



You are Called to Be a Dad

What Do You Do Now?

7 Keys to Effective Fathering

By Mark Neese

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Welcome to a message created specifically for fathers!

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God has placed a call on your life.

It is encouraging to know you are pursuing the call God has placed upon you as a dad. It is my prayer your faith will be strengthened as you discover how seven key ideas may assist you in this process. These key discussion areas have been developed through observing other Christian men and selecting key qualities from their example to others. Before exploring these seven areas, please take time to consider your answer to this question:

“If your children have faith like yours, what kind of faith would they have?”

When I first read this in Max Lucado’s [*Dad Time*](#), I knew my heart’s desire was for my son to experience God in greater ways than I have in my life. The more I ponder this question, the more I believe my influence is grounded in how I focus on developing my own walk with Christ. As I strengthen mine, it will also strengthen his.

Dads, we have a calling that has eternal significance

Dads, we have a calling. Never is this more evident than during the time we first discover we join the ranks of those called “Daddy.” Upon receiving the news, we are a dad, men often take time to reevaluate their lives. Those who understand the truth in Psalm 127:3 recognize the impact of how miraculous the process is for fathers who understand “Children are a gift from the Lord.” **What we do with this legacy has eternal significance.**

As I began to analyze all the spiritual champions in my life, I became even more grateful for the mixture of pastors, coaches, teachers, family and friends who invested in my spiritual growth. Each

relationship invested time to help me mature in matters of faith. I describe them as “What IF Dads”; men who seek to lead their families to pursue the purpose of our Savior and dare to ask the question “What if.” as it pertains to the possibilities of their role as a father. I go into more depth on “What is a **What IF Dad**” on our [website](#).

I combined the lessons I learned from Godly examples in my life into specific areas of growth. As I considered their impact on my life, I placed their wisdom into seven categories, based upon the challenge found in Joshua 24:14 -15. This passage describes how Joshua gathered men together and gave them a challenge stating:

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

When evaluating the depth of Joshua’s decision and comparing it to the lives of spiritual champions who invested in my understanding of God, I discovered:

“**What If Dad’s**” are defined as men who:

1. **I**ntentionally Make Decisions
2. **F**ocus on faith
3. **S**erve God First
4. **E**ncourage Others
5. **V**ow to Forgive
6. **E**liminate the unnecessary.
7. **N**ame themselves and their family as followers of the Lord

Now, let’s take a look at each of these characteristics and see how each may assist in our becoming a stronger, “**What IF Dad.**”

What if Dads:

1. Intentionally make decisions.

Joshua 24:14-15 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, **then choose** for yourselves this day **whom you will serve**, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. **But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**”

Men who assisted in my spiritual growth intentionally chose to serve the Lord and consistently directed me to God and the Bible to answer all the “Big Questions” about life. Psalms 119:105 reminds us, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path.” **What IF Dads** are men who recognize the truth found in the Bible and use it to direct their path and guide their family.

Fathers must be ready to make intentional decisions based upon Biblical guidance. If not, be ready to be swayed by all the world has to offer. Steve Farrar reminds us in [*Point Man*](#) how this is difficult in today’s world where Christians battle for a voice. He claims, “It’s not easy to hold on to convictions when you are a minority. You and I live in a society that is constantly trying to chip away at our biblical convictions. My time in the scripture each morning underscores why I chose those convictions. We are in a war for our families, and we cannot afford to compromise the divine absolutes given.” He reminds us “**A solid education of biblical truth is no option for the family leader.**”

Dads, we have the most amazing opportunity to assist in directing another spiritual life. Psalm 127: 3 reminds us “Children are a gift from the Lord.” We are the caretakers for someone who is conceived as an image bearer of the same God Jacob chose to serve. How we

respond to this image must be intentional due to the continuous invitations from the world to reject God and make ourselves rulers over our own pleasures.

The What IF Dads who taught me to intentionally make spiritual decisions for my life were from New Home Missionary Baptist Church in Royal, AR. I experienced their focus as I grew up with their kids; one who asked me one day if I had accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior. A question which led me to understanding my place in the world. These men were there when I said yes to that invitation and loved me as if I was their own. That's the way it was in our rural community and I see it today with my son and his friends. These men choose a spiritual role and encourage kids around them. I am grateful for their efforts since I am the typical ADHD person who needs to expand a lot of energy with questions and discussions and questions and ... You know, the one who talks in movies and initiates conversations with anyone around them. My son describes me as the man who goes to the store and speaks with everyone and returns home without anything on the grocery list. Imagine me as a kid. Thanks to their Godly example, I knew I wanted to be like these men who make **intentional spiritual decisions** to influence those around them. I still do.

What IF Dads:

2. Focus on Faith

Joshua 24:14-15 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. **Throw away the gods** your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

“What are you doing right now that requires faith?” I often struggle with this question Francis Chan asks in his book, [*Crazy Love*](#). It forces me to examine my life and see if I am operating in my own strength or allowing God to guide me into unknown areas. Areas which lead to growth.

What gods do your ancestors worship? In Biblical times they had names like Artemis, Baal, and Asherah. Today, they are defined with names like, ball (sports), occupations, clothes, cars, reputations. Is there anything competing for more time than your calling to lead your family? This would be your term for the god which steals your time and joy and replaces it with a false sense of pleasure. It is often identified by where your time and money are spent.

Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*” Growing up, I am grateful I was surrounded by numerous men who assisted in my discovering I have a hope and a future. For this section, I honor the **What IF Dad men** God placed in my life who were educators. Teachers and coaches throughout my life assisted in my development of understanding faith. From Sunday school to science class, academics and athletics, I was able to see men who lived out their faith. Never forcing their beliefs

upon me, but were always available when I asked questions. Men who gave up time with their families to instill virtue into the lives of students. Men who shared with me, prayed with me, and encouraged me to honor God. **I am forever grateful for the role played in encouraging me to seek God and serve others.**

One of the most meaningful expressions of Godly faith shared with me by educators was seeing them take the time to pray with not only their own family, but others as well. William Beausay II reminds us in *Boys; Shaping Ordinary Men Into Extraordinary Men*, how, “We must teach our boys to practice prayer as a way of life. And we must teach them that Jesus listens to our prayers. Good prayer is a focused conversation for sharing a relationship with the living God.” **As a father, we should not only be praying for and with our kids, but teaching them how to pray.** This allows us to grow as well. Max Lucado’s question, “If your children have faith like yours, what kind of faith would they have?” is a reminder of the importance of the example we set for our children. If we desire for our kids to have a strong faith, we need to focus on developing our own.

What if Dads:

3. Serve God First

Joshua 24:14 -15 - “**Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.** Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

In his book [*UnLeader*](#), Lance Ford reminds us how “**Jesus, the one and only, is *the* Leader with *the* vision.** The rest of us, even the best of us, are called to point away from ourselves and clearly to *him.*” Our children live in a world which promotes self. They are bombarded with advertisements telling them to make the most of and highlight their personal happiness. It is easy to follow a world so focused on making our kids happy we forget to teach them to be holy. The best thing we can teach our children is how Jesus still confronts us from Mathew 16:24 and says “Follow Me”. **We must choose a response.**

The What IF Dads who were an example of this concept as we shared life together were the Godly students and professors at Ouachita Baptist University, Dallas Baptist University, and Southwestern Seminary. These men boldly challenge peers and students to not be afraid to seek out all views but to then seek out Biblical truth. Their example taught me to not just pursue knowledge, but to also have a compass to guide me to find truth. The consistent discussions of how, “People find what they are looking for.” and, “Figures don’t lie but liars figure.”, continue to push me to dig deeper into beliefs, prejudices, and challenge me to be sure to keep my relationship with God as my goal or something else will gladly attempt to fill that void.

I am grateful to have had relationships with men who introduced me to the concept of how serving God continually calls us to serve others and to uplift those who are suffering. During my time with them, they intentionally invited me to places around the world where I became more aware of the suffering of others and how Christians were working together to assist not only spiritually, but academically, socially, and physically. This is a reminder of what Max Lucado Describes in [*Out Live Your Life*](#) since, “Those who suffer belong to all of us. And if all of us respond, there is hope.” I thank men who encouraged me to seek encounters of cooperation with others I meet and to recognize, **“When workers divide, it is the suffering who suffer most.”**

As fathers, we are called to be sure our children experience our commitment to serving God first. Understanding this priority will assist them in making the same decision. If you asked your kids, what would they say is the most important thing to you? Make sure they not only hear but experience how serving God first is the priority for your life.

What if Dads:

4. Encourage Others

Joshua 24:14 -15 Now fear the LORD and **serve him** with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Serving God intentionally commits us to serving others. In the book [*Crazy Love*](#), Francis Chan asks, “How would my life change if I actually thought of everyone I came into contact with as Christ?” Serving in public education, there are times I see the worst behavior in fathers. My initial reaction is often to focus on their failures rather than on their created image because of the pain they have caused their children and those around them. It is only when I operate in recognizing how we each bear the image of God that I am able to focus on serving the families with love. Love includes consequences and discipline, but is empowered by service; service deserved by all.

In the book [*The Influence of a Father*](#), Tom Lane reminds us, “God doesn’t use our failures to condemn and reject us, so we do not want to do that to our children.” Some of the most frustrating times to be around other fathers is during athletic competitions where I hear them publicly scream out every mistake their child makes. For those who make “Ball” their god, it is evident as they exacerbate their child in front of an audience. Dads, we need to be careful we are our child’s biggest fan as we encourage them to pursue a focus on faith. A faith developed by an intentional decision to invest in a relationship with the One who reminds us there is no condemnation for those who are in Him.

Have you ever rejoiced in the company of amazing encouragers? When I think of the time my life was surrounded by a large company of men who define this word, I am flooded with memories formed by love at Kanakuk Kamps and Doulos Ministries. These men taught me how to live a life focused on encouragement because they displayed this quality as part of their identity. Kanakuk is such a magical place where it is understood we are not defined by what we do, but by who we are in Christ. I am grateful God placed these strong spiritual leaders in my life and allowed me to work together with them as a counselor. They remind me of King David's Mighty Men described in 2 Samuel 23 who would go to great lengths to support one another.

I dedicate the **What IF Dad** virtue of encouragement the men of Kanakuk Kamps and Doulos Ministries. During my time with Doulos, I was able to stay in the home with Dr. Doug Nuenke and his wife Pam. Both have such an amazing heart for ministering to others and I learned many ways I would want to interact with my own children.

What IF Dads:

5. Vow to Forgive

Joshua 24:14 -15 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, **we will serve the LORD.**”

Serving the Lord requires us to change. Change is not always easy, but becoming like Christ is always fulfilling since we understand we have been bought with a price. This new identity requires the type of change which convicts us of the need to forgive as well as understanding when we need to ask for forgiveness. This is the type of forgiveness which rejects the world’s definition of seeking to make ourselves great, but rather, seeking to make God great.

As an educator, I often view fathers who believe their child is their report card. They relentlessly push their children into activities so they can define themselves by their kid’s achievements. Jay Payleitner reminds us in [52 Things Kids Need from a Dad](#) that we need to, “Make sure they know you love them for who they are and not what they do.” Do your kids hear you speak this over them? If not, ask for their forgiveness and begin a relationship based upon the understanding of their purpose, not just based on their performance.

Dr. John Gray reminds us in the book [Children are from Heaven](#) that, “Children cannot learn to be forgiving unless there is someone to forgive.” In a world where we see so many quick to be offended, we need to teach our children to be quick to forgive. I have seen so many who remain bitter and frustrated, blaming others for their actions rather than choosing to forgive and heal. The great thing about this is who we serve sets the ultimate example. Ephesians 4:32b –“ . . .

forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Men, we need to have discussions with our children so they understand Christ’s forgiveness of our own sin. Then, it is possible to have discussions with our kids about forgiveness and what it means to be called to forgive others as Christ forgave us.

Ephesians is also expected to be applied to ourselves. This is often a great stumbling block to believers. Learning to forgive ourselves is often the most difficult aspect of allowing God to truly teach us how to forgive others. It is during this time we recall Psalm 103:8-10, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abiding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”

I dedicate the **What IF Dad** virtue of forgiveness to men who God placed in my life as part of my accountability group in Ft. Worth, TX, where we would meet weekly to discuss our growth in Christ. They were present during the chapter of my life I would not want anyone to read. During my greatest time of spiritual disobedience, they showed God’s love and assisted me in the process of forgiving myself. I am eternally grateful for those men who lived out Christ’s example of forgiveness. God has prepared a source of comfort and healing for these times. Seek it out.

What IF Dads:

6. Eliminate the unnecessary.

Joshua 24:14 -15 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. **Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt**, and serve the LORD.

¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

We live in a world bombarding our kids with the need to accumulate. Families are surrounded by people constantly seeking items which are unable to completely satisfy and never last. Our kids are overwhelmed with technology and information is abundant and available to share all the sick secrets the world has to offer for fulfillment. From the book [*Better Dads, Stronger Sons*](#), Rick Johnson reminds us how, “The Legacy you leave on this earth depends upon the planning you put into it.... That kind of responsibility requires planning and intentional performance so that we are not just flying by the seat of our pants.” What legacy do you want to leave? Your message must resonate above the flattering invitations of the world. To do this, we need to eliminate the unnecessary.

When discussing things to eliminate, consider how John Piper reminds us, “Television is one of the greatest life-wasters of the modern age. And, of course, the internet is running to catch up, and may have caught up.” I recommend his book, [*Don't Waste Your Life*](#) which reminds us how, “We have become almost incapable of handling any great truth reverently and deeply.” It is our job to filter through the information and events bombarding our children and define what is necessary.

One of the What IF Dads who taught me this concept is Mark Baber. Mark was the director of the Baptist Student Union my freshman year at Ouachita Baptist University. He encouraged students to seek God's plan. That type of life led him to serve as a missionary in South Africa. It led me there as a student. During this time I was able to compete with Mark in one of the most exciting events known as the Comrades Marathon.

This was one of the most grueling experiences of my life and I do not believe I would have made the timeline for a medal had it not been for Mark's encouragement. I took a few days to recover and stayed with Mark and his family. I was able to talk with him about his decision to leave so much behind and go to another continent as part of pursuing purpose with his amazing wife and kids. He reminded me that if you filter out all the distractions offered by the world, you can see more of what God is calling you to do. I use his wisdom and ask the same question to my own son as he seeks to obtain his position in life. I encourage him to filter out the unnecessary. **If my son seeks to serve God first, I know he will be OK.**

What IF Dads:

7. Name (Declare) themselves and their family as followers of the Lord

Joshua 24:14 -15 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. **But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**”

There is a beautiful descriptor found in the book [Blue Like Jazz](#). Donald Miller describes how, “There is a time when every person who encounters Jesus, who believes Jesus is the Son of God, decides that they will spend their life following him. Many of you have experienced this. Some may be considering this truth right now. You are unable to take others where you have not been. It is important at this time to consider if your relationship with the Lord is real. A great resource is: [How to Be Sure of Your Salvation](#) by Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Those who name themselves followers of the Lord recognize why S. Truett Cathy states “Children and teenagers seek an identity, a name, larger than themselves to call their own -a family, a peer group, a troop, a team, a company- and they adapt their behavior to fit that group.” His book, [It's Better to Build Boys Than Mend Men](#), recognizes the need for fathers to lead their children into the world of Godly men. If not, we leave them to another waiting to deceive by offering a false sense of purpose and identity. We need to be reminded how our children are not our hobby, or possessions, they are part of God’s purpose and plan and we are responsible for providing them a place and naming them as followers of the Lord.

Ian Coash is another amazing man God brought into my life. He is organized, sophisticated, calm, all wrapped up with a British Accent; like James Bond. He allowed me to be his Assistant Director of the Baptist Student Union after I graduated from Ouachita Baptist University. I was the scattered to his organized, the uncouth to his sophistication, and the storm to his calm, as well as the country slang to his proper British English.

Ian taught me the value of using your strengths and working together to pursue God's purpose. I was able to see his example of naming himself and others as followers of God not only at his work, but at his home as well. His amazing wife and beautiful daughters were his priority. I gave myself an open invitation to drop in anytime and was never turned away. Not only did he name his family for the Lord, but he named me as well. He taught me how God's plan persisted outside of the bounds of just our own family and how we are all created at conception with the empowerment of God Himself. Ian shared how valuable every person is and how important it is to claim and respect life. He taught me to adopt others as part of my spiritual family who have little or no spiritual support at home. This is how the family of God works. It is how our family should operate as well.

While placing the best of what I learned from these men, I knew I would need to develop some form of system to assist me in developing these traits. I intentionally created seven keys to allow for the integration of an activity for each day of the week. **These attributes describe a spiritual family focused action** designed to invoke discussion with oneself or with others. This is a great way for a parent and child or family to place a specific emphasis on daily spiritual interaction.

This is designed to be a guide. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you and your family.

Monday	Memorize Scripture - Take turns
Tuesday	Talk spiritually about what is going on in the world.
Wednesday	Worship – Discuss aspects on how we worship God.
Thursday	Thankfulness- Thank family and others.
Friday	Forgiveness- How do we need to give and ask today?
Saturday	Stuff to eliminate- Discuss what is in the way.
Sunday	Service with the family- Find time for Church.

Thanks for choosing to be a part of the **What IF Dad** Spiritual Support System for our children. I pray it will encourage you as well as your kids. Please let me know if there is anything you believe would assist you in this process.

You can do it, Dad!!

Mark Neese