

REVISED AND UPDATED

POINT MAN

HOW A MAN CAN LEAD HIS FAMILY



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STEVE FARRAR

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POINT MAN, REVISED AND UPDATED

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To James R. Farrar, my dad, in appreciation
for over sixty years of spiritual leadership
where it really counts. At home.

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POINT MAN ON PATROL

It is harder to lead a family than to rule a nation.

—*Chinese proverb*

Albert Einstein was invited to speak at a banquet held in his honor at Swarthmore College. Hundreds of people from all over the country crowded an auditorium to hear what he had to say.

When it was time for him to speak, he stood up and told the astonished audience, “Ladies and gentlemen, I am very sorry, *but I have nothing to say.*” And he sat down. A few seconds later, he stood up again and said, “In case I have something to say, I will come back and say it.” Six months later, he wired the president of the college with the message:

“Now I have something to say.” Another dinner was held, and Einstein made a speech.¹

Some thirty-five years ago, I spoke at a FamilyLife conference in Irvine, California. More than five hundred men filled the auditorium. My subject that morning was “Effective Male Leadership in the Home.” I talked about the importance of being a committed husband and a tuned-in father. My time with those men was relatively brief—less than an hour.

When I finished my talk, both the usual and the unusual occurred. The usual thing was that several men made their way to the stage to talk with me. Some had questions, some had comments, and some just wanted clarification on a point. But then the unusual happened. The first man asked me a question that I had never been asked: “What have you written on this?” Then another man came up and asked me the same question. Then another walked up and asked the same thing. In the span of five minutes, fifteen men asked me the identical question. One right after the other.

That was unusual.

I had no answer for these men. Like Einstein, I had nothing to say. At least nothing that would fill a book.

But it started me thinking. Thereafter, whenever I spoke on the subject of effective male leadership in the home—whether in Phoenix, Boston, Dallas, Minneapolis, or Boise—I would get the same inquiry: “What have you written on this?” And my answer was always the same: “Nothing.” But at some point I paused and said, “But if I ever do have something to say, I’ll let you know.”

I now have something to say.

This is a book for men. It’s a book that talks about *how*

you can become an effective leader in your home. After many years of research and study, I've concluded that effective male leadership in American homes is going the way of the dinosaur. Some people are worried about the extinction of whales, condors, snail darters, or baby seals. Those are legitimate concerns. But let me shoot straight with you. I'm a lot more worried about the extinction of the men who know how to lead a family. And the effective male leader who knows how to lead his family is already on the endangered-species list.

Dr. James Dobson provided an insightful diagnosis: "The Western world stands at a great crossroads in its history. And it is my opinion that our very survival as a people will depend upon the presence or absence of masculine leadership in millions of homes. . . . I believe, with everything within me, that husbands hold the keys to the preservation of the family."²

Things have not gotten any better in the years since Dobson made that statement. If anything, the crisis has grown even more acute.

That's why I now have something to say. Three things, to be specific. And I want to say them to men—men who love their families, who care for their families, and who would die for their families.

WAR HAS BEEN DECLARED ON THE BIBLICAL FAMILY

You are only eighteen—in the absolute prime of youth. You've got a driver's license, a girlfriend, and plenty of dreams. Your entire life is ahead of you, but your immediate goal is to stay alive.

Welcome to Afghanistan.

On this particular day, you would give anything not to be here. Why? Because on this day you are going out on patrol. You've been on patrol before, but today is different, and that's why there's a knot in your gut and an icy fear in your heart.

Today is different because the patrol leader has appointed *you* to be "point man." In essence, you're the leader. Everyone else will fall in behind you. And as you move out to encounter the enemy, you realize that the survival of those seven men stepping cautiously behind you will depend on just one thing: *your ability to lead*. Your judgment may determine whether they live or die. The responsibility hangs over your head.

Your senses have never been so alive, your adrenaline so surging—you can almost hear it rushing through your veins. You know the enemy is near, maybe just hundreds of yards away. Intelligence reported heavy enemy activity in this area late last night. Your job is to confirm or deny that activity. For all you know, they're watching you right now. Perhaps they can see you, but you don't have a clue where they are.

As you gingerly make your way through the meadow thick with poppies, you've got one eye out for concealed wires in your path and another scanning the trees for snipers. Entire patrols have been lost because the point man failed to anticipate an ambush. Men have been killed or horribly maimed, all because a point lacked skill and wisdom.

You never saw it coming. The violent shock and utter surprise of gunfire momentarily paralyzes you, despite your "instant reaction" training. Before you can respond, a bullet tears through your flesh and explodes a bone in your leg. A thousand thoughts instantly flood your mind: *Am I going to*

die? Where are those shots coming from? Is there more than one? Will I lose my leg? Where's the patrol leader?

One glance to your left tells you that the family of the patrol leader is now fatherless. In the chaos of attack, and in spite of your wounds, the other men are looking to you for direction. They know that you are the most experienced man. In panic situations like this, the book goes out the window. Like it or not, you are the leader.

As a medic evaluates your wound, you're trying to determine what to do next. *Just what is the situation? What are we up against? Where are they?* Some good news in the midst of confusion brings a ray of hope—the bleeding has stopped. You're luckier than most guys on point. Usually they're dead before they hit the ground. You're still alive and in control of your thinking.

Two other men beside the patrol leader were hit. One is dead, the other bleeding profusely. You get on the radio and report your situation and position. You request a chopper for the hemorrhaging private. But before you can finish your request, the hidden enemy unleashes all his firepower on your position. You're surrounded.

In your gut, you know the odds are against you. You're outnumbered, outgunned, and not in the greatest position to wage a counterattack. You've got two men dead, one dying, and four wondering if they'll make it to lunch. The worst-case scenario has happened . . . and it's worse than you ever imagined.

Now is the time your leadership will make the difference. What you say and do will determine whether your men live or die. As automatic weapons blaze around you, you must accurately assess the situation, determine the critical next steps, and formulate a flawless plan. It's leadership, pure

and simple. If your plan works, you and half your men may get out alive. If it doesn't, someone will be lucky to find your dog tags.

Some reading this account don't have to use their imagination—you were actually there. You know what it is to see your buddy disappear forever behind the zipper of a body bag. You know firsthand the white-hot heat of phosphorous grenades and the adrenaline rush of a firefight. You know what it's like to be disoriented by the concussion of artillery shells crashing in around you. You don't have to imagine patrolling in Afghanistan . . . it's all you can do to get a night's sleep without reliving it again and again.

Let's make a critical change in the scenario. You're still in Afghanistan, on patrol in the same deceptively beautiful meadow. But something about this patrol is different. You're still the point man, but this time you're not leading a group of men.

You're leading your family.

You look over your shoulder to see your wife and children following behind. Your little girl is trying to choke back the tears, and your little boy is trying to act brave. Your wife is holding the baby and trying to keep him quiet. On this patrol, you don't want to engage the enemy; you want to avoid him.

What would you be feeling under such conditions? The survival of each member of your family—and its survival as a whole—would completely depend on your ability to lead through the maze of possible ambushes, hidden mines, invisible snipers, and all the extraordinary hazards of combat.

Would you be motivated? Would your senses and adrenaline be working overtime? Of course they would! You would

know in your gut that the survival of your family was up to you. It's all on your shoulders . . . because you are the leader.

This is no imaginary situation. It is reality. If you are a husband or father, then you are in a war. War has been declared on the family—on your family and mine. *Leading a family through the chaos of American culture is like leading a small patrol through enemy-occupied territory.*

If you doubt such a war now rages in our country, take another look at the casualty list:

- Nearly one out of two marriages ends in divorce.³
- Tonight, enough teenagers to fill the Rose Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Sugar Bowl, Fiesta Bowl, and average Super Bowl will practice prostitution to support drug addictions.
- Back in 1960, most teen mothers were married; an estimated 15 percent of births to mothers ages fifteen to nineteen were to unmarried teens. Today, it has flipped: 89 percent of those in that age group who give birth are unmarried mothers.⁴
- Teens and young adults think it is more immoral not to recycle than to view porn.
- Almost two-thirds of teens and young adults have received images that are sexually explicit (usually from someone they are dating or a friend), and nearly half have sent such images.⁵
- The suicide rate for girls ages fifteen to nineteen doubled from 2007 to 2015, when the rate reached its highest point in forty years, according to the CDC. The suicide rate for boys ages fifteen to nineteen increased by 30 percent over the same time period.⁶

Let me ask you something: What are you doing to keep your marriage off the casualty list? You've seen divorce hit your friends and maybe even your extended family. Why won't it happen to you?

Then again, maybe it *has* happened to you. You know what it is to have your patrol ambushed. You never saw it coming, but as a result of the enemy's attack, you've lost your marriage and your family. You are still healing from that painful experience, even as you read these pages. I commend you and admire you for picking up this book.

Some of the most teachable people I meet are those who have endured the heartbreak of a divorce. Many of these men and women *never* want to repeat that experience. Because of their painful wounds, they soak up the truth of Scripture like thirsty sponges. This book will offer some principles to help you avoid another ambush in the future should you remarry. Or you may already have remarried and are dealing now with all the intricacies of leading a blended family. You are back on patrol. *Good man!*

Others are parenting solo—the toughest job in America. If that's you, I think you will find some encouraging words in these pages as well.

I applaud all you men who have been through a family ambush for taking the time to equip yourself for the ongoing battle against the enemy. God will honor your teachability.

I've asked how you intend to keep your marriage off the casualty list. Let me ask you something else: What are you doing to keep your *kids* off the casualty list? Not what is your wife doing, not what is the church youth-group leader doing, not what is the pastor doing, but what are *you* doing?

Because many of the kids on that casualty list are from Christian homes.

Maybe you have teenagers and don't have to be convinced there's a war going on. You see the casualties nearly every day. If you don't yet have teenagers, let me ask you another question: How long before your oldest kid hits thirteen? How much time do you have left? Two years? Five? Maybe ten?

Time is slipping through our fingers like spaghetti in the hands of a two-year-old. We must be actively working to prepare our children to defend themselves against the snipers, ambushes, and booby traps. This *is* war, and there are no guarantees our children will stay off the casualty list. But with God's help and our concerned leadership, we can greatly reduce the risks.

It's like the risk of a heart attack. None of us have any guarantees we won't suffer a cardiac arrest. Yet at the same time, it is also true that if a man quits smoking, watches his weight, participates in some type of aerobic exercise, and stays away from high-fat, high-cholesterol foods, he will greatly reduce his risk.

It's the same with our kids. There are no guarantees. You could do everything right, and your child could still rebel and pursue a life of drugs, promiscuity, and irresponsibility. Almost every kid will test the limits and rebel to some degree, actively or passively. Nevertheless, by consciously, constantly building moral strength into your child's life, you greatly reduce the risk of that happening in the teenage years.

War has been declared on the biblical family. But I have something else I want to say.

SATAN HAS TWO SPECIFIC STRATEGIES IN HIS WAR ON THE FAMILY

In Scripture, God gave us a blueprint for how the family is to function. The father is head of the family. Together with his wife, he raises his children in a home where Jesus Christ is the focus. The Bible is the most important book in the home. It is the responsibility of the parents, and ultimately that of the father, to make sure the children grow up in an environment that will enable them to one day become competent, responsible parents in their own right. This ensures the continuity of the biblical family for the next generation.

It is abundantly clear that the enemy wants to interrupt this link of biblical families from generation to generation. He does this by implementing two strategies:

Strategy #1: *To effectively alienate and sever a husband's relationship with his wife.* Such a division can be either physical or emotional. Both are equally effective.

Strategy #2: *To effectively alienate and sever a father's relationship with his children.* Again, such a division can be either physical or emotional. Both are equally effective.

Dave Johnson, a friend of mine who was a longtime policeman in San Jose, California, shared this story with me years ago. One morning, Dave was called to the scene of a family disturbance. When he arrived, he found another family that would soon be added to the casualty list:

The woman was crying and yelling at her husband who was standing with his hands in the pockets of

greasy overalls. I noticed homemade tattoos on his arm, usually a sign that someone had been in prison. I was glad that my “fill unit” had arrived. I stepped from my patrol car. As I walked towards the two, I could hear the woman yelling at her husband to fix whatever he had done to the car so she could leave. He made no reply, but only laughed at her with a contemptuous laugh. She turned to me and asked me to make him fix the car. My fill unit broke in and we “split” the two up so that we could find a solution to the problem. I began talking to the husband who said that his wife was having an affair and she was leaving. I asked him if they had gone for counseling and he said that he was not interested.

He went on to say that he was interested in only getting his “things” back. He said that his wife had hidden them from him. I asked his wife about his things, and she said she wouldn’t give them to him until she got one of the three VCRs they owned. I found out later that his “things” consisted of the narcotics he dealt in. The other officer went to the wife’s car and began looking under the hood to see if he could spot the trouble. The husband walked over, took the coil from his pocket, and handed it to the officer. He then told his wife that she could have one of the VCRs if he could have his things. She finally agreed and went into the house. As she entered the house, I noticed two little girls standing in the doorway, watching the drama unfold. They were about eight and ten years old. Both wore dresses and clung to a Cabbage Patch doll. At their feet were two small suitcases. My eyes couldn’t leave

their faces as they watched the two people they loved most tear each other apart.

The woman emerged with the VCR in her arms and went to the car where she put it into the crowded back seat. She turned and told her husband where he could find his things. They both agreed that they had equal shares of the things they had accumulated in ten years of marriage. Then as I stood in unbelief, I watched the husband point to the two little girls and say to the wife, “Well, which one do you want?” Without any apparent emotion, the mother chose the older one. The girls looked at each other as the older one picked up her suitcase and then climbed into her mother’s car. I had to stand and watch as the littlest girl, still clutching her Cabbage Patch doll in one hand and her suitcase in the other, watched her big sister and her mother drive off. I watched as tears streamed down her face in total bewilderment. The only “comfort” she received was an order from her father to go into the house as he turned to talk with some friends. There I stood, the unwilling witness to the death of a family.⁷

Families are dying all over America. They are dying on my street and on yours. And in every one of these dead homes, the autopsy would be the same. Cause of death: Strategy #1.

The enemy cannot kill a family without dividing the husband and wife, so that is where he puts his efforts. And it is working. It’s a strategy that’s been around for thousands of years. It’s called divide and conquer.

But there's a flip side to the story. When a husband and wife refuse to allow anything to divide them, they become an impregnable force in the war on the family. When emotional energy is not spent on fighting each other, it can then be used *constructively* . . . to build the family.

When a husband and wife are committed to each other and to the Lord Jesus Christ, they can then begin to build their family on the solid foundation of the Word of God. Or to put it another way, they will build their home by teaching their children—and daily living out—a biblical worldview. A husband and wife who have a biblical worldview will take their counsel on life from the wisdom of God, not from the philosophy of men. When God's Word is our standard, it gives us and our children the compass of God's truth. This enables us to have God's perspective on right and wrong, which provides spiritual wisdom and discernment.

Researcher George Barna has done extensive studies demonstrating that fewer than 10 percent of self-proclaiming born-again Christians in the United States possess such a biblical worldview. The "10-percenters" are serious about their faith and committed to passing on the truth of God's Word to their kids. As a result, they make it a priority to not only spend time with their children but also teach them the Scriptures.⁸

To put it bluntly, you must decide to build your family and entire life on the Rock. Jesus and His Word are the foundation and rock of our lives. Those who obey Him are husbands and wives who are serious about their faith and committed to passing on the truth of God's Word to their sons and daughters—which will certainly have an impact on how these kids respond to life situations. The father, along with his wife's help, establishes an atmosphere in the home

where anything and everything can be discussed with the kids. Every issue and situation, however, will be viewed through the lens of God's Word, not by popular opinion or the perspective of the world.

Barna's research indicates that the results of this approach can be significant. Here are a few positive statistics that demonstrate the wisdom of parents teaching their children a biblical worldview. Those children are

- 12 times less likely to engage in extramarital sex
- 9 times more likely to avoid adult-only material on the internet
- 5 times more likely to believe that Satan is real, not just a symbol of evil
- 5 times less likely to believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are simply different expressions of the same truths
- 4 times more likely to reject the idea that a person can reach Heaven through personal goodness or doing good works⁹

By the way, teaching all these things takes time. Lots of time. You know the old debate about time, don't you? "Quality time" versus "quantity time." Some well-meaning parents who realize that their careers take too much time from the family choose to emphasize quality time. In their minds, their work is simply too demanding to have quantity time, so they make sure the time they do have with their families is quality.

That sounds good, but it has one fatal error: *you never know when quality time is going to show up*. Quality time

isn't the norm. Quality time is when you can talk heart to heart with your kids. Quality time is when your son asks you a serious question completely out of left field as you are trimming the bushes together. Quality time is when you're putting your daughter to bed at night and she asks you to tell her a story about when you were a kid. It doesn't seem like any big deal at that moment, but it's a funny thing: she may remember it for the rest of her life.

Quality time usually makes an appearance someplace in the realm of quantity time.

Tom Peters is a prolific writer on the subject of business and excellence. He has either authored or coauthored such bestsellers as *In Search of Excellence*, *A Passion for Excellence*, and *Thriving on Chaos*. Listen to the words of this business guru who divides his time between homes in California and Vermont: "We are frequently asked if it is possible to 'have it all'—a full and satisfying personal life and a full and satisfying, hardworking professional one. Our answer is: No. The price of excellence is time, energy, attention and focus, at the very same time that energy, attention and focus could have gone toward enjoying your daughter's soccer game. Excellence is a high-cost item."¹⁰

High cost is right! It may cost you a child on the casualty list. It may cost you a son who turns to alcohol because Dad was never around. It may cost you a pregnant daughter who went to some adolescent male to meet her emotional needs because Dad was unavailable to fill her emotional tank.

Peters doesn't know it, but he's dispensing enemy propaganda. This successful writer is giving men permission to sacrifice their children on the altar of personal ambition. And he is wrong. Peters is to be commended for his honesty, but his reasoning is barbaric. An expert in marketing, he is

marketing Strategy #2. And ultimately, Strategy #2 will eat your lunch. The enemy will use anything to alienate you from your children. Even a “passion for excellence.”

You know, I have a passion to be an excellent father—and now a grandfather. I’m guessing you do, too, or you wouldn’t have read this far. We need some men who have a passion to be better fathers than they are accountants. We need some men who have a passion to be better dads than they are attorneys, salesmen, foremen, pastors, or doctors.

Are you one of these men? You can be!

So far in these opening pages, I’ve said two things—but they may be among the most important things you’ve heard in a long time: (1) War has been declared on the biblical family, and (2) Satan’s two specific strategies in this war are to alienate you from your wife and to alienate you from your kids.

But I have something else I want to say.

SATAN’S STRATEGY IN THE WAR ON THE FAMILY IS TO NEUTRALIZE THE MAN

Baseball’s legendary manager Leo Durocher was coaching first base in an exhibition game between the old New York Giants and the cadets at West Point.

One noisy cadet kept shouting at Leo, doing his best to upset him.

“Hey, Durocher,” he hollered. “How did a little squirt like you get into the major leagues?”

“My congressman appointed me,” Leo shouted back.¹¹

Not only is that a great comeback, but it also reveals how you got to be head of your family: you were appointed. Like it or not, you carry the responsibility. You are the point man.

The enemy is no fool. He has a strategically designed game plan, a diabolical method he employs time and time again. When he wants to destroy a family, he focuses on the man. If he can neutralize the man, he has neutralized the family. And the resulting damage is beyond calculation.

Satan's approach is the same, whether he's doing combat in the church or in the family. If he can neutralize a pastor through the man's financial impropriety or sexual escapade, he has neutralized that pastor's church as well. Not only has the pastor's reputation been tarnished, but the church's has as well, possibly for a generation. Satan's strategy has always been to neutralize the leaders.

That means we should *expect* to be attacked. We should *expect* extreme temptation to come our way. When you get serious about leading your family, you will be opposed.

If a man is passive and indifferent to the things of God and the spiritual leadership of his home, then attack isn't necessary. He's already neutralized. But the moment a man gets serious about following hard after Christ, he can expect the shelling to start. The enemy wants you neutralized, and he is not pleased when you begin to give spiritual leadership to your wife and children.

May I ask a question? What do you suppose Jesus Christ thinks about the failure of men to assume their God-appointed leadership roles? Jesus Christ established the family. Jesus Christ was incarnated into a family. He had brothers, sisters, and a genealogy. Perhaps the Lord would look at our contemporary situation and modify something He said at

another time, in another culture. Perhaps He would say something like this:

When He saw the leaders, He was filled with dismay, because so many quit, so many were set aside, and so many were plateaued and directionless. They had lost their zest for leading. They had *no clear philosophy or direction for their leadership. They were leaderless leaders. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the leaders with clear direction are few. Ask the LORD of the harvest, that He will send forth knowledgeable, discerning, and direction-oriented leader-laborers into His harvest.”*¹²

In the war on the family, the harvest is our children. They are the leaders and the parents of the next generation.

What will turn the tide in the war on the family? In the months prior to the last presidential election, I heard many evangelicals talk about the necessity of electing a Christian president. “Wouldn’t it be great to have a committed Christian in the White House?” they asked. I would like to suggest something else that, in my opinion, would have far greater impact. If hundreds of thousands of men seriously began to lead in their own homes, the impact on America would be far greater than one Christian man leading in the White House.

It is estimated that when Canada geese fly in formation, they can fly 70 percent farther than when they travel alone.¹³ If Christian men all over America would get into battle formation and begin to lead, we could turn this war around—and we could turn it quickly.

That's what I wanted to say.

I know that you love your family. You love your wife. You love your children. You would be willing to die for them. In most wars, that's what men are asked to do. They go off to war because they're willing to die for their families.

But in this war, it's different. In this war, Jesus Christ is looking for men who will *live* for their families. That's what He would have you do.

In the spiritual war on the family, it is the father who leads best.