to benefit fathers. May each of you be rewarded in intangible ways for contributing to this important and significant work.

Recently Brian Bloomberg and Randy Phillips joined NCF to expand our efforts to engage fathers in a significant way, so stay tuned.

Since the founding of NCF, many others have served for a season and made important contributions. I am thankful for the service of Lowell Bliss, Marshall Hollingsworth, Bernard Franklin, David Warnick, Ken Howard, Ray Mabion, Rahn Franklin, Mike Randall, Karen Smith, Amy Wilson, Lyle Moss, Bill Beahm, Roy Quilice, and Bain Culton.

In addition, the board of directors of the National Center for Fathering serves out of a sense of duty and calling. Each board member has been successful in his field or business, yet they all know that

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

being a dad and granddad is one of their most cherished roles. I am grateful for the service of Blake Ashdown, Joel Jennings, Rich Hosley, Lee Paris, Sam Mathis, Brian Wink, and Peter Spokes, as well as former board members Rick Thaemert, Dana Green, and Ron Rice. Thank you for giving sacrificially with your time and treasures.

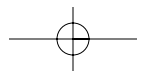
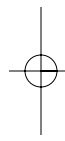
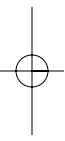
My most important earthly treasures are locked up in relationships. As my mother has said, "I don't know where Ken would be if he hadn't met Dee." You're right, Mom. Dee has been a faithful friend, wife, and partner for thirty years. She has given birth and care to all of our five children. They are all signs to me that this world is in good hands. I look forward to another thirty years of serving with you Dee, Lord willing.

Rachel, Sarah, and Hannah, your character, service, and beauty are a joy to behold. May your heavenly Father provide everything you need in the coming years.

Micah and Joel, you are both stand-up gentlemen. I watch with excitement as the work of another Father unfolds in your lives.

Ted Mabie and Justin Heimer, it's great to have you on the team. May your fathering be filled with the same joy I have experienced as a father.

Finally, to the dads we serve at NCF who continue to inspire and challenge us. May the heavenly Father use this meager text to encourage you as a dad just as He has encouraged me. May His glory continue to be expressed in our weakness, and may His will be done in our hearts as He has modeled for us.



INTRODUCTION



A CALL TO ACTION

See, I have set before you today life and good,
death and evil. . . . Therefore choose life, that
you and your offspring may live.

DEUTERONOMY 30:15-19

Dad, we are standing at a crossroads. Each of us faces a choice about our fathering that will either make or break the next generation.

Consider the following:

- Children growing up in a home without a dad are much more likely to: get in trouble with the authorities, drop out of school, make poor grades, commit delinquent acts, engage in drug and alcohol use, receive welfare, marry early, and go through a divorce as an adult.¹
- Almost 60 percent of all children under the age of eighteen will spend at least part of their childhood living apart from their fathers.²
- In one study 53 percent of Americans agreed with the statement “Fathers don’t know what is going on in their children’s

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lives,” and 54 percent agreed that “most people [adults and children] have unresolved problems with their fathers.”³

- Marie Bracki, associate professor of psychology at National-Louis University in Chicago, observes, “The gang is fulfilling the father role in the lives of youth! There is no use in trying to intervene in gangs if that intervention doesn’t include a father figure.”⁴

However:

- Infants who have time alone with Dad show richer social and exploratory behavior than do children not exposed to such experiences. They smile more frequently in general, and they more frequently present toys to their dad.⁵
- Children who feel a closeness to their father are twice more likely to enter college or find stable employment after high school, 75 percent less likely to have a teen birth, 80 percent less likely to spend time in jail, and half as likely to experience depression.⁶
- A four-decade study found that when dads encouraged their daughters to excel and achieve and were emotionally close to their sons, the daughters were more successful in school and in their careers, and the sons achieved greater status later in life.⁷

The data is sobering. The absence of a father leaves a child at risk, with hopelessness and disaster waiting in the wings. But the presence of a dad, particularly one who is warm and loving, can breathe hope and life into a child. What’s more difficult to track is the impact of a dad who lives at home with his family but has not made fathering a

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priority in his life. While the situation may look better on the outside, over time these dads can cause the same pain as defacto dads.

No question about it: Every child needs a dad they can count on!

I believe that Moses's words to the nation of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land can be applied to our nation today. "Dads, your attention to fathering will either yield life and good to your child, or death and evil. Therefore choose life so that you, your children, and your children's children may live!"

MAKE A COMMITMENT TO FATHERING

Dad, if you do not become attentive and involved in the lives of your children, you are putting them at risk. It is your God-given responsibility—and your privilege—to be the best father you can be to your children.

Perhaps you're wondering if this is even possible because you grew up without a dad or with one who was uninvolved or even abusive. Maybe someone told you that you live under a generational curse, one that you will inevitably pass on to your own children. If so, don't believe it. More important is your commitment to fathering today, tomorrow, and the rest of your life.

For at least the past three generations, the fathers in my family have not made spiritual growth a priority of the family. My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were awesome, law-abiding, bring-home-the-bacon men, but when it came to the spiritual and emotional areas of their lives, they were quiet. When the heavenly Father transformed my heart, I soon discovered many other "spiritual fathers" who brought me guidance in a way my forefathers did not. I quickly learned that God was using these pastors and leaders as His fathering gifts to me in human form. All of them had families of their

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own, but it did not hinder them from sharing their lives with others. They provided the *spiritual care* that I needed.

God will bring men into your life who will do the same for you. All you need to do is ask Him. I am convinced that our heavenly Father will give His wisdom to any dad who hungers for His grace and mercy. Such a father will have a positive and lifelong impact for good in the lives of his children—no matter his own heritage.

This was true for me and also for pastor and writer Frederick Buechner. When Buechner was only ten years old, his father committed suicide. Over the course of his life, he learned that his heavenly Father brought healing to his life in ways he had only dreamed of, particularly in regard to his fatherless past. In his memoirs, *Telling Secrets*, Buechner wrote this about his father's death: "Who knows how I might have turned out if my father had lived, but through the loss of him all those long years ago, I think that I learned something about how even tragedy can be a means of grace that I might never have come to me any other way."⁷ No clear-thinking person invites tragedy to his door, yet Buechner's story demonstrates the *curse reversed*—grace and blessing for forthcoming generations through a heavenly Father whose heart is turned toward His child.

When we invest in the hearts of our children and seek God's best for their lives, we are sending a powerful blessing into our world as well as to future generations. Our influence can be *exponential*. Here's an example of what I mean.

I have 5 children. If each of my kids has 3 children, and each of those grandchildren has 3 children, my fathering choices will likely influence at least 65 people. Add two more generations, and the number grows to 605 people—and that doesn't count the people outside my immediate family that my descendants will impact.

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What kind of influence can we fathers have if we band together and make healthy fathering a passion in the land? Let's assume that at least ten thousand dads read this book. Even if we reduce the number of kids per family to an average of 2.5, we dads still have the potential to influence 62,500 grandchildren and 156,250 great-grandchildren. That's a decent-sized city! Carried out to the fifth generation, we can positively impact more than 1,000,000 descendants. We serve a God who is greater than you can imagine, and He has equipped you to be the father your kids need—starting today.

As fathers we need to promote an ethic, a movement, and a lifestyle that engages our faith and our fathering. This movement calls us to make being a father one of the highest acts of spiritual service, because unless we have renewal, our nation's legacy will be brokenness and suffering instead of blessing. However, if we take action, we can bring life and renewal to our households and restore the land. Our children and their children will thrive, and future generations will celebrate our faithfulness. Our legacy will be rich and filled with hope.

This book is an invitation to leave such a legacy. It's the result of fifteen years of research about integrating faith and fatherhood, and it seeks to show you how you can become a modern-day hero in the lives of your children by implementing nine key practices.

In 1990, after informally studying fatherhood for a number of years, I founded the National Center for Fathering as an outreach to equip today's fathers with the tools they need to become dads of destiny. Our goal is to make fathering a personal and national priority with the vision that no child would go unfathered. I'm convinced that many of today's dads are searching for answers about how to effectively father their families. It's time for a spiritual infusion of the Father's grace to engage dads and prompt their labor with fresh vision, passion,

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and discipline in their households and churches. Ultimately, these dads will have a life-giving impact on future generations.

As fellow pilgrims on the adventure of fatherhood, let's do everything humanly possible to succeed in our role as dads. At the end of our lives, the peace and satisfaction that come from being a committed father will have no rival. At that time we will feel the touch of another Father, and we'll hear Him say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. I called many people to different tasks, but I called you to be a dad of destiny. You fulfilled your calling with excellence. Good work! Come join Me in glory."

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

After reviewing this book, my colleague Dr. Walter Schumm wrote, "*They Call Me Dad* is a firehose experience of information that is best consumed one chapter at a time." I agree. In addition, it has been my experience that processing fathering information is done best in a small group. According to the research done by the National Center for Fathering, dads who are involved in a regular small group have fewer sexual struggles, report fewer problems with dishonesty, and are more connected on a spiritual level with their families. This confirms the many testimonies I have heard over and over from fathers. Meeting with other men for mutual support and encouragement is one of the best investments you can make to strengthen yourself as a dad.

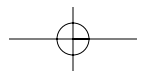
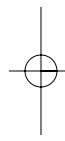
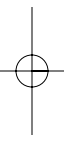
Fathering requires action. It's more than knowing the right information; it's applying that information. It helps when you have someone putting pressure on you each week by saying, "So, what did you do about what we discussed last week?"

At the end of each chapter I have included three tools that can be used by individuals but are most effective when used in the context of

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a small group: a profile titled “Meeting the Challenge,” which has been developed from surveys taken by thousands of fathers over the past ten years, asking them specific questions about their fathering behavior; a set of questions for discussion within your small group or for personal reflection; and a collection of action points that I have collected from other fathers who are also seeking to become dads of destiny.

I encourage you to join a small group soon—or start one of your own. Men who are seeking to become dads of destiny need each other. Dads need other dads who are willing to listen, exchange ideas, provide support, and give accountability to one another. If this happens, a movement will be born.



CHAPTER 1



DADS OF DESTINY

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

For several summers, I had the opportunity to lead groups of dads and their teenagers on a wilderness expedition sponsored by an outdoor adventure organization. It was a five-day getaway from civilization—no cell phones allowed—so dads and kids could renew their relationships while facing challenges together. Not only did they have a great experience together, most came away with a new perspective on their relationship and what's most important in life.

Each day's schedule included a fun and challenging activity, such as hiking, rappelling, or swimming, and a one-to-one dad-child dialogue designed to help dads practice the fine arts of listening and encouraging their kids. On day four, the dialogue focused on the child's goals and dreams. The dads helped their adolescent children set goals for the coming year and then made a commitment to help them reach their goals. Then each dad read a letter of blessing that he wrote to his child the previous day. In addition the dads gave their children similar letters

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from their moms, a friend, sibling, teacher, youth pastor, or other significant persons. That same evening the dads gathered for a special campfire to prepare for the next day's hike to a mountain summit where they would pronounce a specific blessing over their daughters.

One summer on a trip involving dads and daughters, I was struck once again by the profound effect of a father opening up his heart to his child. On the fourth night, as the dads were heading toward the sleeping bags, they were eager but also apprehensive. Clearly, this adventure was stretching them in ways they hadn't been stretched before.

Not one of these men had ever received a blessing from his own father. Most of them came from homes where the father had been present but not connected in a spiritual or emotional way. Nevertheless, each agreed that although verbally blessing his daughter in front of the entire group would be a challenge, it was the right thing to do. Clearly, many of those dads needed to *speak* the blessing as much as their daughters needed to *hear* it. Some of them would take a huge step by breaking the curse of silence in their families; others would take a good relationship with their daughter to a much deeper level.

It rained during the night, and morning brought a chilly wind—not uncommon in the Sierras, even in August. It would take about four hours of steep climbing to reach the summit. En route many of the girls complained: “I’m tired.” “Let’s go back.” “How much farther?” As the hours passed, the tension increased. A few of the dads even suggested that we turn back.

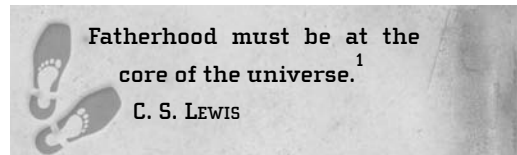
But when we finally reached the top, something extraordinary occurred. The blustery wind suddenly died down, the clouds parted, and rays of sunshine burst through, almost like a spotlight. It was as if we were on holy ground. For the next hour, the air stayed calm and warm.

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Then one by one each father introduced his daughter, shared something special about her, and pronounced a blessing on her in front of the rest of us. Next, all the fathers gathered around the dad and daughter and prayed that God would bring the blessing to pass. As each father shared—talking about his pride in his daughter, her unique gifts, and his love for her—he broke down and wept at some point, no exceptions. The daughters, who had been weary and grumbling, all became attentive and bright-eyed. After hearing her father speak blessings to her, each one was relaxed, talking, and laughing. I still hear from dads and daughters who talk about that day and the difference it made.

That experience—which happened on August 6, the same day the Eastern Church celebrates the Festival of Transfiguration—reminds me of one of the two times in Scripture when God spoke a blessing over His Son. Jesus, in preparation for His final days, had gathered three of His disciples to join Him for prayer on top of a mountain. There He was transfigured and joined by two heavenly visitors, Moses and Elijah. Then a cloud, signifying God's presence, covered the mountain, and God declared, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5 NIV). Through this blessing, God affirmed His love for His Son and that He had chosen His Son to carry out His purpose.

That day on the mountain, those fathers did something similar for their daughters. Though their own fathers hadn't modeled this for them, these dads were willing to be vulnerable and bless their daughters. The transfigured impact was glowing young women with sparkling eyes.



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Above all, each of these fathers made a commitment to forge a better relationship with his daughter and to become what I call a “dad of destiny.” Dads of destiny are committed to being engaged fathers who bring life and renewal to their households so that their children—and future generations of children—thrive.

Dads of destiny father intentionally. They recognize being a dad is a gift from God that requires focus and faith. Dads of destiny are deliberate in setting goals and have plans to help their children succeed, but they also know it’s not just about their desires. Rather, it’s about being a servant to their children, ultimately submitting their hearts, minds, and wills to another Father. And by faith, over time, this heavenly Father will guide His earthly representatives to become dads of destiny in their homes, their communities, their country, and the world.

If we want to become dads of destiny, it will require three qualities or attitudes I observed in those dads on the mountain: vulnerability, passion, and an Abba connection.

COURAGEOUS VULNERABILITY

None of us are perfect. I fail in many ways as a dad, and I’ve tried to be honest and open about that with my family. But since few of us saw that openness in our dads—and being vulnerable and broken runs counter to our own egos and the image of success we try to uphold—the effort to be open and honest can be a challenge. But as fathers committed to connecting and building relationships with our children, we need to take this step if we want to unleash God’s power in our families.

Through the apostle Paul, God tells us not to be concerned about weakness because, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is

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made perfect in weakness.” Paul was so convinced of this that he proclaimed, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Strong, effective fathers admit when they are wrong. They are not afraid to say to their families, “I was wrong.” “I’m sorry.” “Will you forgive me?”

Ironically, confessing our *inadequacies* makes us more able to pass on an authentic legacy of faith to our children. Fortunate are the children whose dads recognize their own weaknesses and limitations and then lay them at the foot of the cross. You’ll gain much credibility with your kids if you can tell them something about your own struggles and even ask them to pray for you. By demonstrating vulnerability and teachability, you will show them it’s OK to make mistakes and that spiritual maturity is a lifelong pursuit. One of the most courageous things a dad can do is set aside his ego, admit his mistakes, and ask for forgiveness.

RELENTLESS PASSION FOR GOD

If you are going to become a dad of destiny, if you are going to be a hero to your kids, you will need to cultivate an inner drive, a God-given passion, to live a holy life before your children, and to prepare them for the challenges of life.

Many dads wilt in the face of the huge challenges. We freeze up or run away, when instead, we should act courageously through trust in the living God. Or, perhaps worse, we let our jobs or other pursuits distract us from what is most important. We may get lulled into complacency and overlook the challenges and changes that are coming in our children’s lives—even though we say we want to make our kids a

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priority. But a dad of destiny wants to be certain that his child has a solid reference point for how a godly man lives, for oh so soon his daughter will be wooed by young men and his sons will be relating to young women and facing a variety of temptations.

First Samuel 17, which tells the story of David and Goliath, puts our challenge into perspective. David was the only one in all of Israel who was willing to fight the giant. Why? Because he was a man of great passion for the Lord. When he got to the camp, he immediately saw that something wasn't right. "Who is this . . .," he asked, "that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (v. 26). Then, when facing Goliath, he risked everything on God. He said, "Today the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel . . . for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands" (vv. 46–49 NIV).

Do you have a giant that needs to be slain? A difficult relationship with a teen, a personal struggle or addiction, or an uncontrollable temper? Sometimes it's scary just relating to our kids and opening our hearts to them. Have you been standing on the sidelines? Have you forgotten that you have God's power on your side?

In God's hands, a shepherd boy has a sling with perfect aim, and a scrawny kid can kill a giant and become a great king. And with God's power we dads can bring healing to relationships that seem hopeless. We can even change destructive habits that have been in place for generations.

Passion is proactive. It makes sure that first things do come first; it leads us to follow God, even at great risk. Dad, what giants are you facing today? Get your sling and rocks! Remember that God is bigger than any giant in your path. All you need is faith the size of a mustard seed and the courage to trust.

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Maybe you didn't come to know the Father until your children were teenagers, and you have many regrets about how you have treated them in the past. Even so, God can bring about His full blessings to your children through your fathering.

Maybe you're seeking healing from a relationship with a father who was abusive, emotionally distant, or absent. Again, God will see that you are not shortchanged, but you must open your heart and by faith cry out, "Abba Father." He wants to bring healing to your life. Your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask. Jesus said, "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? . . . How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9–11). When you open your heart to Him, He will give you what you need to be a great dad, whether it's healing from a rocky past, guidance for a current struggle with your child, or both. He wants to help you bless your children, give them a firm foundation, and create a climate in your home where their spirits will thrive.

If you had a good relationship with your father, you may be wondering why I'm placing such an emphasis on healing wounds from the past. We are all wounded sons, whether the wounds be mild or severe. No matter how great your dad may have been, he wasn't perfect. He had to let you down in some small ways. The gap between your father and an absent or irresponsible father is really much smaller than the gap between your father and your heavenly Father. Your heavenly Father has so much more in mind for you. So no matter what our fathering heritage may be, it falls short of what God intended. The healing agent of God's saving grace in our lives can enable us to be the fathers our children need.

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But we can't be the father we want to be until we are first reconciled as sons. It is wise to reconcile our hearts and lives to the heavenly Father as a precursor for our work as fathers.

A HEART-TO-HEART CONNECTION WITH ABBA

Less than a week after God had blessed Him, Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, wrestling with God over His forthcoming arrest and crucifixion. Mark records the prayer and cry of Jesus: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). Many scholars and theologians agree that this represents a turning point in the way Jesus wants His followers to think about God. "For Jesus to venture to take this step was something new and unheard of. He spoke to God like a child to its father, simply, inwardly, confidently; Jesus' use of Abba in addressing God reveals the heart of his relationship with God."²

The apostle Paul explained what *Abba* meant in his epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. We really are children of God—"God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). When we cry, "Abba! Father!" the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (see Romans 8:15–16).

Jesus used His relationship to His Father as a model for us to follow. Jesus refers to God as "my Father" twenty-five times in the gospel of John. In doing so, He demonstrates His unique relationship with the Father, who is His source of guidance and strength. "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these" (John 5:19–20 NIV).

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Later, Jesus introduced a new facet of the father/son relationship to the disciples. At the tomb, He tells Mary Magdalene, “Go . . . to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father *and your Father*, to my God *and your God*’” (John 20:17 NIV, emphasis added). This proclamation offers hope of intimate relationship with our heavenly father.

Our Abba Father has demonstrated His love by being attentive and responsive to our needs as sons and our destiny as fathers. When we develop a heart-to-heart Abba-Father connection with God, our own approach to fathering will become attentive and responsive to the needs of our children.

Men, when you open your heart to the Father, His healing and empowering are as certain as the warm rays of a rising sun. And in due time, because of what He has revealed to you as His adopted son, you will set into motion authentic acts of fatherhood.

HEALED HEALERS

I’ve spoken with hundreds of men who were provoked and embittered by hostile or uncaring fathers. Maybe that was your experience. Now that you’re a father, many of those negative memories and heated emotions may have come flooding back, leaving you unprepared to relate responsibly to your own kids. It’s like you have a crippling wound, and that pain should not be trivialized.

However, you now have a heavenly Father, and by His power you can join the distinguished ranks of fathers whom I call “healed healers.” These men successfully work through the issues of the past and move confidently into the future with their own children. They are willing to admit weaknesses, they’re passionate about doing whatever it takes to connect with their children, and they are developing an Abba-Father relationship with God.

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The following poem captures one dad's experience of finding spiritual healing for his father-wound:

*One morning I stood at the window,
made cold from the outside rain,
and rubbed a circle on the steamy glass,
exposing beneath, the pane.*

*Through my circle, I saw my father
climb routinely into the car.
His job would keep him distant,
his work would take him far.*

*"Of course your father loves you.
Can't you see how he provides?
Just accept," my mother told me,
"that he keeps his love inside."*

*So I, too, learned the business
and made love a transactional art.
I sold my grades to buy his time.
I played sports to buy his heart.*

*Yet, I imagine that once my father
made his own circles on the pane.
I know his dad had left him.
He had not heard from him again.*

*And I imagine that, in his young heart,
he had made a solemn vow:
He would love his sons and give them time;
he would break the cycle now.*

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*Yet despite his noble ambition,
my dad, too, soon became
another father, the circle unbroken,
the patterns still the same.*

*So as time passed by and our numbers grew,
I left home in my own car.
I never returned to mend the fences.
I never returned to start.*

*I never returned to share the pain I felt inside
and the grief I had learned to stuff.
No, it was more than I could handle,
but less than I could bluff.*

*Still, something inside me beckoned,
for I, too, had come of age.
I now had children of my own
that I had begun to encage.*

*No longer a boy, still I desired
a father's voice accepting of me.
Too often I wanted to scream and shout.
Too often I wanted to flee.*

*It was time to go, and wisely so,
to find that for which I yearned.
I couldn't make sense amidst the pretense
until I finally learned*

*That once, two thousand years ago,
the sky burst forth in rain.*

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*It was a Son who had gone to work,
and a Father who felt the pain.*

*It was His whisper that drew me close,
a voice that caused no shame.*

*I found the Father of my great search,
and Abba is His name.³*

The pain created by imperfect fathers is passed from generation to generation, but you can be the one to break the cycle. As you draw close to your Abba-Father, you will find the strength and faith to become a dad of destiny who makes a positive difference for generations to come.

I know men who lay their lives on the line for their kids, seeking to leave a legacy of love and grace. Their commitment to fatherhood, first as a son and then as a father, fashions them into healed healers. Simply defined, a healed healer is a dad who recognizes his weakness as the basis for his strength. By being transparent and vulnerable, he finds healing through the competence of another Father. Dads who recognize their weaknesses are more likely to reach out and ask for wisdom from above.

Healed healers are positioned to become healers for their children and for generations to come. And healed healers become the models of authentic fatherhood for their family and community in a simple yet profound way.

PREVIEWING THE PLAN

If we are going to restore fragile families and give our children the foundation they need, we can't settle for imitating the world or even merely surviving in the world. A dad of destiny understands that his

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call to be a father is a supreme act of spiritual service. He accepts the challenge in Romans 12:2, where Paul urges us not to conform to the world but to be transformed—in a way transfigured, by the love of our heavenly Father—so that we can demonstrate the good and acceptable will of God. To do so we need a new paradigm for fathering.

This paradigm is simple. It incorporates both sacred and scholarly insights and is designed to be a bugle call to arms for dads of destiny. Dad, I want to challenge you to cast a vision for your children's future by showing them how to *outlove the world*, *outthink the world*, and *outlive the world*.

We can *outlove* this world because the Father can give us His heart of compassion. One of the most loving gifts we have to share with others is the grace to forgive. God knows your sins and my sins, and He forgives them—as far as the east is from the west (see Psalm 103:12). He desires that we live like Him and extend His love and forgiveness to others. The world will know who we are and whose we are, by our love.

We can *outthink* the world because as devoted, obedient followers of Christ, we have something that even the most brilliant minds of the world can never grasp. We have the mind of Jesus, complete with His wisdom, insight, and wit.

We can *outlive* the world because we have the Holy Spirit, who can empower us. Sure, we're still human. We'll get sick and eventually die, but we're living with a new strength from above, and the quality of our life and our children's lives can set us apart from the rest of the world.

Now, you might say, "I'm no Einstein or Harvard grad. I'm just trying to get by. How do I outthink this world?" Or, "How am I going to outlive the world when I struggle with the same things everyone else does?" Maybe you have an addiction or a volatile

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temper or materialistic tendencies. Or, when it comes to love, “Dr. Canfield, don’t ask me to step out of my comfort zone and reach out to an unfathered child.” Or, “Don’t tell me I have to forgive someone who hurt me really bad. You don’t understand being abandoned and the pain that left in my life.”

It’s true—I *don’t* understand your situation, but I know what God has done in my life and in the lives of so many friends and colleagues. So, as a fellow father, like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread, I’m hoping to share what I’ve discovered. Throughout this book, I’ll give you many ideas for how you can help your kids outlove, outthink, and outlive the world.

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MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Commitment

A dad of destiny maintains a high level of motivation in his fathering and draws confidence from his role as dad. He claims his children verbally, resolves to always act on their behalf, and regularly invests his time, energy, and resources in their lives, giving them a high place on his list of priorities.

INSTRUCTIONS:

On a scale of 1 to 5, rank the accuracy of the following statements. Then add your scores and plot your total on the scale below. (You may want to have your child's mother or someone who knows you well take the survey and then compare their answers to yours. If your child no longer lives at home, score yourself as you remember your involvement.)

- 5 = Mostly True
- 4 = Somewhat True
- 3 = Undecided
- 2 = Somewhat False
- 1 = Mostly False

- 1. I avoid action in fathering my children.
 - 2. I tend to delay doing the things I know I should do as a father.
 - 3. I have difficulty in being motivated to do my fathering tasks.
 - 4. It is hard for me to get going in my fathering role.
 - 5. I rarely have time to play games with my children.
 - 6. My children and I seldom have time to work together.
 - 7. I rarely spend time with my children.
- TOTAL

PLOT YOUR SCORE:

35	25	19	13	9	7
VERY POOR	POOR	AVERAGE	GOOD	VERY GOOD	

(The scale is not uniform because it is based on norms from a study of 1,650 fathers.⁴)
 This is a reverse scale as the questions have been worded negatively.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

As you consider how you scored on this inventory, think about the following questions or discuss them with some other fathers.

1. How did your father express his commitment to you? How did it make you feel?
2. What steps do you need to take to improve your communication with your children?
3. What are some specific things you can do to maintain your commitment to fathering?
4. Describe a man whom you consider to be a highly committed father. What makes him a good dad?
5. What sacrifices have you made—or do you need to make—for the sake of your kids?

ACTION POINTS

Choose one of the following action points and commit to doing it before you go on to the next chapter (or your next group meeting).

1. Skim through the gospel of John and identify ten times where Jesus refers to “my Father.”
2. Ask your child what she’d like to do when she grows up and then set your own goals for how to help her.
3. Ask your wife or someone else who knows you well to suggest one area in which your fathering could use improvement.
4. When you go to work after hours, arrange for your children to come along.

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5. Seek out an older father and ask him about the greatest struggle he has faced in his fathering and how he has handled it.
6. Skip lunch one day a week to pray for your children.
7. Ask your child what he likes to do with you and set a date to do that together.
8. Surround yourself with visual reminders of your commitment: photographs, your child's artwork, "World's Best Dad" mugs, T-shirts, and hats.
9. Be a chaperone at your child's next school function.
10. Find another man whom you can encourage in his fathering—and then do it.

