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Family Systems and Parenting

Fathering Research: Problems,
Prospects, and Potential
Ken Canfield

Internal Family Systems:
A Compassionate Approach to
Healing Trauma, Addiction, and
Experiencing Intimacy with God
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The Wounds of Father Abandonment
and God's Path to Restoration
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The Sturdier the Foundation,
the Stronger the House:
Why Girl Dads Matter
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Parenting Your Adult Children:
Rising from Regret to Resiliency
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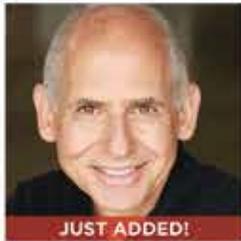
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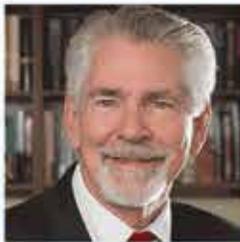
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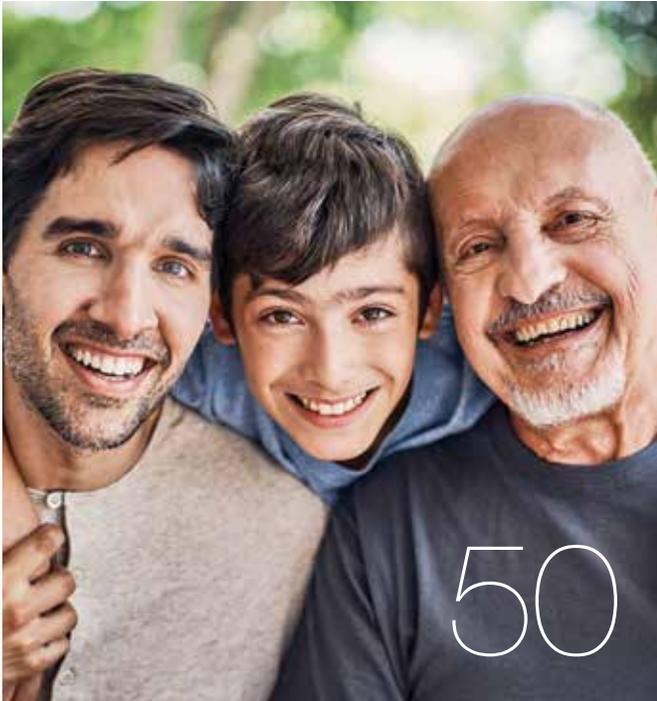
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The Dad Factor: Why Dads Matter More Than You Know



A few years ago, I attended an event hosted by Ralph Reed in Washington, D.C. On that occasion, Dr. James Dobson was recognized for his work by receiving the Winston Churchill Lifetime Achievement Award from the Faith & Freedom Coalition. I will never forget what happened that evening. As he made his way to the podium, he thanked everybody, looked out over the crowd with almost a blank stare, and said something that is etched in my mind. He said, *"I wish my dad was here."* Dr. Dobson was 80 years old at that moment. If you know anything about Dobson's history, you know how significant his father was to him and how important dads are to their children.

I also love to tell the story of the Little League center fielder waiting for the next play. Sure enough, a line drive was hit toward him, and he was not paying attention, so he bumbled around and missed the ball. Later in the dugout, all red-faced, his coach came up to him. The young boy looked up at his coach. The coach asked, *"You know what happened out there?"* The boy said, *"I'm sorry, coach. I was looking in the stands for my dad."*

Yes, whether young or old, male or female, we all look in the stands for our dads. Their influence is one of the most significant and critical components of life. You know why? It's really simple—dads matter.

A Modern-day Crisis

We have a mental health disaster going on today. With all my heart, I believe mental health is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, challenges

Dr. Dobson taught us through the years that we often see God through the eyes of our fathers. I see many younger dads starting to recognize these patterns and step up to the plate.

facing the Church and the world community going forward for the next five to 10 years. Whether you want to disregard it or not, it's real... and it's strong.

Something along this line that really burdens me is what we are seeing a great deal of in men today. Let me share a few alarming statistics:

- More than six million men suffer from depression each year, and it often goes undiagnosed.¹
- Since 2000, male suicides have been on the rise and are one of the top 10 leading deaths in men each year.²
- One in five men develops alcohol dependency during his lifetime.³
- Men are often less likely than women to pursue mental health or substance use treatment.⁴

Anchored in all of this is the struggle many men have with relationships. Too often, a man's identity is based on what he does and what others think of him. Coupled with "attachment" issues, this challenge is frequently present in parents of today's generations. After all, this is the fatherless generation, and we have learned that families tend to reproduce themselves.

Much of my work over the years has been in relationship psychology. I have had the privilege of working with several Christian leaders and professional athletes in this area. God taught me through the years that we

all develop a relationship style for good and bad—how we do or do not do relationships. Lots of it goes back to how we were parented. Breaking this cycle is critical.

Dr. Dobson taught us through the years that we often see God through the eyes of our fathers. I see many younger dads starting to recognize these patterns and step up to the plate. They want to be connected with their children. They are seeing the need to be emotionally present, learning the ability to be attuned with their kids, the ability to understand their emotional journey and recognize their brokenness... to be touched with the feelings of their infirmities like Jesus is for us—those are the fathers who can, and will, help change the predicament we find ourselves in today.

One morning, while reflecting with the Lord alone, I saw an online video of an older man, not Christian, who commented on how we often chase things that really do not matter. One modern-day definition of tragedy is *being successful in the things that really don't matter*. He went on to say, "You know what really matters? Whether or not your kids want to come home and see you when you are old... whether or not they want to be with you...."

Wow... that's a big deal! Dr. Dobson said it this way, "Life will trash your trophies. In the end, all that matters is who you loved and who loved you." God help us.

One of today's most significant

issues is helping dads realize their significance. Our culture wants to take men, dads, out of the picture. In many ways, we have taken ourselves out, but it is time to rise up and step in this moment. The research is clear... dads matter! ✖



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Endnotes

- ¹ Infographic: Mental health for men. Mental Health America. (n.d.) <https://www.mhanational.org/infographic-mental-health-men>.
- ² Infographic: Mental health for men.
- ³ Infographic: Mental health for men.
- ⁴ Infographic: Mental health for men.



Fathering Research:

PROBLEMS, PROSPECTS, AND POTENTIAL

What is the status of fatherhood, and how has fatherhood research changed over the past 40 years? We know all too well the negative social sequelae impacting children who are growing up without a father or father figure. These children languish compared to those with a dad or father figure who is **I**nvolved, **C**onsistent, **A**ware, and **N**urturing—also known as the “**I-CANs of Fathering.**”

Early in the fathering movement, a team of researchers devised several new metrics that assess the I-CANs¹ of Fathering along with satisfaction measures,² general fathering practices,³ attachment, father engagement, attunement, and many more. However, the once-promising field of fathering research, which was rich with resources from foundations and federal dollars years ago, has seen many funders move on to explore new social issues and problems.

Correspondingly, practitioners who have led fathering programming have also experienced funding challenges, yet their commitment, driven by passion, has yielded new understanding and insights. Going forward, both practitioners and researchers realize that responsible fathering is essential *in raising the next generation to be confident and healthy adults.*

In addition, new innovative pathways must be explored as we look at fresh approaches in contemporary research and integrate both the moral and spiritual dimensions of fathering.

The Power of Hope

Astute Christian therapists and researchers have an opportunity to tap into historical literature and sync those insights with the current research on hope.⁴ In Hebrew literature, the word for hope is *tiqwa*.⁵ *Tiqwa*, in a literal sense, means “cord,” and it was used to describe the cord that Joshua gave to Rahab, the prostitute, as he instructed her to leave this cord outside her window to avert the consequences of the destruction of her city.

The word *tiqwa* became one of the common words for hope in the Old Testament⁶ and was used extensively in the narratives in Job. It often conveyed the idea of deliverance from an unknown future, especially when facing the possibility of death, fear, isolation, failure, or loss. Hope was contrasted with hopelessness when despair and desperation reigned.

Researchers and clinicians⁷ have long known that hopelessness is often a byproduct of poor outcomes. It can lead to a frozen, fearful state where people remain stuck until they find ways to start new habits, adopt better outlooks, and begin to move forward with hope.

Thus, biblical hope and the science of hope overlap in many ways. Current research suggests that an essential step in activating hope is developing a pathway or a plan, which includes identifying barriers and obstacles to achieving goals. Without a pathway, hope is wishful thinking or, using Prochaska’s⁸ grid, *pre-contemplation*. However, positive change is far more likely with an established plan that identifies the attitudes, behaviors, and support systems necessary to engage in hope-filled living.

Researchers and clinicians have long known that hopelessness is often a byproduct of poor outcomes. It can lead to a frozen, fearful state where people remain stuck until they find ways to start new habits, adopt better outlooks, and begin to move forward with hope.

KEN CANFIELD



Why is Hope Important to Fathers?

In many cases, discouragement and despair have haunted men in their efforts to be committed fathers, especially men who grew up without a father. At the same time, sons and daughters are looking for courageous, hope-filled leadership from their dads in a world saturated with gloom and desperation. With hope as a guiding pathway—which reigns in negativity and transforms the impossible into a promising future—the deployment of hope-filled fathering is timely.

The following questions can be asked of fathers to help them establish a reference point for hope-filled fathering:

- When you have felt *hopeless* as a father, what circumstances were you facing?
- What *goals* have you determined to be important in your fathering repertoire that you have failed to act on?
- How have you *celebrated* your child, your child's mother, or other family members when you are positively focused on your fathering role?
- What is the *source* of your fathering energy that keeps you going in good times and when unexpected crises occur?

Hope Research Applied to Fathers

After conducting research⁹ (N=1616) using *hope* as an independent variable and relating it to fathering practices and behaviors, four categories of hope and fathering emerged:

1. Hurting and Hopeless Fathering. All fathers will face this demon at some time. It is inescapable and can be related to a variety of circumstances. A dad may be mired in a fathering wound he inherited from his father. Or he may be separated from his child and in a contentious relationship with his child's mother. Dads in this category are more likely to be dealing with the overwhelming demands of caring for a special-needs child or be a dad grieving as his child chooses a path that is diametrically different from his values, plans, or hopes, leaving him assuming responsibility for his child's mistakes.

It is common for these fathers to feel a lack of energy and motivation to keep going—which may be exacerbated by physical, emotional, and/or financial challenges. Dads in this difficult state feel out of control and are also typically unable to be patient or laugh with their children while being more likely to struggle with intense emotions like anger and rage.

Hope-filled fathers are attuned to the spiritual side of fathering, with strong faith connections that their children recognize as authentic. They truly live out their moral and spiritual convictions.

Hopeless fathers benefit from practical tools and having a road map to help them better understand their children's development and unique needs. Too often, they are stuck in negative thoughts and emotions, and it can seem impossible to overcome the prevailing circumstances that inhibit their influence as a dad.

Action Points for Hurting and Hopeless Fathers:

- Complete a genogram with a trained counselor, coach, or pastor
- Identify supports to address his deficits
- Commit to processing issues through self-disclosure (e.g., journaling, counseling, etc.)
- Begin by taking small sequenced steps to be an overcomer father

2. Hoping Fathers. These dads have good intentions and seek to engage, strengthen, and stay connected to their children. Unfortunately, many times, they are preoccupied with other “important” priorities. They are more likely to pursue matters that seem “urgent”—burdened by the daily distractions of life—at the risk of missing out on their limited opportunities with their kids. Well-financed dads may think of ways to buy their children high-quality opportunities at the expense of their own involvement. Fathers in this category often depend on other influences while hoping they will fill the void in their children's hearts for a committed dad.

Goals and a plan are paramount for these fathers, yet if there is no accountability, evaluation, or assessment of their follow-through, their potential as dads will languish. This is where hoping fathers struggle as they often set themselves up for a rude awakening years later—when they finally recognize the error of their ways, but by then, the prime opportunities with their kids have passed them by.

Action Points for Hoping Fathers:

- Identify a mentor/model you can trust and with whom you can share challenges
- Join a small group and be forthright and honest about your issues
- Recognize and identify any barriers to your fathering goals
- Establish benchmarks for growth and accountability

3. Hopeful Fathers. These men have a fathering plan with corresponding backing to accomplish that plan. They know how to fulfill their role, realizing that it must

fit into a mutually agreed-upon plan with their children's mother and other stakeholders in their children's future. Also, hopeful fathers are skilled at expecting problems to occur while exhibiting an optimistic attitude when those problems present themselves.

Hopeful fathers have go-to sources of support that they can reference throughout their fatherhood journey. They read, listen to podcasts, observe, and interact with other fathers who have a track record of success. Being acquainted with helpful resources is essential for these fathers to succeed—they know it and take action.

Action Points for Hopeful Fathers:

- Identify any deficits and weaknesses in your past and present fathering
- Share your areas of vulnerability with others who are trustworthy
- Participate in a small group
- Develop a plan to build strengths (e.g., clarify a fathering plan with specific goals)

4. Hope-filled Fathers. These fathers are not unrealistic in their expectations, nor are they aloof. Instead, they are courageously and diligently utilizing every resource available to keep growing as fathers. They are eager to be involved with other fathers and mentors who become reliable guides along the way and are willing to listen and learn. When problems arise, which they do, these dads are quick to respond with energy while utilizing whatever resources are needed to continue moving forward without excuses.

Hope-filled fathers are attuned to the spiritual side of fathering, with strong faith connections that their children recognize as authentic. They truly live out their moral and spiritual convictions. Hope-filled fathers quickly acknowledge the influence of others who help make their children successful. Additionally, hope-filled fathers respond with humility and applaud their children's wise choices while remaining consistent even when their children make unwise choices.

Action Points for Hope-filled Fathers:

- Be humbled by recognizing and examining your heritage
- Facilitate a small group and mentor others
- Build upon and activate your assets by applying what you have inherited and learned
- Exercise your leadership by initiating, encouraging, and serving your children and others

Conclusion

We all know there are no perfect fathers. We are also well aware that these dimensions of hope will overlap and fluctuate at times throughout the fathering journey. Yet, it is up to each dad to maintain his focus and give his very best to the role.

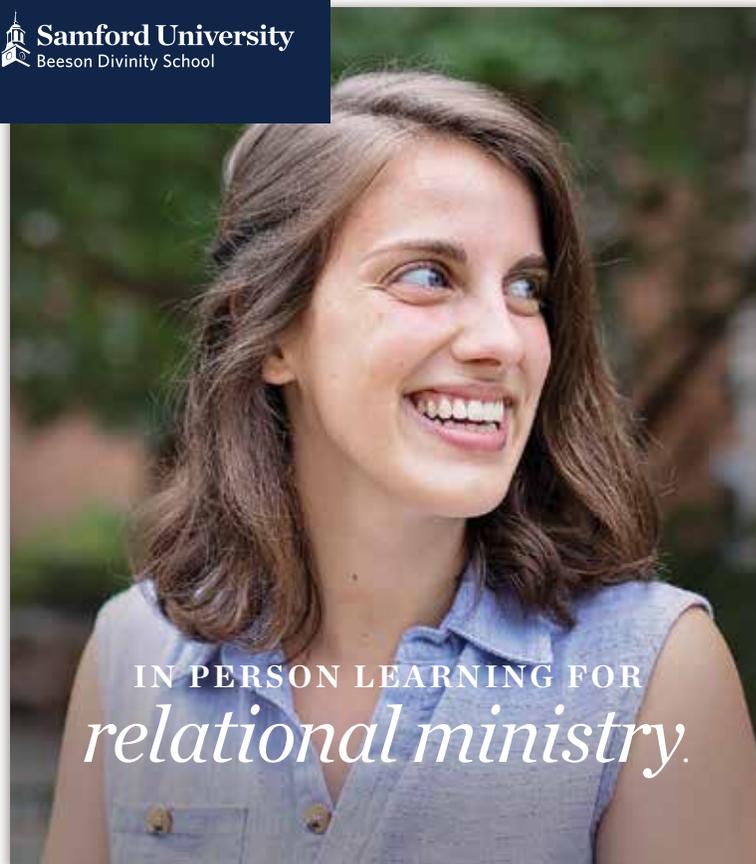
And for those working to bless, encourage, and support dads in your lives or through your practice, remind them of one great place to start when addressing any fathering challenge: the spiritual and moral dimension. As my wife succinctly noted about hope, a **Heavenward Orientation Powers Everything.** ✨



KEN CANFIELD, PH.D., is the founder of the National Center for Fathering, @fathers.com. He has published both scientifically and popularly. Ken is the father of five children and granddad of 16. He also provides leadership to www.grandkids-matter.org. Ken is married to Michelle, and they reside in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

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INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS (IFS):

*A Compassionate Approach
to Healing Trauma, Addiction, and
Experiencing Intimacy with God*

What if I told you that your addiction was *good*? Not the behavior, of course, but the part of you engaging in it. Yes, you read that correctly. The part of you that wants to eat all the Oreos, drink all the wine, or look at the porn. What if *that* part of you was *good*?

What if I also told you that a path to connecting more intimately with God involves *welcoming* the parts of you doing or feeling all those painful things? Perhaps you are like me and have always believed the exact opposite. I have thought the parts of me that were doing and feeling yucky things were bad and sinful, and the way to connect more deeply with God was to faithfully eliminate those parts of me. Of course—just between you and me—it never worked. I still felt anxious and wanted to eat all the Oreos. However, I kept trying to overcome those parts of me prayerfully and never once stopped to think that, perhaps, it was not working because my fundamental premise was wrong.

That is until I discovered Internal Family Systems (IFS) and found that it offered me a way of experiencing God and healing my troublesome behavior that was utterly transformational. It invited me to do the opposite of what I had always done—move toward™ my struggles with curiosity and compassion rather than moving against them.

IFS is an approved National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP), evidence-based modality developed by Dr. Richard Schwartz 40 years ago. Dick was a bright young star in the family therapy world, having written a widely used textbook on family systems therapy (Nichols & Schwartz, 2006). A brilliant systems thinker, Dick was passionately convinced that by restructuring the (external) family system of a client, one could successfully reduce the client's symptoms. He set out to prove this, and to his dismay, he discovered it did not work. Worse yet, they only escalated when he tried to work directly with the client to extinguish their symptoms. In despair, he did the unthinkable. He asked *clients* what was going on. To his surprise, every one of them reported some variation of the same theme—they all had parts at war. One part of them wanted to cut, binge, or purge, and another part of them was furious and wanted it to stop. The more these parts battled, the worse the symptoms became.

He was surprised to discover that we all have an inner family of parts and a core essence that he calls *Self*. In *Altogether You: Experiencing Personal and Spiritual Transformation with Internal Family Systems Therapy*, I offer a “translation” of IFS for Christians and explain that IFS's *Self* is simply referring to the *imago Dei*—the powerful, loving, healing “image of God” that Scripture notes is within us all (Genesis 1:27). It is the conduit that connects us to the divine outside of us and also the seat of our authentic spirituality.

I have thought the parts of me that were doing and feeling yucky things were bad and sinful, and the way to connect more deeply with God was to faithfully eliminate those parts of me. Of course—just between you and me—it never worked.

JENNA RIEMERSMA

The world engages with us in ways that miss the mark of God's original perfect design, and the result is our parts become carriers of this "sin."

Of course, because it is the image of God, it is no surprise Dick discovered that accessing this God Image and inviting parts to be in relationship with it is the key to healing. IFS facilitates secure attachment internally between our parts and the God Image/Self, the same way Jesus invited us to experience secure attachment with Him: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, NIV).

IFS teaches that our Self and parts are all fundamentally good, meaning they bring positive characteristics to our unique inner systems. The God Image/Self always contains the "8 C" qualities (compassion, clarity, confidence, calm, courage, creativity, connectedness, and curiosity), and our unburdened parts (shown in the subsequent graphic, harmoniously surrounding Self) make up our unique personalities.

One person might have an organized part, another might have a mathematical part, and a third might have a humorous part. The Image of God is designed to be the wise leader of all these parts, much like a conductor in an orchestra. The conductor directs, each instrument plays its part, and the result is harmony. People of faith might refer to this experience as all our inner parts being "led by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16).



The God Image/Self is always present at our core, but when parts of us become triggered and take us over, we lose access to it. IFS likens this phenomenon to clouds covering the sun. The sun is still there, but we cannot see or feel it until the clouds move. When our triggered parts calm down and settle (which happens most easily when they feel heard and understood), the God Image/Self is once again revealed.

Scripture offers support for the idea that we are created with many different parts. Genesis 1:26 makes it clear we are created in the image of a triune God (one God with three parts); thus, it stands to reason that we are one person with many distinct parts. We might also consider Paul's famous description of his parts at war: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15, NIV). One part of him wants to do one thing, while another part does the exact opposite. I deeply relate to this struggle. One part of me wants to eat all the Oreos, and the part of me that wants to fit into my jeans is pretty upset about it.

James observes the same dynamic in our interpersonal struggles: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your (parts) desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1, NIV). Also, 1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV) further underscores the nature of many parts within one body: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ."

When negative experiences occur, some of our parts become burdened (covered over) by the impact of those painful events. In the clinical world, we understand that our burdened parts are now carrying the effects of trauma. In faith communities, we often refer to this as "sin," from the most common translation of the original Greek New Testament word, *hamartia*, meaning "missing the mark." In other words, things are not as they should be. The world engages with us in ways that miss the mark of God's original perfect design, and the result is our parts become carriers of this "sin." IFS helps us see that sin happens to our parts because of the world around us "missing the mark" (not matching God's original perfect design) and, once established as a burden, causes our parts to feel and behave in ways that "miss the mark" of their original positive design as well. (For a more comprehensive explanation of topics such as original sin, the fundamental depravity of man, etc., see the *Altogether You* book and online video workshop: movetoward.com.) We are still responsible for our behavior and choices, but this new way of understanding what is causing them offers an effective approach to help them heal.

To get a sense of how this happens, let's consider the example of a caregiver who hits a child for making noise and being messy while playing. This frightening event may cause the child's playful part to become lost under a burden of shame. It's as if a blanket (burden) of shame is thrown over the playfulness. Playfulness is still there under the burden, but the child no longer has access to it.



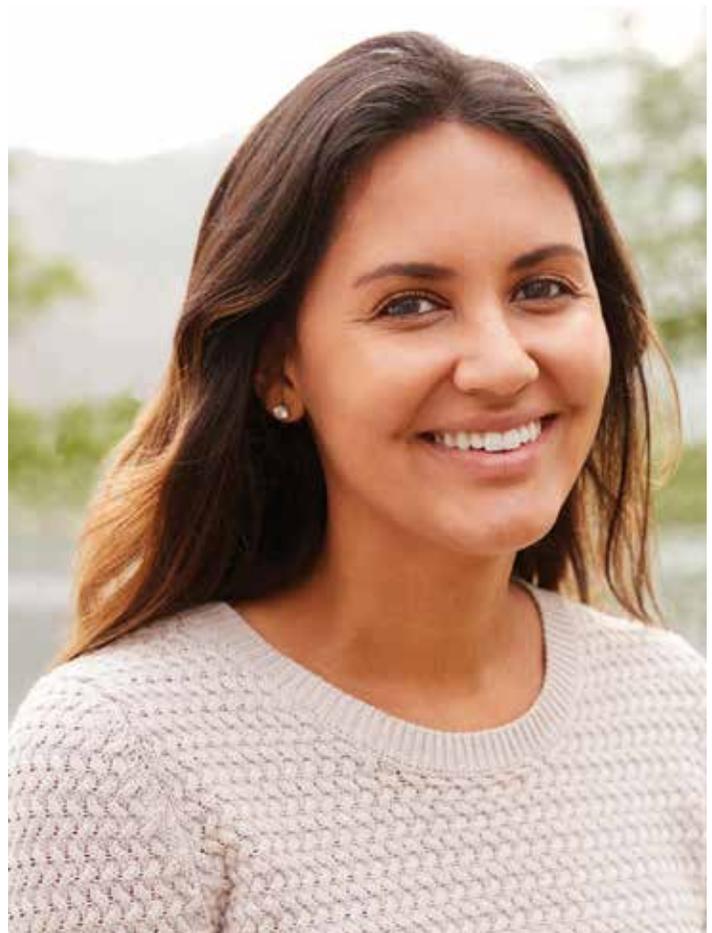
Parts burdened with vulnerable feelings (shame, fear, worthlessness, powerlessness) are in tremendous pain, and it feels overwhelming when they take over. As a result, everything in our inner system mobilizes to exile them.

IFS refers to these vulnerable parts as exiles, and their burdens create disharmony in our inner systems.

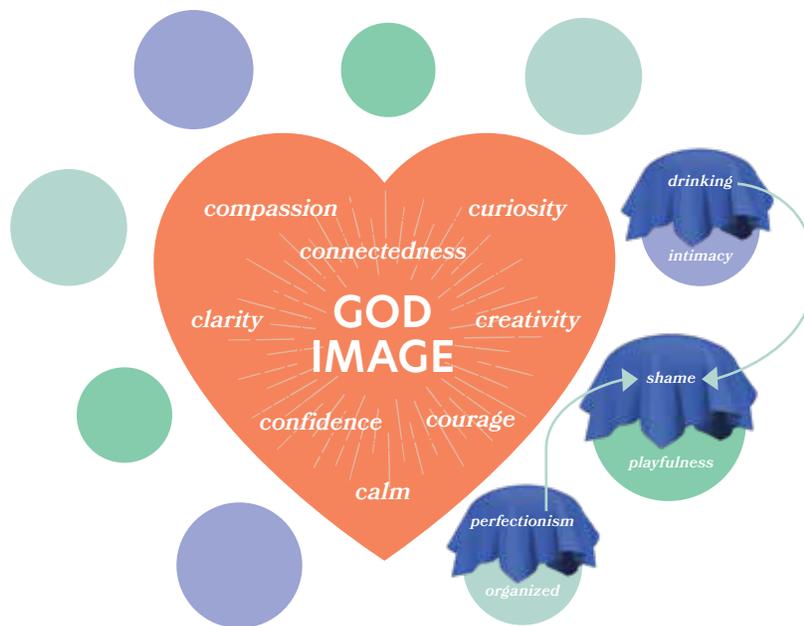


Components that mobilize to exile vulnerable parts in an attempt to protect the inner system from their pain are called protectors. Protectors can be proactive (managers) or reactive (firefighters). Managers take on burdened roles such as inner critic, overworking, control, judging, hoarding, perfectionism, restricting food, and rigid spiritualizing in well-intentioned but misguided attempts to prevent the exile’s pain from taking over. A part whose original positive quality is organization, for example, may become burdened with the job of perfectionism in a desperate attempt to prevent the triggering of the exile that carries shame. What previously was experienced as an easeful creation of organization now feels like an urgent mandate to do things perfectly.

Eventually, manager strategies fail, the perfectionist part makes a mistake, the exile becomes triggered, and the person is flooded with shame (e.g., *“I messed up that presentation. I am such a failure”*). This feeling activates the reactive team of firefighters who rush in to put out the “flames.” Firefighters become burdened with the most extreme and undesirable jobs—all the addictions (gaming, shopping, gambling, drinking, drugging) as well as dissociation, rage, blame, cutting, bingeing, and suicidal and homicidal ideation and behavior.



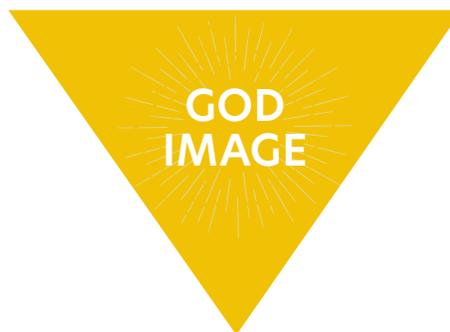
Since only the Image of God/Self has the power to heal burdened parts, when we try to manage them with other parts, the result is an escalating inner war.



A part designed to connect in healthy relational intimacy, for example, may become burdened with drinking in an attempt to soothe an exile's shame (e.g., *"I messed up that presentation. I am such a failure. I need a drink."*). Of course, firefighter behavior ultimately worsens the exile's pain, which forces the managers to get stronger, causing the firefighters to increase their efforts, further burdening the exiles. This ever-increasing cycle, which IFS Lead Trainer, Cece Sykes, maps on a triangle (Sykes, Sweezy, and Schwartz, 2023), is one reason addictive behaviors escalate. As Cece so insightfully observes, "The addictive process is a system, not a symptom."

MANAGERS

Control
People Pleasing
Spiritualizing
Overworking
Critic
Judge
Perfectionism
Restricting
"Get Sober!"



FIREFIGHTERS

Suicidal Ideation
Homicidal Ideation
Self-harm
Sex Addiction
Drug Addiction
Alcoholism
Binging
Dissociation
Blame
Rage

EXILES

Alone, Shame, Broken, Powerless, Afraid, Unwanted, Worthless

Since only the Image of God/Self has the power to heal burdened parts, when we try to manage them with other parts, the result is an escalating inner war. Inner critic and control might work hard to contain the firefighter who drinks, for example, and they may succeed in "locking it in the basement" for a while (e.g., *"I am such a loser. I am not going to drink and make a mess of things again today."*). While it may stop the drinking for a while, this common approach misses several key points: 1) the drinking part, the one who is being asked to change, has not been invited into the decision; 2) the drinking part feels vilified and resentful; and 3) the inner issues driving the drinking part (the shame of the exile and the pressure of the perfectionism) remain unaddressed. We often see these types of locked-down firefighters burst out of the "basement" and take over with a vengeance, which is known as relapse.

Triangle attribution to Cece Sykes: Compassion for Addictive Processes

An interesting side note is that firefighters work in collaboration and a hierarchy. This means that if a manager successfully locks the firefighter who drinks in the basement, others must jump in to fill the void. When you attend a typical Alcoholics Anonymous® (AA) meeting, you might walk through the smoking area and stand in a long line for coffee before you sit down next to your recovery buddies who have all gained 20 pounds in sobriety. The drinker may be under “house arrest,” but the smoker, caffeinator, and eater must escalate like crazy to keep the exiles at bay. If the manager gets tired and backs off (stops going to meetings, calling their sponsor, working the steps, etc.), the drinker will likely burst out. So, the saying, “Your addiction is out in the parking lot doing pushups while you are in the 12-step meeting,” is exactly right. That’s what happens when our parts are at war.

IFS offers a markedly different approach, which IFS addiction experts, Cece Sykes and Mary Kruger, detail in their brilliant chapter on IFS and addiction in *Altogether Us: Integrating the IFS Model with Key Communities, Modalities and Trends*. They explain that people are not their parts, and parts are not their burdens. *You* are not “an addict” or “anxious” or “a perfectionist.” Rather, a *part* of you has become burdened by those feelings or behaviors, and you are much more than that one part, and that part is not its drinking burden. Who you truly are is the Image of God/Self within you, and if a part of you has become burdened with challenging feelings or behaviors, IFS knows the Image of God/Self can help.

The compassionate and non-pathologizing approach of IFS avoids moving against the parts of ourselves that we do not like (which only exacerbates parts at war) and instead invites us to move toward™ them with compassion (in much the same way Jesus moved toward the hurting). IFS welcomes whatever feeling or behavior is present with connection and curiosity (8 C qualities). This causes reactive parts to relax and settle back, which allows the Image of God/Self to emerge and ultimately unburden them. It is important to reiterate that IFS does not imply that the feeling or behavior parts that burdens carry are good or excused; it simply offers an effective way of healing them, which is with love.

In her groundbreaking work on IFS and sexuality, Certified IFS therapist, Patty Rich, articulates the necessity of “inner consent,” meaning all parts are consulted before a decision is made. Think of it like an inner round table where all parts with opinions about the topic are invited to a place of honor to share their perspectives and concerns with God Image/Self as a leader. This means that in developing a sobriety plan (or any decision, such as deciding on a diet, leaving a job, etc.), the parts in favor and opposed, particularly those whose behavior is being asked to change, are invited to share their fears and perspectives. When all have been heard

and honored, the God Image/Self can lead the inner system in recovery decisions and, ultimately, healing.

Of course, there is underlying neurochemistry that interacts with the workings of our parts and must be considered in comprehensive and effective addiction treatment. Both neurochemistry and the IFS unburdening process are beyond the scope of this article. However, with this brief introduction to the model, we can see how both healing and connecting with God are a process of surrender rather than striving. IFS facilitates this experience beautifully.

IFS establishes secure inner attachment between all our parts and our God Image/Self, and for the God Image/Self to eventually unburden the parts so they can be restored to their original positive nature. This healing gently restores the God Image/Self to its benevolent inner leadership role. Healing and recovery are then led by the God Image rather than by parts.

So now let’s return to our original question: What if I told you the part of you engaged in addictive behavior is good? And what if I told you that welcoming it with curiosity and compassion would help you connect with God?

My prayer is that you might glimpse the deep resonance of these possibilities and personally experience the gracious IFS invitation to know that “All Parts of You are Welcome.” ✦



JENNA RIEMERSMA, LPC, is a popular author, speaker, and Certified IFS therapist whose groundbreaking IFS books have repeatedly topped Amazon’s best-selling new release charts. A Harvard graduate, seasoned clinical director, and dynamic presenter, Jenna speaks to audiences across the globe, offering compelling and innovative solutions to the most challenging spiritual and mental health issues of our day. Jenna is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), a Certified Level III IFS Therapist and IFS Approved Clinical Consultant, a CSAT and CMAT Supervisor, and an EMDR Therapist. She is the developer of the Move Toward™ shorthand of the IFS Model. Find her many free resources at MoveToward.com.

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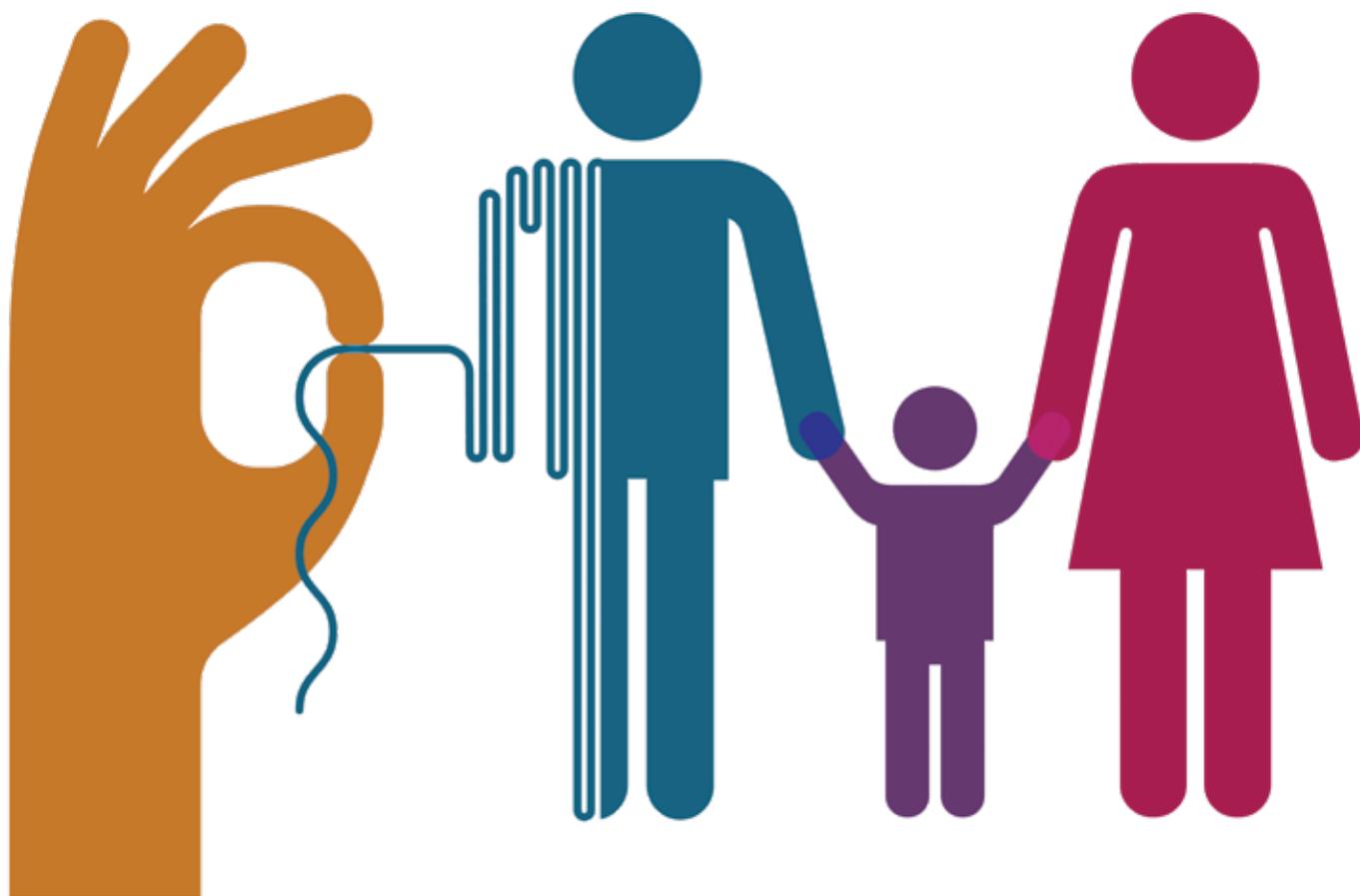
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The Wounds of Father Abandonment and God's Path to Restoration

Whether caused by divorce, abandonment, absenteeism, neglect, or addiction, in America today, more than 25 million kids under the age of 18 are growing up without a father's steady presence in the home.¹

By divine design, fathers are called to lead their families in love and righteousness. When these duties are neglected, devastating repercussions begin in childhood and have lifelong implications. Boys who experience fatherhood abandonment often struggle to develop a healthy understanding of a man's calling to be the pastor, provider, and protector of the home. They are more likely to be overly aggressive, depressed, have low self-esteem, do poorly in school, become lawless and get incarcerated, use addictive substances, and are more prone to suicide.

Here is a truth bomb we must face with intense sobriety: **Fatherlessness is now our nation's #1 societal issue.** Unsurprisingly, we are witnessing a significant decline in our country's strength and an increased spiritual heaviness in the absence of biblical, masculine leadership. Where America hurts, acts out, and is marginalized, you will find at its source broken homes and broken men who, for lack of biblical example and training, repeat a destructive pattern. Generational fatherlessness, left unimpeded, threatens to undergird the rapid decline of God's anointed "city on a hill."

Masculinity Matters to the Creator of the Universe

All men are born with a meaningful, eternal purpose, but too many fall short of their calling and lose their way due to the pain and consequences of being fatherless. Just as the Heavenly Father has uniquely designed the hearts of mothers and framed their natural femininity, masculinity is a special gift from God to the world—to men, women, and children. In fact, godly masculinity fuels a man's growth and accountability.

Our culture today seems intent on removing fathers from the home, feminizing men, and redefining the expectations of masculinity, forever destroying our Heavenly Father's design for the family. How do we restore it? By looking to the Bible for wisdom and addressing the issue at its core. God has commanded two essential steps for the restoration of the father-led family unit.

1. The Body of Christ is called to take up the cause of the fatherless. The local church is uniquely positioned to minister to those carrying the weight of fatherhood abandonment and should be intentional in doing so. Boys and men who have not experienced life with a reliable father in the home often carry low self-worth that can prevent them from fully understanding the love of their Heavenly Father and knowing their purpose in Him.

The Bible is abundantly clear—the Lord called the Church to: *"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow"* (Isaiah 1:17, NIV). There are many ways the local church can carry out this calling.

The development of an effective ministry outreach that recruits and engages mentor men to be champions for fatherless boys has a proven and profound impact on both our communities and the Kingdom of God. Men in the Church must model what it means to be a godly man in this world and help young boys build lifelong values. At the same time, single mothers will be encouraged, knowing they are not alone and solely responsible for the development of their sons as they parent without a father in the home.

The Bible is abundantly clear—the Lord called the Church to: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17, NIV).

JOHN SMITHBAKER



For hurting and broken adult men who have not yet found peace and healing, the Church can partner with Christian counselors to provide a safe space for vulnerability, emotional processing, and the application of biblical principles to heal the wounds of fatherhood abandonment. By providing resources, support, mentors, and a community of believers who understand the redemptive power of God's love, these ministries become a powerful foundation for healing.

2. God commands us to forgive. The burden of unforgiveness toward an absent father can weigh heavily on a boy's heart and become a deep soul wound he carries throughout his life and into adulthood. Learning and deciding to forgive the father who let him down so profoundly requires grit and courage. Even more importantly, forgiveness is a profound act of biblical obedience. It is counterintuitive and countercultural in America today to grant unearned forgiveness, but the Lord God Almighty not only models this grace but demands it of each of His children.

When Jesus taught His followers how to pray, He said, "*Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive anyone who sins against us...*" (Luke 11:4, NIV). On the cross, He prayed for those putting Him to death, "*... Father, forgive them...*" (Luke 23:34, NIV). They had not asked for His forgiveness, but He mercifully offered it anyway.

Forgiveness is neither a feeling nor the pursuit of justice or reconciliation. It is not about condoning a father's actions or pretending that our hurt from loss does not exist. Forgiveness is about releasing ourselves from the bondage of anger and resentment that hinders our relationship with God, limits our availability to fulfill His calling on our lives, and indeed cuts us off from His fellowship.

In the pit of their despair, Satan, the "father of lies," tells abandoned boys (and men) that they need not forgive their fathers for their abandonment and they are righteous and entitled to their resentment and hate. Perhaps even worse, modern

American culture tells the wounded that they should not be hurt in the first place because fathers do not matter that much anyway. More lies.

In truth, faithfully and obediently choosing to forgive an absent father is a declaration that the actions of others do not define us; instead, we are committed to breaking the cycle of pain and bitterness to walk in the freedom of Christ. However justified a man might feel in harboring resentment toward the father who was absent or abandoned him, believers are not exempt from the biblical command to forgive others. Unforgiveness is a sin. Like all sin, if unconfessed and unrepented for, our souls can become crushed under its weight. When we confess it to the Lord, we find healing, peace, and, best of all, the restoration of our fellowship with

Him—ultimately making room for the spiritual growth essential to becoming who God called us to be.

We Must Fight for the Family

A father's role is steeped in biblical truth and does not change amid the brokenness around us. At the risk of our own peril, this biblical model for fatherhood cannot be perverted or redefined by populist trends. It is time to take back God's design for the family and support men in reclaiming their positions as courageous leaders and strong heads of the household to shape future generations of godly men and women. ✦



JOHN J. SMITHBAKER, B.S., M.B.A., is an author, speaker, founding servant of *Fathers in the Field*, and an alpha male activator. His passion and focus are to help men recapture their divinely assigned roles of pastor, provider, and protector in the home, as well as in the Church. He earned his B.S. from the University of Arizona and his M.B.A. from the University of St. Thomas. His latest book, *Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the*

Wounds of Fatherhood Abandonment, is available now.

Endnote

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A 90-DAY EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN DEVOTIONAL

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THE STURDIER THE
FOUNDATION, THE
STRONGER THE HOUSE:
Why Girl Dads Matter



I fully believe we will have a healthier country from the ground up with healthier women. Yet, we can often trace their lack of health to father wounds or voids, which leads me to ask: *If you could lead every woman in your practice toward greater health, would you? Of course, you would!*

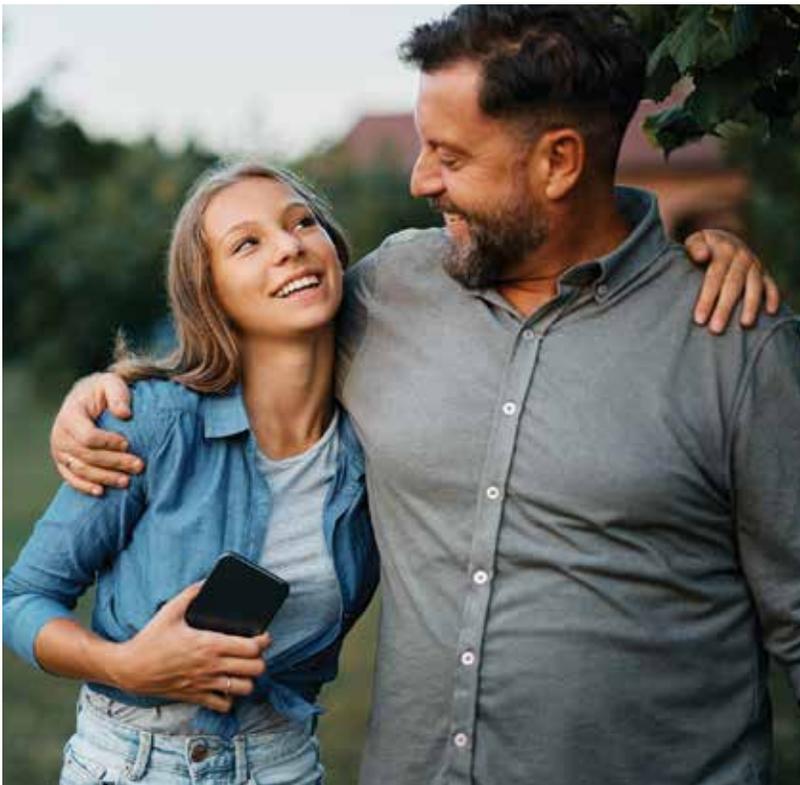
Here is one of my most effective “secret weapons” as a clinician, one I wish someone had told me when I started my career almost 30 years ago: *Invite fathers to join their daughters in sessions.* I wonder why I have never heard much, if anything, about the powerful impact of a father’s presence in the counseling process when he is there with his daughter. Yet, I have discovered that when dads are invited, they show up. They rearrange their schedules, push past fear, and show up with readiness to engage despite feeling unsure. *But we as leaders must invite them.*

According to author, founder, and president of Dads and Daughters, Joe Kelly, *“Fathers are the key to a daughter’s well-being, healthy development, and resilient self-image... and our greatest untapped natural resource.”*¹ However, most dads have not heard this message about being one of the most significant influencers in a daughter’s life. *We, as leaders, must tell them.*

Because men tend to avoid incompetence at all costs, they will quickly disqualify themselves from a deeper connection with their daughters if there is a risk of relational collision. They need to be taught how to lean into discomfort to build, rebuild, and/or strengthen their relationship with their daughters. *We, as leaders, must coach them.*

That is what I have been doing for years with girl dads. I developed a program called The Abba Project, where 12 dads from all walks of life come together for nine months to learn strategies that add more tools to their fathering toolbox and grow their skill set as dads, ultimately benefiting their daughters. Having led different groups of men each year for 10 years, I have listened closely to their challenges and been privileged to be trusted with their stories, heartaches, and victories.

MICHELLE WATSON CANFIELD



Dad-Daughter Stories

I remember when a dad named Brandon called to inquire about counseling for his 15-year-old daughter, Ella. His voice cracked as he shared that she had been cutting and struggling with low self-esteem and depression. Because he courageously joined his daughter for her first session, it seemed fitting to extend an invitation to participate in our closure session.

Later, Ella shared, *“Having my dad there definitely made the session more powerful because it helped me know how much he cared about me and my mental health. It reminded me that I’m part of a safe, loving family; without my dad there, I wouldn’t have gotten that reminder. This helped me connect with my dad a lot more, too.”*

Brandon added, *“I think it’s beneficial to invite dads into their daughter’s sessions. The experience improved our relationship, and I believe it mattered to my daughter because she saw I was committed to her and loved her.”*

Now to dad, Rick. As we were finishing The Abba Project one year, he said something profound: *“Because of this group, I’m not just a better dad to my daughter; I’m now a better dad to my sons, a better husband to my wife, and a better manager at work.”* Rick’s words underscore that when a dad takes time to proactively invest in learning to engage his daughter’s heart, it leads him to healthier engagement in other relationships.

Daughters are God’s gift to fathers to guide them to activate their hearts. This is not demeaning or dismissing what is in their heads, nor discounting father-son relationships; instead, it highlights the incredible value of heart activation in fathers through their daughters. Relational learning inspired by daughters expands a dad’s capacity for emotional awareness and connection—an invaluable gift.

This validates the words of my friend, Dr. Meg Meeker: *“Our daughters need the support that only fathers can provide—and if you’re willing to guide your daughter, to stand between her and a toxic culture, to take her to a healthier place, your rewards will be unmatched.”*²

Research Findings

The overriding themes in research confirm that when a daughter *feels connected* to her dad, she thrives in every area of her life. As a result, she will:

- Demonstrate increased cognitive competence
- Display lower frequencies of adverse behaviors with fewer suicide attempts
- Experience less body dissatisfaction and have greater self-confidence
- Delay her sexual debut
- Report less depression and decreased emotional distress
- Have lower rates of substance use
- Exhibit improved pro-social behavior

For more than 30 years, Professor of Adolescent and Educational Psychology at Wake Forest University, Dr. Linda Nielsen, has taught a college course devoted exclusively to father-daughter relationships. She states: *“Poorly fathered girls are generally plagued with a host of problems throughout their lives. In our society, father-daughter relationships are treated much like the light inside the refrigerator: ‘there,’ yet rarely on our minds except when we open the door in search of food or when the bulb burns out. Strengthening father-daughter relationships has far-reaching benefits.”*³

Biblical Foundations

As we see in research, there is a significant benefit to a daughter when she *feels connected* to her dad, which is clearly a heartfelt term. Thus, it is no surprise that God’s Word emphasizes the importance of a father *“turning his heart”* toward his children. The last verse of the Old Testament declares that if the *hearts* of fathers do not turn toward their children, and children to their fathers, God will strike the land with a curse (Malachi 4:6). We do not have to look far to see the impact of this curse, especially on daughters, when a father’s heart is not turned her way.

Although every daughter needs her dad’s head to turn toward her, I also believe God commands a turned heart from fathers because it is often less intuitive for men and must be intentional. If a dad is unable to connect heart-to-heart with his daughter, he will typically default to only staying in his head, resulting in a decreased bond. What happens when a dad’s heart is not turned toward his daughter? She is more susceptible to believing lies about her identity that come directly from the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Because the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), he has an agenda to undermine the connection between daughters and fathers since this relationship sets a foundation for her connection with her Heavenly Father.

Decoding Daughters

Because women look for reassurance and affirmation from their dads, it is essential for fathers to grasp the impact of their responses (or lack thereof) on their daughters. To support fathers as they seek to understand what heart-to-heart engagement means, the following examples help to clarify:

- If dad laughs at her jokes, she tells herself, *“I’m funny.”*
- If dad discusses politics and world events with her, she tells herself, *“I’m interesting.”*
- If dad asks her opinion about a fact, theory, or idea, she tells herself, *“I’m knowledgeable.”*
- If dad asks her to help fix something, she tells herself, *“I’m capable.”*
- If dad asks her for input in buying a present for mom, she tells herself, *“I’m clever.”*
- If dad applauds her achievements in sports, grades, music, or work, she tells herself, *“I’m competent.”*
- If dad affirms her artistic endeavors, she tells herself, *“I’m creative.”*
- If dad celebrates her academic prowess, she tells herself, *“I’m smart.”*
- If dad actively listens while she talks, she tells herself, *“I’m engaging.”*
- If dad teaches her to say “no” and then honors her boundaries, she tells herself, *“I’m strong.”*
- If dad lights up and smiles when she walks into the room, she tells herself, *“I’m delightful.”*
- If dad respects her opinions about topics ranging from literature to spiritual things, she tells herself, *“I’m wise.”*
- If dad treats her with kindness, understanding, tenderness, and love, she tells herself, *“I’m worthy.”*

Seven Reasons Dads Matter to Their Daughters

Now that we are mutually committed in our resolve to unite fathers and daughters, here is a summation of why girl dads are essential to their daughter’s health and well-being:

- 1. God says dads carry significant weight in their daughter’s life.** One antidote to a broken daughter is a heart-connected relationship with her father.
- 2. When a dad’s heart is turned toward his daughter, she will believe she is worthy of being loved.** The more a daughter is intentionally pursued and loved by her dad, the stronger her core sense of identity and security will be.
- 3. Daughters internalize their dad’s view of them.** The way a father sees his daughter is intertwined with how she sees herself. When a dad takes time to notice his

daughter's presence, he communicates that she is valuable, which shapes her view of herself. Yet, the converse is also true. When a dad is angry or dismissive, his harsh words deliver a blow and wound her spirit.

4. Daughters who feel connected to their dads are more confident, healthier, and happier. As the previously mentioned research states, a father makes a vital difference when he consistently dials into his daughter's heart and champions her as she becomes a world changer.

5. A strong father-daughter bond protects her from influences that seek to steer her away from being her authentic self. Women often fear being rejected or displaced, which can chip away at self-confidence and the ability to step into their true calling. Fathers provide protection against the onslaught of negative influences that threaten to keep daughters from being who God created them to be.

6. When a daughter is known and seen by her dad, she is less apt to look for love in all the wrong places. Instead, she will look for love in all the right places as her father's active presence proactively shields her heart.

7. Earthly fathers build a bridge to God, her Heavenly Father. Though no father is perfect, every dad needs encouragement to be the reason his daughter turns to God as her Father, not the reason she doesn't.

I agree with the prophetic words of my husband, Dr. Ken Canfield, founder of the National Center for Fathering: *"There's a huge opening before us, and I believe God is going to send a wind of renewal right into His kingdom through the dad-daughter portal."*

The time is now for us, as leaders, to partner with fathers:

- by challenging them to pursue their daughters' hearts with intention and consistency
- by encouraging their active participation in bringing renewal and revival
- by preparing them to lead their daughters to connect with the heart of God the Father

Do girl dads matter? *Absolutely!* If you are ever in doubt, be reminded that a daughter is more vulnerable without a father. Yet, her safety and success are more secure with an engaged father. Our collective investment in fathers to equip them to set a sturdier relational foundation with their daughters is a powerful way to support raising stronger, healthier women. ✕



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DAUGHTER IS
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PARENTING YOUR ADULT CHILDREN:

Rising from Regret to Resiliency



“My dad is now doing his best parenting ever, and we are all adults.” My friend, Miles Adcox, the CEO of Onsite, an internationally-known emotional wellness treatment facility, said this as an almost throwaway line. His words stopped me in my tracks. Did he misspeak? Isn't your parenting job done when your kids leave home? I could hear the song lyrics in my head, “Too much, too little, too late!” Or Harry Chapin's haunting words in his song, “Cat's in the Cradle.”

As I paused to consider the impact of my friend's words, I became aware of tears beginning to fill my eyes. In one surprisingly impactful moment, I felt shame, sadness, and regret while simultaneously experiencing a powerful sense of encouragement, excitement, and clarity about my role and relationship as the father of my three adult children. At that very moment, I passionately committed to God and myself that I was taking my intentional, proactive parenting of my adult children to a whole new level! As I felt a surge of adrenaline and dopamine in my brain and body, I now had a new commitment to moving from parental regret to parental resiliency.

I have often lived in the painful ambiance of parental regret. Can you relate? Everyone tells you when your kids are little, "They grow up so quickly." I woke up one day and found those prophetic words ringing and stinging in my ears. I found myself running inventories in my head regarding how time could have flown by so quickly and contemplated how and why I was so often busy, distracted, and simply not present with my children when they were growing up in our home. I knew I had earned a couple of master's degrees and built a successful broadcasting and counseling career while my kids were growing up. We were a one-income family, so I had to hustle and work hard to make ends meet. With seminary, graduate school, and working full time, my best available time was not always at home with my family. Then came the sobering reminder that so often, when I was home, I was out of gas. I wanted to be off duty.

I often played out the toxic comparison scenario, believing most other Christian parents did an awesome job with their children as they were growing up. These "award-winning" moms and dads actually read and followed the best parenting books, seminars, and advice. They were winners with little to no parental regrets. Teddy Roosevelt's powerful quote came to mind, "Comparison is the thief of joy."¹ These words are so true. Comparing myself to other parents did not help me when my kids were young, and it certainly was not helping me now that my kids were adults.

I made every reparation I knew possible with my adult children. I explored the facts and the impact of my fathering, or lack thereof, on them. I asked my children to forgive me. At one point, one of my adult children profoundly, wisely, and compassionately told me, "Daddy, you have made all the amends you need to make for me. Live in the present with me now." I will never forget those tender, loving words of invitation to intimacy and relationship.

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JIM CRESS



Doing your best parenting when your children are adults in no way ignores or minimizes your parental failures in the past. It focuses on actively and intentionally pursuing your adult children's hearts, minds, souls, interests, and faith journey. Be curious about your adult children. When they talk with you, instead of jumping to unsolicited advice, opinions, or counsel, simply be with them. When they finish a thought, pause and say, "Tell me more," or lean in and say, "I'd really like to hear more about what you're saying or thinking." Remember, "listen" and "silent" have the exact letters.

So many young adults are deconstructing their faith systems these days, or they have opposite political views than their parents. This can invite deeper dialogue and intimacy between parents and their adult children. I understand this deconstructing can cause or reveal our own parental anxiety, fears, and regrets. In some cases, the impact of your adult children simply moving from the denomination in which they grew up to a different church or a denomination that you are uncomfortable with may prompt you to feel concerned or uneasy. Decide which hills are truly worth dying on. Be curious, not furious, with your adult children when you do not agree with some issue in their lives. Respect and honor your adult children's boundaries, and do not be a "helicopter parent." Allow your kids the freedom and space to decide how they want to parent their own children. This can be difficult, especially when you feel compelled to offer "free parenting advice."

As a parent, reflect deeply inside yourself and contemplate what your adult children's choices, beliefs, and actions are activating in you. I call to mind Proverbs 20:5 (ESV), "*The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water,*

but a man of understanding will draw it out." Are you experiencing anger, anxiety, fear, or regret over some of the decisions and beliefs of your adult children? Are you living in what the Bible calls "fear of man," worried about what others are thinking about you regarding your adult children? My question is, "What do YOU think about yourself and your adult children?" The "Itty-Bitty-Pity-Committee" inside you will only keep you wasting time and energy in shame. I say S-H-A-M-E stands for "Self-Hatred At My Expense." It is time to remember Romans 8:1 (ESV): "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

I have counseled 60-year-old men and women who profoundly long for their 80-year-old parents to pursue them. It is not too late to be the parent you deeply want to be and the mom or dad your adult kids still need. I am reminded daily of Paul's challenge in Ephesians 5:16 (KJV), "*Redeeming the time...*" Be encouraged. Your best parenting days may just be starting! ✦



JIM CRESS, M.A., LPC, CSAT, CPTT, CMAT, is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Sex Addiction Therapist, and Certified Multiple Addictions Therapist. He is a group leader for Onsite Workshops near Nashville, a national conference speaker with the American Association of Christian Counselors, and a 34-year veteran broadcaster. Jim cohosts the "Therapy & Theology Podcast."

Endnote

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FATHERING AND ATTACHMENT THEORY

“Daddy, I hurt my knee. Can you put a band-aid on it for me?”

“Daddy, my bike chain fell off. Can you fix it for me?”

“Dad, this kid on the bus was making fun of me today.”

“Daddy, can you come outside and play?”

Every father who has heard these words knows how vital it is to comfort, protect, and encourage his children. Each child who has reached out to a dad in these ways has experienced the deeply felt need to know they are loved, safe, and belong.

These themes are at the core of attachment theory, which describes children’s essential bonding needs for their parents when they are young.¹ Attachment theory instructs parents to care for children in ways that build their emotional strength, self-worth, and internal confidence to explore the world.

Children who consistently receive the attentive gaze of their parents, soothing touch, and emotionally sensitive engagement will have the best form of attachment—secure attachment.² These children know that there will always be someone to care for them in moments of emotional and physical need. They also have the settled confidence to explore their outer world and inner landscape because they know a caregiver is encouraging them onward and waiting eagerly to hear about what they are discovering. I enjoy summarizing these two dimensions of secure attachment as follows:

Shelter: “I know that my parents are there for me to comfort and reassure me whenever I am in need. Because of this, I don’t fear abandonment, and I can be vulnerable with my needs.”

Delight: “I know my parents are proud of me, cheering me onward in my physical and emotional growth. Strengthened by this support, I boldly branch out to become all God has for me.”

The Role of Fathers in Attachment

In the early years of attachment research, the role of fathers was not emphasized nor fully understood.³ The founders of attachment theory observed that a child’s attachment style was based on interactions with one primary caregiver, whether secure or insecure, and this was typically the mother.

In subsequent years, researchers focused on the role of fathers as crucial in children’s development by being physically present and promoting children to take risks and explore the world through more adventurous forms of play.⁴ Think of a two-parent family where the mother is more nurturing and the father tries to build confidence by lovingly challenging his children. These complementary roles are vital to the child’s total attachment bond.

In the modern era, we understand that fathers occupy a vital role, sometimes as the primary attachment figure but often as an essential co-contributor to their children’s attachment bonding. This includes physical presence in their children’s lives while also being emotionally responsive as parents.⁵ Let’s look at some practical and distinctive applications of this for dads. These principles can serve as an outline for what clients can do to build more attachment security in their fathering relationships.

Fathers Bringing Shelter

Some dads struggle to bring emotional support, feeling inadequate or anxious when their children are highly demonstrative. Here are some suggestions to equip fathers to provide shelter while also playing to their strengths.

- **Emotional Support.** Fathers can get better at this by simply restating their children’s expressions of needs as valid and stating, “I care, and I want to help make it better.” Dads should regulate the urge to solve problems right away.



W. JESSE GILL



Men authentically show love and meet a felt need when they show up to care for physical health requests and fix things that are broken.

- **Protection.** Most men relate well to this attachment ingredient. They can accomplish so much by staying calm while verbally expressing their intent to protect their children from harm. In rare instances, they may activate and bring physical strength to protect.
- **Practical Helps.** Most men are eager to solve problems, and sometimes this is precisely what is needed. Men authentically show love and meet a felt need when they show up to care for physical health requests and fix things that are broken.

Fathers Bringing Delight

We have all heard the pains of clients who never felt their fathers were proud of them. Delight is a foundational building block for children's self-esteem *and* self-confidence.

- **"Proud of You."** This is a phrase that dads can use to let their children know they see the unique ways God created them, and "it is good." This pride is not rooted in performance but is based on a willingness to try and a belief that a child has gifts to share.
- **Belonging.** This is shared through words, "That's my boy!" or "My amazing daughter!" It is also conveyed through holding hands and tender touch. This lets the child know that he or she is part of a family, deeply loved, and cherished.
- **Risk Taking.** Dads can encourage their children to face challenges, from climbing playground equipment (i.e., "You're so big!") to attempting a challenging piece of music on the violin or tackling math problems. It is not about perfection but pushing yourself and learning from mistakes.

Indirect Ways that Dads Build Attachment

Most children are highly attached to their mothers. Fathers can indirectly promote secure attachment by edifying and upholding mothers. Fathers should invest in their marriages to provide children with a home free from the fear of disintegration and abandonment. Dads can also praise the children's mother openly, uplifting her in ways that help them feel reassured and even more valuable. Research shows that maternal mental health has a profound impact on children's well-being.⁶

Both parents contribute to their children's abilities to see God as a place of secure attachment.⁷ As fathers invite their children to learn about God, they present Him as a valuable resource for shelter and exploration in church and home settings. When fathers embody the attributes of support, strength, and encouragement for their children, they lay a vital map for them to know God as a source of shelter and delight experientially.

Healing for Those Who Had Insecure Attachment with Fathers

"Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close."

– Psalm 27:10, NLT

Many clients did not have fathers who were emotionally or physically present. There is hope in both the psychological and spiritual realms for healing. It is possible to develop a form of earned secure attachment by doing therapeutic work on grieving for the belongings the client did not experience as a child while developing compassion for the limitations of the parents who failed to provide what was needed.⁸ Finally, meditating on the numerous Scrip-

tures that characterize God the Father as constant, caring, and protective can rewire the anxious brain and improve total health.⁹

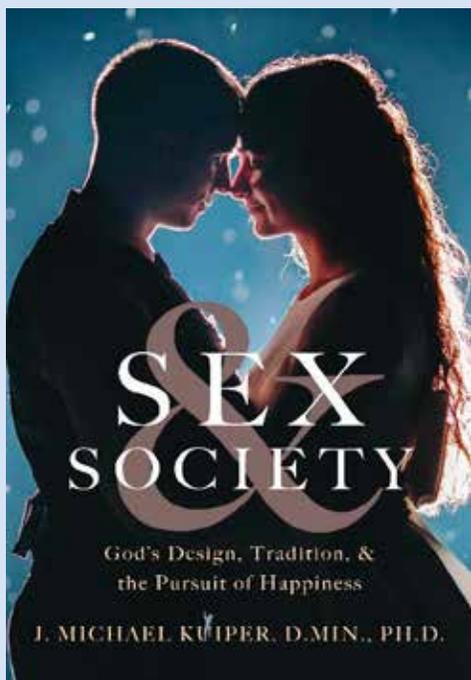
Scriptures such as, "... he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6, NIV) and "When I am afraid, I put my trust in You" (Psalm 56:3, NIV) can become powerful life themes for anyone who needs reassurance of God's secure love for them. Our Heavenly Father stands ready to comfort and strengthen clients who need healing from attachment insecurity with their earthly fathers. ❄



W. JESSE GILL, PSY.D., is a Christian psychologist who practices in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He is passionate about integrating Scripture with attachment theory and applies these truths to marriage, counseling, and clergy care. His book, *Face to Face: Seven Keys to a Secure Marriage*, teaches couples to embrace God's attachment design for marriage (www.facetoliving.com).

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What happened to sex?

Could we have drifted from God's design?

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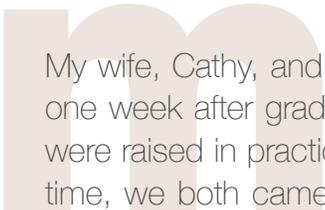
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DEVELOPING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES IN PARENTING

*When Nobody Sent You
to Parenting School*



My wife, Cathy, and I met on the first day at our Christian college, and we were married one week after graduation. I am not suggesting that is a good idea. Neither Cindy nor I were raised in practicing Christian homes. Although we did not fully comprehend it at the time, we both came from classic dysfunctional families. My family system was dripping with alcoholism everywhere you look, and Cathy's was, well, just plain broken. On the other hand, we both became Christians in high school and soon after our commitment to Christ, we felt called into ministry.

As we look back on those early days of marriage and parenting, we both agree that we would not have made it without God's presence in our lives and some very wise counsel. The Bible clearly shows that we inherit the sins of our family all the way to the third and fourth generations. Coming from a family system lacking in boundaries, we found we could either *repeat* those sins or *recover*. Cathy and I put a stake in the ground and committed to recovering from negative family patterns. And that was the most beautiful and challenging journey of a lifetime. The following are two lessons we learned along the way that have helped us develop healthy boundaries in our parenting and personal lives.

Lesson Number One: *Healthy Boundaries Come in Stages*

This may surprise some people, but the bottom line in parenting is not raising obedient children but parenting to raise responsible adults. It takes healthy boundaries and ensuring we are parenting our children at the right stage to help them grow up to become responsible adults. Here is an excellent way to look at healthy parenting stages with boundaries:

Stage One: *Catering* (from birth to two years old). At this stage, you do everything for your children. If they are hungry, you feed them; if they cry, you soothe them, change their diapers, and do all the other things that give them security. There is very little actual discipline, but as a parent, your nurturing keeps them physically and emotionally safe.

Stage Two: *Controlling* (from two to 10 years old). This is where boundaries come into play much more. In the best sense, you are micromanaging your child's life and keeping them safe. You control a two-year-old's actions more than a 10-year-old because they are learning to move from dependence to independence.

Stage Three: *Coaching* (from 10 to 15 years old). By this time, you allow your children to start making more decisions. The early teen years are not easy for parents who like their role of being in control. Coaches are in control, but they give their kids the freedom to fail. Remember that *experience* is usually a better teacher than *advice*.

JIM BURNS



Stage Four: Consulting (from 15 to young adulthood). At this stage, you should allow your children to learn the most from their choices. You are there for love, leadership, support, and counsel. This is where a family system may begin to struggle because older teens want more freedom, and parents are still forcing too much control. Consulting is not rigid parenting that leads to rebellion or being too lenient, which leads to a lack of direction. This is the stage to prepare your children for adulthood; if they do not learn how to make wise decisions, there is often a “failure to launch.”

Stage Five: Caring (Adulthood). A parent’s day-to-day job is done. Talk about a difficult boundary transition. Parents have invested two decades of their lives where they were essentially in control, and now, in this stage, they are releasing their children to adulthood. In other words, they are giving them the “passport to adulthood” whether they think they are ready or not. Parents quickly realize that *unsolicited advice is often taken as criticism*. Enabling adult children causes them to have a failure to launch. When parents and adult children do not have healthy boundaries, adult children often believe their parents do not trust them to become adults.

In a sound family system with healthy boundaries, parents get the privilege of becoming mentors. The relationship moves from a parent-child to a parent-adult relationship, and that is the goal.

Lesson Number Two: They will never know how far the town is if you carry them on your back.

Most parents have pure motives when trying to help their children. However, sometimes, it is difficult for parents to distinguish between helping and enabling. They might be enabling dependency when they

should be giving the child more freedom. A couple came into my office with their 21-year-old son. The presenting problem was the son was not acting like a responsible adult. During the conversation, the parents told me that their son was a very capable student but lacked motivation. At the same time, they allowed him to move back home and gave him their credit card for food, gas, and fun. The mom cooked a vegan meal for him most days and then made another meal for the rest of the family. She made his bed. The dad wanted him to get a job but subsidized this young man's finances.

Finally, the dad blurted out, "Sean has a problem!" I replied, "Actually, I think you and your wife also have a problem. Sean has a very good life at home. You are taking care of him. If I were Sean, I might not be motivated to get a job either. You need to negotiate some boundaries here."

Here are some helpful phrases when setting boundaries:

"You earned it." We must allow children to experience the negative outcomes and consequences of poor decisions. This is how they learn that behaviors have consequences. All choices have consequences. The sooner kids learn this, the sooner they will be ready to move to the next stage of life and eventually toward healthy adulthood. This means that "helicopter parents" need to land the helicopter!

"You can choose the pain of discipline or the pain of regret." Kids need to understand there will be pain in life. When parents enable their children, they take away the opportunity for them to grow in self-discipline. Paul's advice to Timothy was excellent in 1 Timothy 4:7b (NASB), "... *discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.*" Not allowing children to learn the pain of discipline even affects their spiritual lives.

"Use tough love." This does not mean parents need to be mean or angry. Tough love simply means that parents allow the consequences of poor choices to happen. It is not the time to bail them out of their consequences but rather show empathy as they live with those circumstances. That is a healthy boundary. Over the years, Cathy and I had to learn a couple of phrases that helped us out with tough love. "I feel your pain." You are not taking away their pain, but you are showing empathy. Here is one when disciplining kids, "If I were your age, I might feel the same way, but *nevertheless...*" Nevertheless means, *I understand, but I am the leader in this relationship, and this is how it is going to be.* Kids still need parental leadership.

Nobody sent us to parenting school, and most of us did not grow up with healthy boundaries being modeled. We cannot expect our children to create boundaries. That responsibility is firmly planted in our role as parents. Broken family systems need boundaries, and the good news is that learning new behaviors can bring healing and hope to any relationship. ✝



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Tough love simply means that parents allow the consequences of poor choices to happen. It is not the time to bail them out of their consequences but rather show empathy as they live with those circumstances.



A “Fathering Theology”: GOD’S PLAN

The Imitation of God: Fathering Anchored in Theology

Billy Graham once said, “A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed, and yet one of the most valuable assets in our society.”¹ Appreciation for this fact helps us understand why the Old Testament ends with a focus on fathers. In Malachi 4:5-6 (NKJV), we read, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet... And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” This points to one outstanding truth—fathers matter and play a vital role in God’s plan for planet Earth.

Like many, we love the New Testament book of Ephesians. Here, Paul challenges all who follow Christ to “... *be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us...*” (5:1-2, NKJV). A detailed listing follows this call to imitation in 5:22-33 of the responsibilities men must fulfill in their roles as fathers and husbands. These responsibilities are a mandate for men to embrace a “fathering theology”—a way of life driven by an intense commitment to imitate the character and actions of God.

Empowerment for the Imitation of Our Father God

Our high calling to the imitation of “the fathering God” should humble us and cause us to ask, “How can we achieve such a lofty vision?” Paul answers the how question by reminding us that God has given us the Holy Spirit precisely for the purpose of equipping us to perform up to the standard established by God in His fathering. God the Father has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing,” “sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise,” and “strengthened us through His Spirit in the inner man” for the express purpose of empowering His imitation (Ephesians 1:3, 13, 3:16).

A Problem to be Addressed: Masculinity and Fathering Viewed Negatively in Modern America

If you grew up watching many of the most current sitcoms featuring a father figure, you would undoubtedly conclude that fathers are hardly more than affable idiots with very little expected or required of them as parents. Reflecting on this fact, Dr. Tim Clinton, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, states, “This distorted view of masculinity promoted in the literature of the left in our country is weakening our entire society.”² The demise of America envisioned by our Founding Fathers is inevitable if something does not change to reverse this downward spiral of hatred for all things masculine.

Fathering Theology: A Pathway to Biblical Masculinity

This article develops the contours of a fathering theology. We believe the maintenance and, in many cases, recovery of true masculinity are only possible when men commit through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to the imitation of the pattern for fathering manifested by God the Father in His interaction with His human family. Also, we will examine what Scripture teaches us about the God who is Father, His character and actions in that role, and explore how following a fathering theology may contribute to dampening the current disdain for all things masculine, as well as correcting some of the contemporary views on male leadership.

Our high calling to the imitation of “the fathering God” should humble us and cause us to ask, “How can we achieve such a lofty vision?”

RON HAWKINS AND SCOTT HAWKINS

Fathering Theology: Revealed in God's Fathering Role in the Trinity

It is clear from Scripture that God the Father is in the lead position or role in the Trinity. He planned for the redemption of a fallen humanity and the formation of the Church over which Christ would assume headship (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:9-10). He sent the Son and the Holy Spirit to carry out the various requirements for fulfilling the redemptive plan and forming the body we call the Church. In his book, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, author Wayne Grudem states, "The role of commanding, directing, and sending is appropriate to the position of the Father, after whom all human fatherhood is patterned" (Ephesians 3:14-15).³

In His position of authority, "The Father" leads. Adopting a fathering theology requires that men understand that God has entrusted them with leadership and authority to represent "The Father's" heart and character in the home accurately. The embrace of fathering theology requires that men lead soberly and humbly, mindful that those who follow them will view the character and heart of God through the prism of their leadership. We must not fail here. The eternal destinies and well-being of those we lead rests in part on our embrace of a fathering theology. From start to finish, the pattern we are to imitate is spelled out for us in Scripture.

Fathering Theology: Revealed in God's Fathering of Israel

The Old Testament book of Hosea is a wonderful revelation of the heart and holiness of our Father God. In Hosea 11, we encounter the practical outworking of a fathering theology. God the Father loves His child, Israel, unconditionally and sacrificially

(11:1). God the Father teaches His child to walk, tenderly holding him by the arms lest he fall and hurt himself (11:3). When the child is uncooperative or rebellious, the Father restrains or corrects, drawing the child back gently with cords of love (11:4). The Father removes impediments that could hinder the child's ability to function well and, though superior in strength, bends His knee before the child and feeds him (11:4). When the child reaches an age where he resists and even forsakes the values and practices his Father has taught him, God, in His role as Father, refuses to give up on him, and though His heart is broken, refuses to surrender His relationship with the child (Hosea 11:8-9).

Fathering Theology: Revealed in the Parable of the Prodigal Son

In the book of Luke, we find another example of fathering theology. Like the Heavenly Father in Hosea 11, this father is living out the tragedy of parenting a rebellious child. Living out a fathering theology, he embraces the pain and remains anchored to an unfailing hope for reconciliation with the son who has been lost to his home and care (Luke 15:11-27). The father's heart is turned toward this child; like the Heavenly Father (Hosea 2:14-15), he keeps a door of hope open for his son.

The Heavenly Father incarnates a fathering theology anchored in grace and forgiveness, with repentance and return as the only price of admission. Fathers who incarnate this fathering theology will serve a redemptive function in our culture, raise children who love them and God, and reveal an accurate portrayal of our Father God to a watching world. ✨



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Endnotes

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THE SINS AND BLESSINGS OF A FATHER:

Multigenerational Patterns and Promises that Impact Family Systems

From a systems perspective, few biblical verses seem to capture the idea of imparting generational patterns more clearly than Exodus 20:4-6—familiar verses that speak of the “sins of the father” being passed down to succeeding generations. Yet, what is important to understand is that God’s multi-generational grace comes even in this act of generational punishment. Yes, there are negative patterns that can be passed down, but Exodus 20:6 (NASB) ends with the promise, “... but showing favor to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

This idea, then, of systemic, multigenerational patterns being passed down through negative feedback circles is undoubtedly biblical and, perhaps, seen most powerfully in the story of the three kings pictured in 2 Kings.

First is Manasseh. His list of evil choices is legion, as he built altars for child sacrifice, using mediums and spiritualists to shed innocent blood. Even after his death, he dictated that his body be buried in the garden of his own house (2 Kings 21:18)! Think about that from a systems perspective—what an ongoing metaphor of evil left in your very home for each succeeding generation to walk past! No wonder we see what happens in the next generation with his son, Amon.

As we would expect, *“He (Amon) did evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Manasseh had done. For he walked entirely in the way that his father had walked...”* (2 Kings 21:20-21, NASB). Amon not only replicates his father’s sin; he embraces it. As a result of him living with and surrounding himself with evil, Amon is literally “slaughtered” in his own house after only two years on the throne! Then, just like his father, Amon is buried in the garden of his own home. That is a clear multigenerational, systemic, circular pattern—one repeated and passed down from father to son... and one we regularly see today. Then comes the third generation and Amon’s son.

From classic systems thinking, you would expect to hear the following words of Scripture concerning Amon’s son: “And Amon’s son became King, and he walked in all the ways of his father and did evil in God’s sight”—a third generation embracing evil. Yet, while we indeed see generational transmission take place, it is very different!

In 2 Kings 22:1-2ff (NASB), we read, *“Josiah was eight years old when he became king... He did what was right in the sight of the Lord and walked entirely in the way of his father David...”* (emphasis mine). David? Is that an example of an error in the Bible? Certainly not. His literal father was, indeed, Amon. However, as in Exodus,

here comes yet another example of God’s grace. Because Josiah, even at eight years old, realizes that he has a choice. *History is not destiny when God’s love and ability to change a life are involved.* And Josiah chooses a different generational pattern. He skips back 350 years to choose a godly ancestor to follow and build his life around—King David. He is not perfect, but he is still a man after God’s own heart. And Josiah becomes such a man as well.

In short, we see generational patterns of brokenness and dysfunction passed down in these kings. However, those of us who are Christian counselors can see more. Even if the system we have been surrounded with is broken or profoundly evil, generational blessings and faith can be passed down.

Like Manasseh and Amon, We See Systems of Brokenness Passed Down

It is too easy today to turn to the avalanche of studies and books that reinforce the systemic thinking that says broken attachment between a father and son must be repeated. Search Google Scholar for clinical articles on the impact of emotionally or physically absent fathers on their children. In .05 seconds, I had more than 22,000 articles cascading down my screen.

This river of evidence shows that when a father chooses (or is forced to choose) to leave home or stay home without building a loving attachment, what gets passed down to a child is pain. Too often, it is in the form of increased depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol abuse, physical and emotional struggles, educational pressures, gang and criminal behavior, early unhealthy sexual behavior, and more.

Each of us needs a father’s presence and blessing, even an imperfect father committed to building a loving attachment. We were created for connection. Yet, many of us must look toward someone *other* than our fathers to find a model to change the system we have been a part of.

JOHN TRENT

What we choose to do today will leave a generational impact on our descendants.

Like Josiah and David, God's Love and Blessing Can Reverse the Curse

I have mentioned several times that a father has a choice of building attachment or choosing brokenness by leaving. That is partly because I grew up in the shadow of such a choice. My own father decided to leave my mother, brothers, and me when I was two months old. Growing up, there was a stigma of being the only kids in our grade school from a divorced home. Isolated, alone, and angry, I was kicked out of grade school, nearly failed in high school, abused alcohol, and worse. In short, I was becoming just like my father... and had not even met him yet!

However, during my senior year of high school, I met a man who would become my spiritual father. He was a former college football player and Young Life leader who chose to step toward me, not away. Most of all, he was not afraid to show me his life and told me about a source of "attachment" that was totally life changing. I could have a new life in Christ, much like the picture given to us in Deuteronomy 30:19 (TLV): "... *I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live...*"

That verse ends with the choice we all must make. What we choose to do today will leave a generational impact on our descendants. When we choose to embrace life in Christ, it gets us moving toward the Lord and others. However, the other choice is death, with a picture of stepping away into separation and isolation—the choice on a relational level that my father made with me. Yet, alongside that foundational "life and death choice" comes the option to live out relational patterns that express God's love! We are to choose to *bless* instead of curse. To bless means to "bow the knee"—a picture of seeing great value in the person before us. Another biblical word picture is adding a "coin" to a scale.

However, choosing to value and add to someone's life is not the only choice before us. We can also choose to curse and subtract. From a systems perspective, it can seem like our only choice, if our past is full of brokenness and hurt, is to be like Amon—choosing to repeat a broken and hurtful past. However, we have a choice from God's heart and Jesus' death and resurrection—life over death, the blessing over the curse. We have been saved, redeemed, reconciled, justified, and adopted as beloved sons and daughters.

Attachment theory, which is at the heart of systems theory, did not start with John Bowlby or Sue Johnson. It began when a loving God opened the door of acceptance for us—even those of us who have been treated as strangers or abandoned by our fathers. We may have longed to be acknowledged by our own fathers, as I did, but as C.S. Lewis says so beautifully in *The Weight of Glory*, "The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last."¹

In God's welcoming love through His Son, we can be received, valued, acknowledged, and blessed. Yes, there are far too many fathers leaving their homes and children left to suffer for it. Yet, we can choose, like Josiah did, as I did, and as we all can, to find the source of life and blessing outside the system we grew up in. We can choose another father—a Heavenly Father. We read of Him, "... *the Lord your God was unwilling to listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you*" (Deuteronomy 23:5, NASB).

Do you hear the repetition in that verse? The Lord your God (italics mine) repeated three times. In that verse, can you hear and feel His healing, redeeming, and accepting love in your heart? Even if someone in our past, like a father, acted like Balaam did in that verse and chose to curse you, that curse does not have to rest upon us. God's love can indeed "reverse the curse." Like Josiah, we can choose life over death, the blessing over the curse, and a new father—a Heavenly Father we all need. ✕



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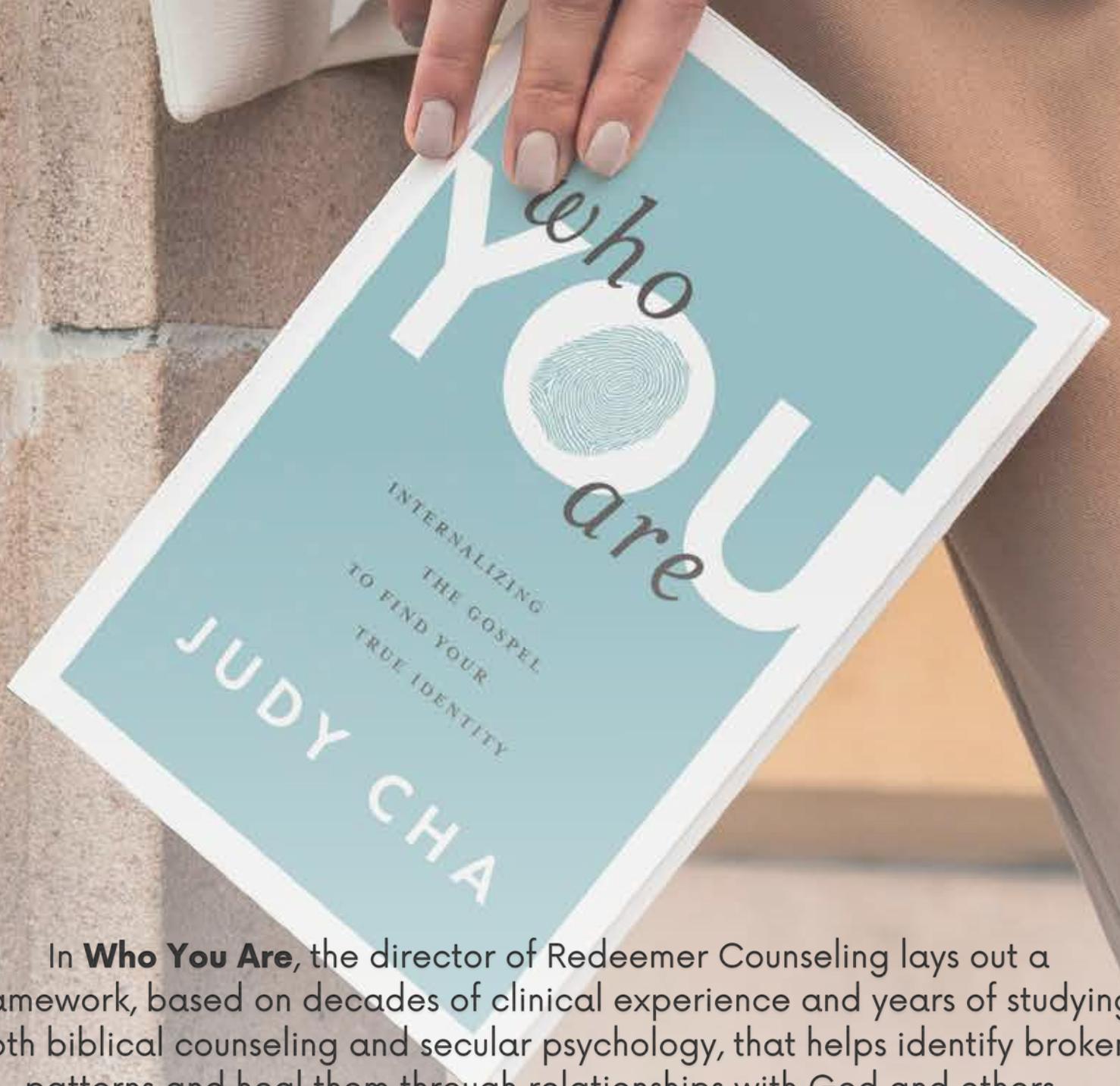
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In **Who You Are**, the director of Redeemer Counseling lays out a framework, based on decades of clinical experience and years of studying both biblical counseling and secular psychology, that helps identify broken patterns and heal them through relationships with God and others.

Drafting a Family Constitution



“The father of a righteous child has great joy; a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him. May your father and mother rejoice; may she who gave you birth be joyful!”

– Proverbs 23:24-25, NIV

Parenting is a journey from control to influence. When our children are little, we make them brush their teeth, eat healthy, and play nice with friends. As they grow, parents can step back from controlling and making all the decisions because their children need to learn to make wise choices independently.

Your love for the Lord is the most important influence you can have on your child. Every Christian parent I know wants well-behaved, successful, and responsible kids who love Jesus. When we started our family more than 20 years ago, my mentor, Dr. Gary Smalley, gave me a firm challenge. He said, “You and Amy need to write down everything most

important to your family. Write it in bulleted form. Call it the ‘Family Constitution.’ It will serve as the core values of your family.”

Challenge accepted. This is our Family Constitution. Feel free to make it your own, edit, or add. Please print it out, frame it, and hang it on the wall. Allow your entire family to be a part of the process. Let it be a daily reminder of your family’s commitment to the Lord and one another.

1. We will love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Matthew 22:37). This is number one. The Lord is the boss, and He will be the boss of this home, and we will love the Lord in everything we do.



2. We will speak words of high honor over each other every day (Matthew 22:38; Proverbs 16:24).

Our home is a judgment-free zone. It will be a safe place to gather and care for one another.

3. We will read and memorize Scripture together (2 Timothy 2:15; Psalm 1). The Bible will be our primary source of truth. All our traditions, emotions, and experiences will be filtered through Scripture.

4. We will pray together every day (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Matthew 6:9-13). Before bed each night, we will pray to close out the day. We will thank God for all He provides, confess sins one to another, and pray for the hurting in our family, church, and community.

5. We will offer grace for mistakes and avoid repeating the same mistakes (Proverbs 26:11; Ephesians 4:26, 32). We all make mistakes. We want to learn from them and move on. When someone makes a mistake, we will forgive them and not hold it against them.

6. We will work hard, give generously, save wisely, and spend sensibly (Proverbs 6:6; Proverbs 11:25; Proverbs 21:20). We will work and give as an antidote to selfishness and entitlement. Jesus is our ultimate

boss. We will live on less to enjoy more. We want to be a family that refreshes others.

7. We will love, support, and serve our church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:25). Faithful attendance and giving to the Church are of high value to our family. We will love the Church as the bride of Christ.

8. We will laugh together every day (Proverbs 17:22; Ecclesiastes 3:4). We will enjoy life together. We want to cultivate a great sense of humor as a family. We want to take God seriously, but ourselves not so much. We will avoid the vacuum of intimacy, fun, and laughter at all costs.

9. We will take 100% personal responsibility for our emotions, words, and actions (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18). I am responsible for my heart, not yours. We will avoid blaming others for our feelings, words, or actions.

10. We will live in the moment, not on technology (2 Corinthians 10:5). We will not miss the important moments for the sake of social media. We will seek permission from other family members before posting private moments. Above all else, we will limit the time we spend staring at a screen.

Do not just read the Family Constitution; live it. Look up the included passages of Scripture and meditate upon them together. Mom and dad, take the lead. Your children are watching and listening. The messages written on your hearts will find their way into the hearts of your children.

By the way, grandparents, it is not too late. You can write one with your grandchildren. Amy and I are empty nesters now, but I know my adult children took each one of these points with them to college and into their homes. I look back with joy at the times I would ask, “What do we believe?” To have my children, Corynn and Carson, answer with one of our core beliefs brought immense joy to our home.

Now that my children are grown, all I have left is influence. The fastest way to squander that influence is to be controlling. I no longer call the shots, but I want influence. For that reason, I continue to live out our Family Constitution. We hope and pray that each line of our Family Constitution will be a message branded on our hearts. We want the overflow of our lives to reflect a deep love for Jesus and each other.

If the goal of parenting is to raise children who love and follow Jesus, then direct your efforts to that end. When they are grown, we want to be able to say, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*” (3 John 1:4, KJV). If you want to experience greater joy as a parent, stop feeding your regrets and ask Jesus to redeem your remaining days. ✦



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Embracing God as Father: Healing the Wounds from Childhood



I am deeply honored to follow Dr. Diane Langberg as the author of this “Looking Inward” column. She leaves a rich and vibrant legacy that I pray I can sustain through the grace and wisdom of Jesus Christ. I also rely extensively on that grace and wisdom in my practice as a clinical psychologist.

His grace and wisdom have enabled me to be the vessel for awe-inspiring changes with many of my clients. For example, I have found that whenever a client enters my office, the subject of their family of origin inevitably comes up. Most share details of family dysfunction and often histories of abuse and

trauma. In addition, when the subject of God comes up, most share negative thoughts and feelings about Him as their Heavenly Father. Sadly, many individuals who have experienced trauma, often abuse at the hands of their fathers, struggle with seeing God as a loving Father figure. Instead, they tend to see God through the same lens as they see their abuser. This can readily lead to issues with their faith and seeing God for who He genuinely is. Despite God’s Word that declares, “*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him*” (Psalm 103:13, ESV), many abuse survivors struggle

to comprehend a father who shows compassion, as well as the concept of fearing the Lord.

If a child is raised with an abusive father, compassion is rarely an attribute of such a man, especially toward his children. Often, parents who abuse their children experienced similar treatment by their own parents. If they have not explored, processed, and healed from their own trauma, they will often re-enact this unmetabolized behavior with their own children. Because their parents may not have shown them compassion, they are unable to have the mindset to do the same.

To have compassion for a child

When clients *truly experience* God’s love and compassion in the context of their painful trauma, it begins to transform the mistrust and misunderstanding of who He is.

requires seeing an emotional experience from a child’s perspective and then having a desire to alleviate their distress. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines compassion as the “deep awareness of the suffering of another accompanied by the wish to relieve it.”¹ It is empathy combined with a merciful tenderness to soothe another’s pain. If you ask abuse survivors if they experienced such benevolence in childhood, they will often scoff at such action at the hands of their perpetrators. This creates a conundrum for Christian survivors. How can they see God the Father showing compassion when their experience has been quite the opposite?

Similarly, abuse survivors comprehend only one type of fear: the terror they experienced when often aggressively and forcefully abused. Fearing an abusive father conjures up memories of post-traumatic dread and panic. So, if God’s Word tells us to fear the Lord, such survivors instinctively want to fight, flee, or freeze. The idea of a father who is to be feared and who also has compassion creates a profound cognitive dissonance that they cannot resolve.

Yet, the word for fear in Psalm 103:13 comes from the Hebrew word “yirah,” which means awe, respect, or honor—a reverential fear of the Lord. This reverence is based upon who God is. Our Creator. Our Provider. Our Shepherd. Our Savior. The Gospel message demonstrates the Lord’s compassion upon us—that when we were still sinners, He sent His only Son to take on human form

and die for our sins. This is the profound compassion of God and why we should fear Him in all reverence and awe.

Sadly, many abuse survivors cannot bridge the gap between the truth of the Gospel and the reality of their trauma. Logically explaining God’s character demonstrated in His Word is usually insufficient to heal this chasm, as rational explicit information does not change deeply held emotionally based implicit experiences and memories. So, to help reconcile what is cognitively known but not emotionally experienced, we can help our clients work on their insecure attachments to God through their attachment to us as their counselors. Despite their initial trepidation, my clients develop a secure attachment to me over time within our therapeutic relationship. When I point out that they trust me as a highly fallible human, we work on transferring this attachment to God, who is much more trustworthy, consistent, and loving than I could ever be. To demonstrate the deep compassion of God, we can regularly invite the Holy Spirit into our work to facilitate healing that only He can offer. When clients *truly experience* God’s love and compassion in the context of their painful trauma, it begins to transform the mistrust and misunderstanding of who He is. Over time, they can or may begin to renew their faith in Jesus, creating transformation and healing. This can ultimately lead to post-traumatic growth and finding purpose in profound pain. To know a Heavenly Father who has a tender,

loving compassion for an abused child can break the chains of generational trauma and abuse.

My prayer is that those who struggle with truly knowing and experiencing the compassion and reverential fear of the Lord due to unresolved abuse would reach out and ask Him to make Himself known to them in the deepest recesses of their trauma... that they would begin to experience God as the awe-inspiring and tender Father that He is.

I look forward to growing with you in your ministries as we learn and share insights together. ✕



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Endnote

¹ *The American Heritage Dictionary* entry: *Compassion*. HarperCollins Publishers. <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=compassion>.

God as a Model of Patient and Accommodating Parenting



Have you ever considered the Old Testament an “unfortunate preface to the part of the Bible that really matters?” That question caught my attention when my colleague, Sandra Richter,¹ was teaching a class on the Old Testament at Westmont College. These words grabbed me because I knew I had been guilty of doing just that. However, what really made me sit up straight and stop checking my e-mail was when she claimed that “... it is likely you won’t fully appreciate the Old Testament until you find that it contains your story.”²

As the lecture continued, I began to see that long, “unfortunate preface” in a new light. It is there you will find the developmental journey of centuries of prodigal children in a developing relationship with

their patient and accommodating Father. Slowly, and in fits and starts, God’s prodigal children become progressively more able to *apprehend* His almost unbelievable offer of redemption. And the redemption He offers is not a marbled mansion or a “get out of hell free card.” It is so much greater than those things. His redemption takes the form of open arms and reincorporation into our true family of divine Light and Love.

As I continued to listen to the lecture series, I began to see my own story in the Old Testament. And, to my surprise, I also think I saw something else. Could it be that the five key figures she was describing from that first section of the Bible—Adam (and Eve), Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David—also represent the five stages of our own spiritual growth and development?

Our Accommodating Father

I admit that one of the reasons I have spent far less time exploring the Old Testament is that I have been put off by a time and culture that seems so foreign. It is a highly patriarchal culture where so many of the heroes of faith sacrifice animals, have multiple wives—not to mention concubines—and initiate covenants by literally splitting animals down the middle and walking between the two carcasses.

However, I am learning to see God’s interactions with His children not as examples of how *He is* but rather how far He is willing to go to accommodate His dear ones exactly where *they are* in time and space. For example, when my two children were younger, I was not communicating who I was when I sat on the floor to be at their level, wrote words

with lettered blocks, talked through the dolls I was animating, and made pinky promises. I was simply communicating in a way that they could better understand. I was expressing my love and care within the context of their world.

Our Father Who Cultivates Our Progressive Apprehension of His Love

A friend of mine, Michael Stewart Robb, recently finished turning his doctoral dissertation into an extremely helpful book. The title makes me smile. He chose to label the book, *The Kingdom Among Us: The Gospel According to Dallas Willard*.³ I smile because the title is the one Dallas wanted to use for one of his books, but the publisher did not like it. So, we know that book now as *The Divine Conspiracy*.

I mention this because Michael makes a bold claim. He believes Willard saw the Bible as a record of the progressive apprehension of God. Note: progressive “apprehension,” not “revelation.” Not only was our patient and accommodating Father willing to step into a particular time and culture, but He also realized His dear children would need to grow up across the centuries (not unlike a child growing through developmental stages) before they could more fully ascertain the true knowledge of God. Deuteronomy, Michael contends, does not have the same theology as Hebrews—not because theology changed but because biblical people had not yet understood God as they would later.

The Five Plus One Developmental Stages of Spiritual Growth

With these things in mind, I invite you to briefly find your story within accounts of the five key figures in the Old Testament—the five with whom God initiated the five covenants of

the Old Testament. And, if you are with me, I would like you to think of these key characters as representing five stages (think Piaget, Erikson, and James Fowler) of our own spiritual development.

Our Stage as Adam: Even before we enter the world, we are the son of Adam or the daughter of Eve. We were not born on third base, so to speak. We were born under the dugout—with pre-existing conditions and circumstances woven into the fabric of who we are.

We are born with the inheritance of separation from God and under the fear-producing shadow of death. And we are not only born east of Eden but with DNA strands that were not our choosing. It will be a while before we realize we are not superior to Adam or Eve. We will make the same choices as our foreparents hundreds and hundreds of times. We are Adam and Eve.

Our Stage as Noah: The narrative of Noah can be seen as a parallel to our own chance to start again, fresh and new. Peter, himself, compares Noah’s ark to the waters of baptism. In 1 Peter 3:18-22, the disciple perhaps most famous for his chance for a new beginning (see John 21) teaches us that as eight people were brought safely through the water, the waters of baptism also deliver us from eternal death.

Our Stage as Abraham: Somewhere in our young to middle adult years, we, like Abram, receive a vocational call. Whether the call is to be a mother, father, teacher, minister, venture capitalist, etc., it comes with an invitation to “go forth” in radical trust and obedience. We are invited into a new way to live and a trust in God so radical that it can be reckoned as righteousness (a state of other-centered love best expressed by the relationship enjoyed by the Trinity). Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:1-9 that what was asked of Abram

We are born with the inheritance of separation from God and under the fear-producing shadow of death. And we are not only born east of Eden but with DNA strands that were not our choosing.



is exactly what is asked of new covenant believers. “Do not fear, [your name goes here], I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great,” said the Lord (Genesis 15:1, NASB).

Our Stage as Moses: Most people I have talked to over the years have not done perfectly well during their Abraham phase of spiritual development. Most have found themselves diverted from the trust that leads to freedom for at least a season into the “land of Egypt.” Trust in God often dissolves into trust in self. Virtues too often give way to enslaving vices. If this is not your story, I encourage you to retake the Enneagram personality test and not stop until you find the number that makes you cry.

It is not surprising that the Mishnah actually commands each Jew of every generation to “regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt.”⁴ Similarly, the liturgies of the ancient Christian faith demand the same of the Christian. If we are to understand the God of our salvation, the faith of Israel, and therefore our own faith, we must understand the need for our personal exodus and purgative wilderness wanderings until we are ready to cross over the Jordan and into the promised land of God’s here-and-now kingdom.

Our Stage as David: One thing that stands out in the narrative of David is that God looks not at the outward appearance but at the heart of a human. David is not chosen because of the height of his stature but the orientation of his heart. He is a person of music, worship, and psalm writing. David represents the fifth stage of spiritual development—the ultimate stage before we get to Jesus and the New Covenant. We, like Adam and Eve, are to have dominion. We, like David, are to rule and reign, but *with* God and a heart filled with love for Him.

Summary

I have become convinced that not only can we find our story in the Old Testament, but we can find a wonderful model for the stages of our spiritual development in the five key figures. We can also see that the journey of our faith development is not linear. Like our five covenantal foreparents, we find ourselves cycling back and forth through the classic spiritual formation processes of trust, death to self (i.e., deep humility), and surrendering to love. However, most importantly, we find that our Heavenly Parent is like the prodigal’s father—patient, accommodating, and waiting with outstretched arms

for us to grow up, pass through the stages of our faith development, and come back home to the inheritance of intimate presence. ✝



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for Christian Spiritual Formation at Westmont College. He continues to direct their resource development initiatives by serving as the director of *Conversatio Divina: A Center for Spiritual Formation*, www.conversatio.org.

Endnotes

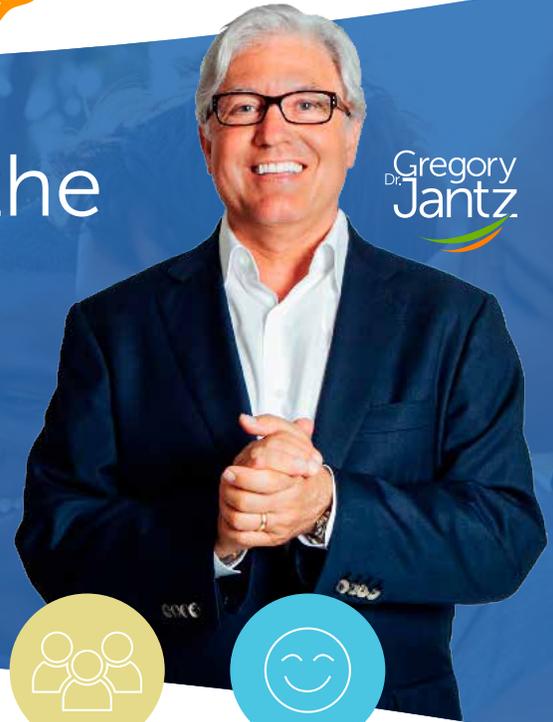
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The Power of Medical Gratitude



The process of seeking help for any medical condition can be complicated, expensive, time-consuming, and lonely. Most of us focus on the potential outcome of the process. As a cancer patient, I badgered my doctors about my possible results. Did the surgery get all of the tumor? Did the radiation kill it all? My patients worry about side effects and the efficacy of their treatment. These are all questions about the results of a process that may not always end positively. My cancer did return—twice. The medicine does not always work or may cause unfortunate side effects. In other words, we do not always get the results we desire.

Many of the Psalms describe David's struggle with difficult life outcomes—like hiding in a cave and fearing for his life (Psalm 57). He was not reserved about lamenting his situation but was quick to pivot to opportunities to praise God and be grateful while waiting for the resolution of difficult circumstances. However, would this apply to the difficult circumstance of seeking medical care? Are there things we could focus on that would give us a reason for the type of praise and gratitude that David expressed—independent of the outcome of the medical intervention? The following is a checklist of some issues we encounter while seeking help that can serve as a platform for mindful praise, positive perspective, and gratitude—regardless of the outcome of the medical intervention (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

- 1. Healthcare Provider** – Be grateful that you have a health-care provider to assist and guide you through this process. Many people lack access to any

provider or healthcare facility, leading to long waits for available care.

2. **Insurance** – Affordable health insurance is a luxury for many who struggle to find care. Finding someone who accepts your insurance is a second challenge. Be grateful for insurance, patient assistance programs, and foundations that provide helpful resources for paying for care. If you have secured an appointment with an affordable provider, you are blessed already.
3. **Transportation** – Having a car that starts and reliably gets you safely to a medical appointment should not be ignored. Many patients ride multiple buses or pay dearly for rideshare or medical transport services.
4. **Parking** – Can I get an amen for free parking or reasonable parking rates? Can I get an amen for not having to drive around a parking deck for 20 minutes while dodging cars and looking for a parking spot?
5. **Ambulation** – The ability to walk from a parking lot to the doctor’s office should not be ignored. If you can walk, you do not have to search for highly needed disability parking spaces or worry about where there are “cuts” in the sidewalk with wheelchair access.
6. **The Lobby** – Take a moment in the lobby and look at the list of doctors and specialties housed in that building. Pause to be grateful for the doctors and specialties you do not have to see that day.
7. **Office Staff** – Be grateful there is one kind and respectful person on your visit. Focus on that angel and not anyone else

who might be having a bad day. Focus on being a blessing to the staff. I provided donuts to my radiation oncology staff every Wednesday to encourage them.

8. **Teamwork** – Medical care is usually delivered by teams of specialists, multi-level nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. Encourage and be grateful for professional communication between these entities. Be thankful for patient portals that allow you to facilitate your connections with different care providers.
9. **Diagnostic Testing** – Do not just focus on what was found. Be grateful for what was not found. A “normal” test is a blessing!
10. **Treatment Options** – Be grateful that there are reasonably efficacious options for treating your problem. Some patients only have experimental or high-risk options for treatment that require the experience of potentially severe side effects.
11. **Affordability** – Be grateful if you have a treatment option that is affordable or covered by insurance. Some patients only have prohibitively expensive options, leading to substantial medical debt.
12. **Commute** – Be grateful if you are close to your treatment facility. One of my patients had to drive two hours one way to obtain a life-saving treatment three times per week. You are blessed if your round-trip commute time is one hour or less.
13. **Job Flexibility** – Be grateful if you have a job that allows you the flexibility to go to medical appointments. Be extremely thankful if you have

“family medical leave” or disability options that enable you to have more extended periods of treatment.

14. **Support Systems** – Be grateful for the people God places in your life to help along the journey of getting medical care. A large part of this journey is waiting for tests to come back, whether the treatment will work, and to recover as fully as possible. At each step of this wait, there is tangible uncertainty about what will happen next, which can be oppressive if done alone. Forty years of practice have convinced me that patients can endure many obstacles when not enduring them alone. God has promised never to leave us, but He often gives us human “angels” to walk with us along this journey. Utilize and be grateful for your cadre of “angels.”
15. **Your Part** – Be grateful for the ways you can actively participate in your treatment plan. This may include changes in diet, sleep, exercise, medication, or seeking counseling. It always requires praying for and encouraging yourself and the other patients you encounter along the journey.

Being mindful of these issues and principles, which could be taken for granted, can help us fulfill being positive and grateful. ✖



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Working with Minors: Understanding Legal and Ethical Responsibilities



When counseling minors, many unique legal and ethical issues must be considered. Most commonly, considerations arise in the areas of the “Four Cs”: Competency, Confidentiality, Consent, and Child Maltreatment Reporting, which we will examine.

The discussion in this column is limited to minors who are *not* emancipated. The legal definition of emancipated varies from state to state. Most, but not all states, define a minor as a person under age 18. It is important to check state law when counseling a minor claiming to be emancipated.

Competency

As in general practice, therapists should only counsel clients when they are competent to do so.¹ This is especially true for minors who are not fully neurologically developed² and undergo several stages of emotional development.³ Unlike adults, minors do not always have control of their environments, and they are a more vulnerable category of people.

Minors also face mental health issues that may vary from adults. The four most common mental health issues facing minors are attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, behavior problems, and depression.⁴ Counselors seeking to work with children and adolescents should consider specialization. Play therapy is a popular option, but certification is strongly encouraged.⁵ If you feel unqualified or underqualified to treat minors, given the unique factors in doing so, you should engage in a competence-based referral.

Confidentiality and Consent

With minors, confidentiality and consent go hand in hand because obtaining consent from parents means the help a minor is getting is not confidential. While consent must be obtained, with some exceptions, confidentiality should be maintained with minor clients, even from parents. “The only scenario in which counselor-client confidentiality can be broken is in situations that necessitate protecting the client or others ‘from serious and foreseeable harm,’ such as suicidal intent,” according to an article published by the American Counseling Association.⁶ When adolescents perceive that healthcare services are not confidential, they report that they are less likely to seek care.⁷

However, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) allows a parent to obtain information on a child’s treatment as long as the parent is the minor’s personal representative for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) purposes. The analysis as to when this is allowed is somewhat complicated. For guidance, HHS has issued a decision tool, which can be found at: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/minors-hipaa-decision-tool.pdf>.⁸

With a few exceptions to follow, counselors must obtain consent from parents/legal guardians before treating a minor client. Under the law, minors are not considered capable of signing contracts or other documents of a legal nature. Many states have recognized that certain issues are so sensitive that minors will opt to go without treatment rather than telling their parents.⁹ While it varies from state to state, minors may be able to consent to treatment without parental consent for prenatal care, including counseling, substance abuse treatment, and suicidal ideation. A summary of state laws is available from the Center for

Adolescent Health and the Law.¹⁰ Double-checking your state law in this document is essential to ensure it is current.

Child Maltreatment Reporting

While confidentiality can be broken for the same purposes as adults (threats of harm to self or others, etc.), minors present an additional consideration. Counselors should report child maltreatment according to the laws of their state.

Child maltreatment laws vary state by state but often include the following types of maltreatment: physical abuse, sexual abuse, child neglect, abandonment, excessive discipline, and emotional abuse/neglect. What your state includes as reportable maltreatment and how maltreatment is defined can be found through the Child Information Gateway.¹¹

Some states only require certain professionals to report, while others require everyone. This information can also be found through the Child Information Gateway.¹² What, where, when, and who you report to are also dependent on your state law; however, a good rule of thumb is to report situations that involve imminent harm immediately to law enforcement and follow up with a report to the state’s Child Protective Services (CPS), or equivalent, as soon as possible.

Sometimes, the law may not technically require a report, but the circumstances may justify you making one based on a moral obligation. The AACC promotes a Code of Ethics oriented toward beneficence rather than the avoidance of malfeasance.¹³ One example may be where your state only requires you to report sexual abuse when perpetrated by a parent or caregiver, but you learn that a neighbor is sexually abusing a minor client. While the penalties for failing to report when required can be

*Sometimes,
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obligation.*

severe, most states grant immunity from both civil and criminal penalties to individuals who make good-faith reports.¹⁴

You may also choose to report an abusive situation that does not involve the parents to the minor's parents under your duty to protect the minor from situations of imminent harm. You may inform your minor client of your intention to report the situation at your discretion. ✕

The information contained in this column is provided for educational purposes only. Nothing in this column should be construed as legal advice, and readers should seek advice from a qualified attorney within their jurisdiction for concerns/questions on specific matters. The law varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.



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speaker. Jeanneane formerly served as the Vice President of External Affairs and Corporate Counsel for Americans United for Life and as the General Counsel of Care Net. She has a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and History from Westminster College, graduating summa cum laude, and a law degree from Boston University School of Law, graduating cum laude.

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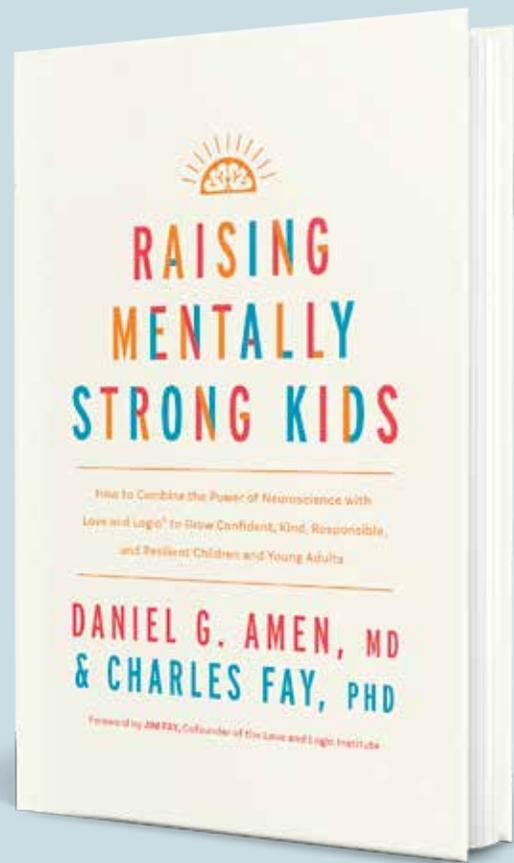
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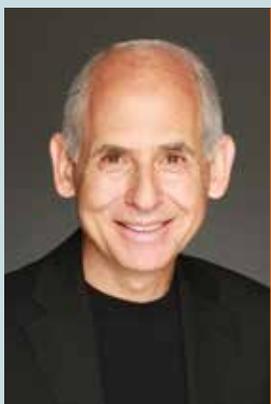
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we can end mental illness by creating a revolution in brain health, and he regularly speaks to businesses, organizations, and churches about how to have a better brain and a better life.



Charles Fay, PhD,

is an internationally recognized author, consultant, and public speaker. He is also president of the Love and Logic Institute, which became part of Amen Clinics in 2020. Millions of educators, mental health professionals, and parents worldwide have benefited from Dr. Fay's down-to-earth solutions to the most common and frustrating behaviors displayed by youth of all ages. These methods come directly from years of experience serving severely disturbed youth and their

families in psychiatric hospitals, public and private schools, homes, and other settings. For more information, visit loveandlogic.com.

In Loco Parentis



In *loco parentis* is a Latin phrase that means *in place of a parent*. It describes an individual or organization's legal doctrine or obligation to assume parental rights, duties, and responsibilities for another person, usually a young person, without adopting that person.

Leaders in a business or organization can be tempted to view the workplace as a “family.” After all, you feel a sense of responsibility for those in your organization. Often, a percentage of them (sometimes a majority) are younger than you, with less experience. As a leader, you oversee the overall functioning of the business, assigning duties and tasks accordingly. In your supervisory role,

you must occasionally take disciplinary action. Together, these scenarios can create the impression your workplace is like a family—of course, with you *in loco parentis*.

In this edition of *Leadership Psych*, I would like to encourage you to use a different metaphor—a biblical one—instead of *in loco parentis* and discourage you from the well-meaning and well-intended tendency to consider those under your leadership in a familial context. Here's why.

People cannot change families; they can change jobs—and do. According to the website Zippia.com,¹ the average U.S. worker has 12 jobs throughout their work life, with an average tenure of just over four years

per job, with younger workers (those under 24 years of age) having around four more job changes than older workers (those over 45 years of age). As of about a year ago, 65% of American workers were actively looking for a new full-time job. When a workplace is considered a family and a person leaves, this can be seen as a type of abandonment or betrayal, not only for you as a leader but also for the rest of the “family” or those workers left behind.

“Doing anything” for family does not translate well into a work setting. Expectations change when work morphs into family, and the work-life balance can become destructively skewed. “Doing anything” may

Employees may neglect their actual families to cater to the needs of their work family, leading to burnout and bitterness. When people fail to go the “extra mile” for their work family, employers may go into punitive mode, and co-workers may become resentful, damaging company cohesion.

translate into overwork expectations or being asked to take on inappropriate tasks. Employees may neglect their actual families to cater to the needs of their work family, leading to burnout and bitterness. When people fail to go the “extra mile” for their work family, employers may go into punitive mode, and co-workers may become resentful, damaging company cohesion.

The doctrine of keeping family secrets does not translate well into a work setting, either. Confidentiality aside, there are always secrets within an organization. As a leader, you need to know what those secrets are so you can deal with them. When a leader acts *in loco parentis*, it is not surprising when the “children,” especially the “teens,” in the organization fail to disclose everything they or their “siblings” are doing.

As Christian leaders, viewing our workplace as part of the larger family of God can be tempting, especially when fellow workers are Christians. However, instead of thinking of those who work for us *in loco parentis*, I suggest we use a different biblical metaphor—the Body of Christ. “For the body is not one part, but many. If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. If the

whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has arranged the parts, each one of them in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But now there are many parts, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again, the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, it is much truer that the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those parts of the body which we consider less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor, and our less presentable parts become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable parts have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same care for one another. And if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if a part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:14-26, NASB).

Thinking of your organization as the greater Body of Christ can produce the desired sense of caring, connection, respect, and belonging:

- As a leader, you are part of the greater Body, while Christ retains headship.
- God distributes His greater Body within your organization, giving each part—and

your organization—a divine *purpose*, so purpose—not mere loyalty—becomes the connective glue.

- Different roles are not allowed to look down upon each other but are called to respect those differences.
- Some roles, which appear to be less “honorable,” are acknowledged for their unique contribution.
- The organization works as a connected whole, experiencing both good and bad and ups and downs together.

Your organization may have posted the ad, but God may have filled it. When a new employee joins, you have a choice... to act as some families do or from a divine perspective. Do you only consider what you can get out of that person, or do you celebrate what God intends for them and you? When an employee leaves, you have the same choice. Do you resent their departure and slam the door on their way out, or do you celebrate the time together and wish them well? ✕



GREGG JANTZ, PH.D.,

is the founder of The Center • A Place of HOPE (www.aplaceofhope.com), a healthcare facility in Edmonds, Washing-

ton, which emphasizes whole-person care, addressing the emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual aspects of recovery. He is the author of multiple books, including his latest, *Triumph Over Trauma*, and *Here Today, Ghosted Tomorrow*. Dr. Jantz is a sought-after speaker in person, on television, and on radio (www.drgregoryjantz.com).

Endnote

¹ Zippia. *21 crucial career change statistics [2023]: How often do people change jobs?* Zippia.com. Feb. 9, 2023. <https://www.zippia.com/advice/career-change-statistics/>.

Evidence-based Parenting Intervention, Mindful Parenting and Self-control, and Strengthening Resilience in Fatherless Homes



In this edition of Research Digest, we examine research evaluating the efficacy of online parenting programs. We also look at the importance of personality characteristics in parenting, such as the capacities for mindful parenting and self-control. Finally, we consider the impact of absent fathers on female youth living in South Africa.

Evidence-based Parenting Intervention

Holtrop, K., Casaburo, G., Hickman, T., Yzaguirre, M.M., & Young, D. (2023). The acceptability and preliminary effectiveness of a brief, online parenting program: Expanding access to evidence-based parenting intervention content. *Family Process*, 1506-1523.

Parents play a key role in children's mental health through effective parenting. When they have deficits in this area, evidence-based programs

can help them gain the tools needed to help their children. Tragically, many families cannot access such services due to several factors. Cost, not having mental health professionals in the area, transportation, childcare, and myriad other barriers can exist. Holtrop and colleagues investigated an online, self-directed, video-based parenting program adapted from the Generation Parent Management Training—Oregon Model (GenPMTO). GenPMTO contains modules on “skill encouragement, limit setting, problem-solving, monitoring, positive involvement, and auxiliary skills (e.g., clear directions, emotion regulation)” (p. 1508). Eighty-seven primarily white female caregivers completed the program.

In the open-trial mixed methods study, the quantitative and qualitative findings provided initial support for the effectiveness and acceptability

of the program. Program finishers reported improvements four weeks after completing the training. These improvements included an increased sense of self-efficacy in parenting, enhanced knowledge of helpful parenting practices, and decreased observed behavioral problems with their children. Such preliminary findings suggest the promise of online parenting programs to reduce barriers they experience in accessing evidence-based parenting resources. Further research with randomized designs is warranted.

Mindful Parenting and Self-control

Li, J.B., Zhang, R., Dou, K., Cheung, R.Y., Ho, H.C., & Chung, K.K.H. (2023). Parental self-control facilitates adolescent psychological adjustment sequentially through parents' perceived stress/mindful parenting and adolescent self-control. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 38(1), 59-70.

Adolescence is a turbulent time where developing self-control for an optimal future is crucial. Though critical to fostering such teenager development, parental self-control has received minimal longitudinal studies on its role. Li and fellow researchers applied the intergenerational transmission model of self-regulation (ITMSR) to see how parental self-control and mindful parenting foster teenage adjustment in 426 Chinese adolescents. The ITMSR examines how prenatal, genetic, and socialization pathways lead to the development of effective self-control in children. Parental self-control is crucial to foster a healthy home environment for socialization. Mindful parenting focuses on how much parents can "... treat their own and their children's behavior non-judgmentally, distance themselves from negative emotions effectively, and execute calm and consistent parenting practices" (p. 60).

The teenagers in the study reported their self-control and psychological adjustment at the outset, while the parents (two-parent households) rated their levels of perceived stress, self-control, and mindful parenting. One year later, the adolescents were assessed again. After controlling for a variety of variables, the researchers found that fathers' self-control "... facilitated adolescent adjustment sequentially through fathers' lower levels of perceived stress and adolescents' improved self-control" (p. 67). However, mothers' self-control fostered "... adolescent adjustment sequentially through mothers' better mindful parenting exercise and adolescents' improved self-control" (p. 67). To explain these results, the authors noted that fathers may be more vulnerable to displacing their stress onto their families, while Chinese mothers spend more time as the primary caregivers for children compared to fathers. Mindful

parenting may be less important for fathers than their stress levels when they are home. Future research should explore the intricate nature of fostering the development of self-control in teenagers.

Coping Strategies for Strengthening Resilience in Fatherless Homes

Gerrand, P., & Nduna, M. (2021). Father Absence in the Lives of Female African Youth Living in Mpumalanga, South Africa: Christianity is a Coping Strategy That Builds and Strengthens Resilience. *Social Work and Christianity*, 48(2), 183-199.

Many studies examine the detrimental effects of absent fathers in families; however, fewer consider factors that can promote resiliency. Gerrand and Nduna conducted a qualitative study with 20 women aged 15-25 living in Mpumalanga, South Africa, a "half-rural, half-urban province" (p. 184) about 120 miles from Johannesburg. They wanted to see what strengths helped these women cope with not having a father in the home. Five of the 20 participants were excluded because they did not discuss explicit coping strategies in their documentation.

All 15 women "... made spontaneous references to Christian values and beliefs when they described how they cope with life without [the] presence of a father" (p. 187). This occurred even though religion was not a criterion for inclusion in the research project. One central theme involved God providing "support and blessings in difficult times" (p. 187). Faith played an essential role in meaning-making when sudden and emotionally difficult challenges occurred. Further, the Church provided social support and even needed emotional diversion when navigating the absence of a father. The second central theme involved how faith principles made the absence of

a father endurable. Many women noted forgiveness as an important path to finding peace with not having a father in the home. Prayer and trust in God as the Heavenly Father who can fulfill the roles of an earthly father proved pivotal for most of them as well. Overall, the findings support the importance of integrating faith aspects of coping with Christian clients who experience the absence of a father as a major stressor. More research on spiritual resiliency factors for coping is warranted.

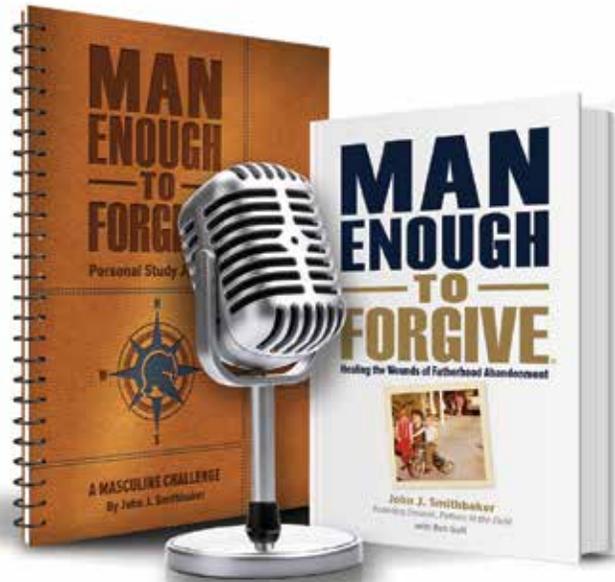
Conclusion

Research on family systems and various aspects of parenting is growing. In this edition of Research Digest, we explored research that suggests online parenting programs may reduce barriers parents experience in accessing evidence-based parenting training. Further, we learned more about how parents' capacity for self-control and mindful parenting influence teenagers' self-control development. Finally, we explored how faith can become a vital coping resource for female South African youth who have experienced the absence of a father in their lives. ✦



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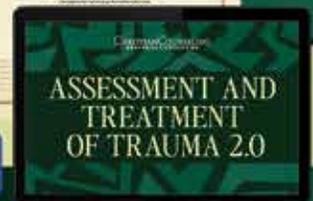
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A “Fathering Theology”: God’s Plan – Ron Hawkins and Scott Hawkins

- God’s heart of “Fathering Theology” is revealed in
 - a. Isaiah 53 and Psalms 23
 - b. Psalm 22 and Romans 8
 - c. Hosea 11 and Luke 15
 - d. Zechariah 13 and Colossians 1

Developing Healthy Boundaries in Parenting... – Jim Burns

- In the article, the parents of the irresponsible 21-year-old son were
 - a. enabling dependency
 - b. giving too much freedom
 - c. irresponsible themselves
 - d. all of the above

Fathering and Attachment Theory – W. Jesse Gill

- In the early years of attachment research
 - a. the father’s role was not emphasized
 - b. the father’s role was not understood
 - c. only the primary caregiver’s role was considered
 - d. all of the above

Fathering Research: Problems, Prospects, and Potential – Ken Canfield

- Which of the following is NOT an action point for hurting and hopeless fathers?
 - a. identifying supports and addressing deficits
 - b. completing a genogram with a counselor
 - c. committing to processing issues through self-disclosure
 - d. setting strict boundaries with difficult children

Internal Family Systems (IFS): A Compassionate Approach... – Jenna Riemersma

- In relapse, reactive “firefighters” tend to
 - a. fix the problem
 - b. provide time to get things under control
 - c. take over with a vengeance
 - d. comfort the exile

Embracing God as Father: Healing the Wounds from Childhood – Shannae Anderson

- Many abuse survivors struggle to comprehend
 - a. a father who shows compassion, as well as the concept of fearing the Lord
 - b. loving and at the same time hating authority figures
 - c. wanting and simultaneously not wanting their children
 - d. trusting church leaders while fearing any authority figures

Parenting Your Adult Children: Rising from Regret to Resiliency – Jim Cress

- Which of the following is NOT advice from the author?
 - a. comparing yourself to other parents does not help
 - b. do not jump to unsolicited advice with adult children
 - c. be curious, not furious, in disagreements with adult children
 - d. if your adult son’s behavior bothers you, quickly correct him

God as a Model of Patient and Accommodating Parenting – Gary Moon

- The Spiritual Stage of trust and obedience is
 - a. the stage of Moses
 - b. the stage of Abraham
 - c. the stage of David
 - d. the stage of Noah

The Sins and Blessings of a Father: Multigenerational Patterns... – John Trent

- The young king who broke a sinful generational pattern was
 - a. Amon
 - b. Josiah
 - c. Manasseh
 - d. Jotham

The Sturdier the Foundation, the Stronger the House... – Michelle Watson Canfield

- The author’s “secret weapon” as a clinician is
 - a. self-disclosure to vulnerable female clients
 - b. wilderness retreats and equine therapy
 - c. inviting fathers to join their daughters in sessions
 - d. intensive weeklong workshops for fathers

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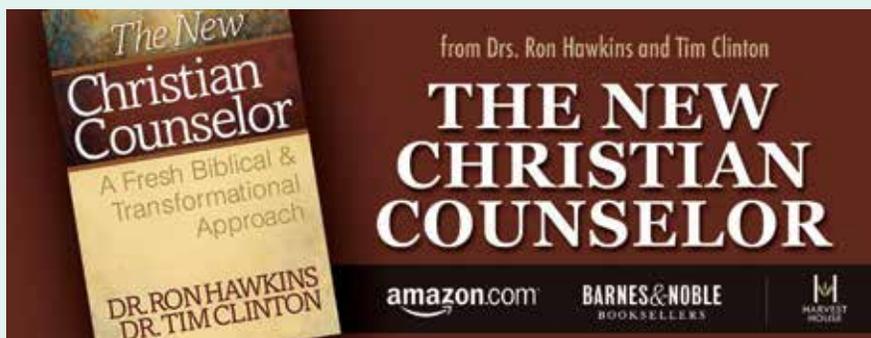
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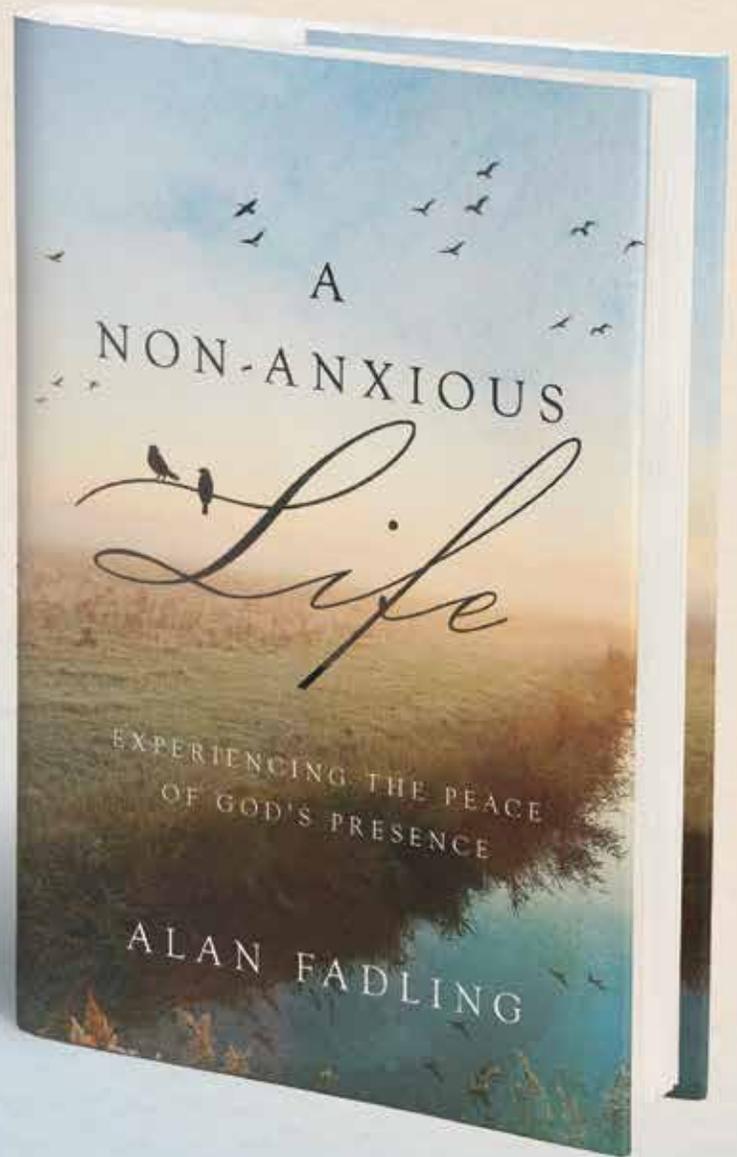


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