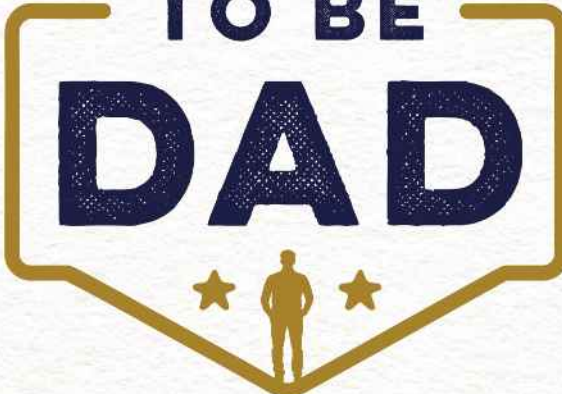


**CALLED  
TO BE  
DAD**

A gold-colored shield-shaped graphic with a double-line border. Inside the shield, at the bottom, is a silhouette of a man standing with his arms at his sides. On either side of the man are two gold stars. The shield is positioned below the word 'DAD' and above the subtitle.

**HOW GOD EQUIPS YOU  
TO BE THE MAN  
HE MADE YOU TO BE**

---

**DR. MARK PITTS**

**CALLED**  
**★ TO BE ★**  
**DAD**

**CALLED  
TO BE  
DAD**



**HOW GOD EQUIPS YOU  
TO BE THE MAN  
HE MADE YOU TO BE**

**DR. MARK PITTS**

  
**Revell**

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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*For my wife, Susan, who has been my best friend for more than forty-five years. You are the example of what true prayerful ministry means, and your ability to reach so many for Jesus Christ has inspired me throughout the process of this book. Thank you for reminding me that this is really for all the dads out there and to remain true to what the Lord has called me to do.*

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# INTRODUCTION

To you, dad, before we begin . . .

I have been involved in a full- or part-time teaching and preaching ministry for the better part of forty-five years. As a pastor, I have preached hundreds of sermons about the relevant spiritual topics of the day. Over the years, though, I came to realize—either through counseling or private conversations, at Saturday men’s meetings or spiritual retreats—that dads were not particularly moved by my instruction in those topics. While it could have been that my preaching was lacking at times, what I realized is that dads wanted to hear and know the answers to the prayers they prayed for themselves and their families every day. Dads wanted to know ten things:

1. How can I connect with God?
2. How can I be a good father?
3. How can I be a good parent?
4. How can I provide for my family?
5. How can I be a good husband?

6. How can I be forgiven for the mistakes I've made?
7. How do I pray as a dad?
8. How can I be a success in what I'm called to do?
9. What if things don't work out for my family?
10. How do I keep going?

Just like every other dad, I struggled with each of these topics as a Christian man, parent, and husband. But this is not a how-to book in the way you are familiar with. The best answers to those questions are grounded in what we will discuss—how God in His infinite wisdom, through His Holy Spirit and with the instruction and example of Jesus Christ as He is portrayed in Scripture, wants each of us to succeed in becoming the father we were called to be.

In each chapter, the primary question dads ask will have at least one Scripture passage to reference, which hopefully will provide comfort and assurance that you can and will succeed in everything God has called you to do. More than anything else, my goal is for you to discover God's love for you as a father. My entire ministry has consisted of bringing the promise of His love to those I counseled or taught in sermons or conferences, and now through the Midnight Dad Devotional community. One of the verses that changed my life (and there are many) was the simple verse that most of us are familiar with, John 3:16. We will see this passage emerge in the context of fatherhood later, but it has so much significance for our lives in the here and now that I think it's necessary as an introductory verse. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten

Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (KJV).

Many of us know this verse by heart, don’t we? We rattle it off, knowing in our innermost being that God sent His Son so we could have eternal life with the Father. However, most of us look forward to that eternal life as though it is something to be hoped for only in the future. We see “perish” and figure that the life Jesus is speaking of begins only after we die. But that is not the whole truth of the verse.

Jesus tells us very clearly that God intended for us to have everlasting life—to have, to possess, to own, to hold life right now. And this is not just limited to our physical life, our physical being. God sent His Son in order that we might have a life today that is full to overflowing with success and reward relationally, spiritually, and emotionally. All of this is in addition to having that eternal life with our heavenly Father in the future.

There is a certain joy in knowing this God who wants us to have everlasting life. That joy consists of a peace without measure and the hope that it will never end. It is walking down the street and, as cheesy as it sounds, seeing a bluer sky and greener grass. It is the multiplication of every good thing we can imagine. For me, that joy is not just about having everything I need—you know, provision, prosperity, and abundant life, as James speaks of (James 1:17). No, for me and I think the dad in each of us, it’s about assurance that I’m making it. That I’ve done everything I needed to do

today to keep my family safe. That the mistakes I've made today will not have everlasting consequences.

God has been involved in every good thing in our lives. In those circumstances that seem quite a bit less than good, we must believe that goodness is on its way.

I live in a region where drought is a regular issue. Anyone who has experience with farming land or raising animals on the land knows that rain is essential to success. Men and women, fathers and mothers pray every single day for rain, which will bring growth to the crops, some of which provide food for the animals they are raising. They pray to God not because they think He is withholding the rain to test their character and He is some kind of bully. They pray not because they think He's unaware of their needs, provision, and livelihoods and if they ask just "one more time" that He will answer. No, they pray because they know He is the provider of *all* good things, that He has sent the rain in the past, and that the rain is coming. So what are they praying, exactly? They are asking God to fulfill His promises, like the one we find in Ezekiel 34:26–27: "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD" (KJV).

Sure, these farmers and ranchers are praying that the rain comes sooner rather than later. They watch the radar as though they can actually move the rain closer to their land by sheer force of will. But at the end of the day, they

know it's coming because it always has. Trust me, no farmer plants today while worrying if the conditions will be just right at harvest. They plant because they trust God to bring in the harvest, whenever it arrives.

Like with those farmers, each and every need you have is in God's hands. God knows who you are, He knows your every need, and He knows your every footstep. He knows that the needs you are praying for are just as real and urgent and terrifying as the daily needs of those farmers.

God doesn't play favorites. You and your prayers will always have an immediate audience with Him. You see, He doesn't love anyone more than He loves you. He is always ready to hear from you about what you need. And you can trust that He will be just with you because He loves you and wants everything for your good.

One last thing. If you believe God is anything other than good, if you believe He wants anything less than success in your life, if you believe His primary function is to judge and punish your every move and plan, then you will not enjoy this book very much. We are delving into how we want to succeed as dads, and in order to do that, we must believe and know that such success is possible. Our prayers for our families rely on God to provide the answers. If God as Father is not good, how can you ask Him for advice on how to be the best father you can be? If God has not provided instruction somewhere, anywhere, on how to be a good parent, how do you expect to succeed in that role?

Our relationship with God is based upon His love for us. And His love is everlasting. We struggle with our fears

and failures and wonder if we are forgivable. We may have been tried and found wanting in our own endeavors, and we want some avenue to chart a new life where opportunity and outlook prevail. We wonder if the mistakes we've made and the ones we know we'll make in the future will prevent us from seeing the success we hope God has for us.

Rest assured, we are children of God, heirs to heavenly fortunes, and God wants this day and every day to be the best one of our lives. Let's see how we can manage our futures going forward as fathers, as husbands, as parents, believing that the God who made heaven and earth truly has our back.



# **GOD YOUR FATHER**

I want you to know that God has a special place in His heart for a father like you. You are fulfilling God's primary role of being a father to your children, just as one of God's primary roles for you is as your Father. He has given you a calling. He has also given you His attributes as a father to fulfill that calling. Of course He wants you to succeed! He has been and is even now preparing you for the life you have entered into.

You may have had a wonderful childhood and want to discover just how much better you can raise your own children. Or you may have had trouble while growing up and may be searching for confirmation that you are not bound by those difficulties. Maybe you grew up in a home where your father was absent or, as in many cases, was ill-prepared for the role of fatherhood in his own life. In each of those circumstances, fatherhood was passed from generation to generation, with widely varying outcomes.

I am the son of an adopted son. My father did not grow up in a nurturing home. He lived in what might have been called an orphanage for the first several months of his life. His adoptive parents were middle-aged when he became part of the family, and he was nine years old when his father died at the age of forty-six. By the time my father was a dad, his adoptive father had been dead fourteen years. He did not get to experience how a father might care for a son as he was growing up. Essentially my father had no father as a mentor or caregiver. And because he had no training in fatherhood, he was unable to pass down any training to me.

And this is where the training becomes so important. My father had no one to ask about being a father, and therefore he felt ill-equipped to give me advice. His only real word of advice when I asked him what it meant to be a dad was “Don’t drop your daughter.”

When we’re children, we see or understand so little about the motivations of our fathers, so we will only ever connect “fatherhood” to what they do or did. In our culture, most sons grow up believing they will be a father. So it was with me. I believed I was going to be a father and I would need some help to succeed. And so, growing up, I searched for the father I lacked. I found him in God, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ.

### **More Than a Fixer**

We start with the love of God as Father for us, because this will set the stage for how we connect with God. This is the basis for everything we will need as dads.

As dads, we are, in effect, doers. We are fixers, we are builders, we are finders of lost toys. We take those responsibilities very seriously.

But that's clearly not all God has intended. He intends for us to be actively involved in training our children, preparing them for life, and empowering them the way He has empowered us. We must train them in the ways of God, using His power, His principles, and His promises. And we can do so only by the measure of who we have become in God, knowing who He is and how He is present in our lives. Just as God as a Father loves you as a son, so also He wants to show how you can love your children.

It is Jesus who came to connect us to the Father. Therefore a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, is the starting point that will make you the father you have always wanted to be and always believed you could be.

Fatherhood is an intensely personal responsibility that God as Father is continually preparing you for. Your experience as a dad will not necessarily lead to the same discoveries as other dads. We are on a journey to find God in our everyday lives so we will be able to share the God we have discovered with our children. And along the way, our Father is a loving God who wants us to enjoy the journey rather than pressing full speed toward a destination.

### **The Father of the Lord's Prayer**

As we seek to train up our children, our first privilege is connecting with God and understanding who He is to us as

dads. For that, one of the most helpful passages in Scripture is the first few lines of the Lord's Prayer. "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9–10 KJV).

"Our Father which art in heaven." Powerful words I'll bet you've heard before. Jesus evokes a picture of a father figure who dwells in heaven. These words tell all of us that God is our Father, that we can have a personal relationship with Him, wherever He is. When Jesus spoke these words, He was telling the whole world something new, different, and exciting. Never before had anyone presumed to know God as their own Father. Sure, they knew God as *God*. But to have a personal relationship with Him? Unthinkable! This new relationship was based on who Jesus is to God: "Lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17 KJV).

These are very familiar words that God, Jesus's Father, speaks about Jesus at His baptism. Now, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us that we can have the same relationship with God as a Father that Jesus Himself has. We can be God's beloved son.

So how can that connection help us as dads? It provides an example of how we, too, can connect with our children. We know how important His presence is in our lives, and we can be that same presence for our children. It's not always possible to be as physically present as we wish we could be. We have provision and protection responsibilities as dads, and we're not always able to rearrange our schedules to be

present for our children. But where we do have choices, let's consider what God the Father's presence means to us. Don't we think our presence means that much to our children?

I intentionally turned down a promotion in a different state with the company that had hired me very early in my career because I would have been the same absent dad that my father was. While there was some second-guessing for several months after that decision, the Lord protected my family from what would have been a great deal of turmoil and separation. This changed my career trajectory so I was able to be present with my children every day, with maybe not quite as much provision as we might have had if we had moved. But I had the freedom to attend events with them and to show them how special they were to me.

At the end of the day, our presence in our children's lives promotes in their minds and hearts that what they do is important. Just like how the Lord is close to us when we draw near to Him, both in our struggles and in our successes, so also can we be present and supportive when our children deal with their own trials and tribulations as they grow.

Jesus reminds His disciples that since they have seen Jesus, they have seen the Father. And since they have known Jesus, they have known the Father.

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I

speaking not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. (John 14:9–10 KJV)

The disciples had a personal relationship with the God of heaven and earth. And Jesus Himself seeks to establish this promise of a personal relationship to his disciples and to all of us. In the Gospel of John, He strengthens this theme:

I have manifested Your name [and revealed Your very self, Your real self] to the people whom You have given Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept and obeyed Your word. Now [at last] they know [with confident assurance] that all You have given Me is from You [it is really and truly Yours]. (John 17:6–7)

God sent His Son so that He, Jesus, would promote God's glory on the earth. He gave Jesus the responsibility to keep, protect, and promote those He had given Him. Just as God gave those people to Jesus, you can know that He gave you your children, and you can trust Him to keep and protect you as you seek to provide for and protect them.

The implication of the phrase “Our Father which art in heaven” is far more encompassing than just referring to One who loves you very much. God is not just a father in the way we might think of one. A better expression of this phrase would be “God is Father.” He is the Creator of the limitless expanse of the universe and everything in it. He's also the Creator of the limitless expanse of heaven and is able to dwell there. He was everything before there was anything. He has “fathered” everything.

The next line of the Lord's Prayer says, "Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9 KJV). God has many names, each one describing an attribute that helps us discover who He really is. He is the God who protects. He is the God who sees and provides. He is the God who is a shepherd. Each one of those names should be hallowed, or holy—treated as special, set apart, greater than anything else—and they define, identify, and give a picture of how we might see Him and relate to Him. So God our Father is each and every one of those attributes to us. And Jesus Himself tells us that, first and foremost, we should hallow God's name of Father. Not in comparison to any other father but as *the* Father.

Listen, dad, we're protectors, and we know what this means because our Father protects us. When we're stressed about choices we are about to make but diligently pray and approach Him for advice, He is faithful to show us the way we should go and protect us from our own devices. How many of us have wished we had given the Lord a chance to answer for us when we were faced with an attack upon our character while going about our day at work or in the community?

Or what about those times when we just don't know where to turn, when the bills are due or the baby is sick and there just isn't enough of any resource to pave the way? Our natural minds and hearts are already screaming, "What am I going to do?" We live in an urgent world. We can barely see past today, much less tomorrow. But when God sees, He provides. No matter what we think or when we think it, He is already making the way for us. He sees

what we need and when we need it. We are never alone in our circumstances.

The next verse of the Lord's Prayer completes the identity picture of our Father. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (v. 10 KJV). Jesus, in describing His own relationship with His Father, says that we can and should expect our heavenly Father to be present in our lives. This may be the most looked-forward-to portion of this passage of Scripture.

Ever since I began my walk with the Lord, I have felt Him present in my life. Whenever I struggled with a momentous decision or wondered what next steps I should take in my career or family responsibilities, as I prayed about these things, it was as though Jesus Himself was in the room with me. And He is that present for you too. Think about it! When we're in the places where we have almost no ability to change our circumstances, such as a hospital where our children are injured or sick with some malady with a small likelihood of recovery, what do we want to know? Everything! And when do we want to know it? Now! And who do we want to know it from? The Lord, of course. The Lord always seemed present for me, as He can and will be for you whenever you realize that He is the source of wisdom in the choices you face.

The apostle Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we don't know what to pray (Rom. 8:26). It's not about what words we use or don't use or how strong we are. We need to know that when we open our mouths, the Lord is going to show up with exactly what we need.

Do we need healing? Of course, and the Lord our healer is there. Do we need peace? Of course, and the shalom of God is there. Do we need wisdom for what to say to the doctors when they are bringing us the report? Of course, and the wisdom of God is there. Dad, your heavenly Father is all these things, and Jesus tells us that we can count on Him when He says that our Father will be present on earth, even as He is in heaven.

## ★ 2 ★

# THE LOVE OF A FATHER

Dad, maybe the idea of God as Father intimidates you or makes you angry. Let's stop on our journey and focus on the most important attribute of the God you are connecting with—His love for you. First John 4:8 tells us, “God is love. [He is the originator of love, and it is an enduring attribute of His nature.]”

This is an astonishing aspect of God's nature. You see, God does not have love for us as we might understand having love for someone. We measure our love by how strongly we pour out our emotions for someone or how much time we spend thinking about or acting on behalf of them. But God *is* love. Think of standing on the shore of the Atlantic or the Pacific Ocean and attempting to measure just how much water you can see. It's endless and immeasurable. That's how God wants us to experience Him and His love.

Never forget that God loves you. Regardless of the father figure in your own life, God your Father is greater.

Let's delve into this notion of the love of God as Father and who we are as fathers. Just as God is love, so also did He intend for us to have and experience that love with our children. Think about it. God does not hold anything back from His children. When we pray for what we need and utilize God's name, He manifests Himself into our circumstances. While we may ask for health or wealth or peace because those are human needs, God brings Himself completely into our situation. He does that because He loves us. To that end, love as an attribute always arrives first. That means He has made us capable of holding a vast amount of love ourselves.

### **The Beginning of Love**

“In the beginning God . . . created [by forming from nothing] the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). God created everything that was. That's the introduction to Scripture. Everything else is advertising. Everything else is the details. Genesis 1:3 tells us that God said, “Let there be light.” This was not as though God was asking the light to come from someplace else. It was God declaring, “Light, BE!” What God said, was. It just was, as though God declared Himself. The glory of God was manifested as light. And the words of Scripture suggest that the glory of God consisted of . . . wait for it . . . love!

Why is this important? Every expression, every breath of God was God. When He says in Genesis 1:26, “Let us

make man in our image” (KJV), we should understand that we are going to be very much like God.

I have two children. One of them looks much more like me than the other. And yet the second one sounds more like me than the first. They are both made in my image, yet with different manifestations of the same creative spirit that God has placed in me.

The apostle Paul speaks of the fruit of the Holy Spirit as a manifestation of His work in a believer’s life. As the Spirit was present with God to allow us to be made in His image, we should understand that the attributes of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control were present in God. And God intended for us to have these qualities as well. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (vv. 27–28 KJV).

God has provided the ability for you to be a creative being by creating male and female in His image. You have a creative nature with which you can be fruitful and multiply. But why did He do it? Because He loved *you*.

This message of love continues throughout Scripture: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 KJV). Notice that God’s first thought out of His love for the world was to *give*. Everything God has ever done manifests His love for you. He created an entire world for you. He provided everything

you would need to succeed in that world. He gave explicit instructions on how you could use what you've been provided to succeed. And He told you that if you used what He had provided in the way He intended, you would have more than enough to share with your family.

When we think of the world, we may think of our earth. “World” in John 3:16 is probably better defined as “cosmos.” This word is intended to mean “everything.” And by everything, Jesus said that God meant “all of creation.” Heaven, stars, planets, trees, rocks, animals, people—all of the above. An artist might have the same sense toward a master work they've completed—that not one more stroke of a brush or one more use of a chisel would ever be needed. But our phrase suggests that God loved creation in a way that only He could. He was in every aspect of creation. He was actually present within it. God loves the world, and we are a part of this world. As such, we receive His mercy, kindness, and compassion—all present because of love.

### **The Presence of a Father**

God's love for you means He wants to be present in and with you, as well as all His children. And He wants you to have the same sense of presence with your children. More importantly, He wants you to have the same sense of fatherhood.

First John 4:7–21 is a great passage about God's intention that we hold others in high esteem, loving them because God has loved us first. But I want us to look at it from

a fatherhood perspective for our children rather than just a brotherhood perspective, as we are accustomed to seeing it. Here, John describes God's love in much the same way as we might describe the love we feel when holding our own newborn children in our arms.

Dear friends, let us continue to love [*our children*], for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. . . . Since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love [*our children*]. No one has ever seen God. But if we love [*our own children*], God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. (vv. 7, 11–12 NLT, emphasis added)

Just as God, our heavenly Father, had a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ, we are able to manifest that same love for our own children. We are fathers forever in the same way that God is for His Son.

Fathers like you have been searching for God's presence forever. You are not the first, nor will you be the last, to wonder where God is in times of provision or lack. When you feel like you need a miracle, you can call on God to be immediately present.

### **Designed to Succeed**

It is well and good to seek after God, and He will welcome you into His presence. He will gladly listen to your heart's desires and give you fresh opportunities to achieve all your goals. Maybe your question to God has always been "Can

I or will I be a good father?” as though the answer is somehow out of your hands, that only God can know. Quite the contrary. As with any desire of your heart, if you want to succeed, you probably will. However, the corollary is also true—if you don’t want to succeed, you certainly won’t.

God wants you to remember that “it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth [*every good thing*] that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:18 KJV, emphasis added). You have the power to succeed as a dad, and God leaves it up to you as to whether that success comes to pass.

We must know that much of our success, or lack thereof, comes from our ability to trust God. If we’re thinking of taking that first step in any endeavor, the first sense we have is that we cannot succeed. If you don’t think you’ll ever run that marathon, you’ll never start. If you don’t think you’ll get that promotion, you won’t try. If you don’t believe in yourself, you won’t put forth the effort to succeed. Our inner voice usually leads us to what is easy rather than what is hard. Yet someone had to be the first one to step into the Red Sea when the Lord said to go. “The LORD said to Moses, ‘. . . Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff . . . that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground’” (Exod. 14:15–16 ESV). God wants to provide that word of comfort and assurance in your life. He wants you to trust Him in all of your opportunities.

I had a severe sports injury in college, which I tended to aggravate from time to time until eventually I had to have it repaired surgically. All the prevailing literature suggested

that the healing process would be long and painful. I was certain that I could heal myself through therapy with only a modicum of pain. However, I came to find out that the prevailing literature was more true than not and that pain accompanied the healing process of this surgery. That is, the less pain I allowed myself to experience, the longer the healing process would take. The therapist warned me that if I didn't heal soon, if I didn't hit the marks of progress that I needed to for full recovery, I would likely have limited mobility for the rest of my life or I would need to have additional surgery to regain the possibility of total health.

I must readily admit that I am somewhat allergic to pain, but pain is sometimes the by-product of God's plan for success for us. God wants us to succeed. He made us for success. Did I have to be a dad to come to the conclusion I arrived at? Of course not. But I was going to be a much better dad and much more able to provide for my children when I started relying on God's plan and not my own circumstances.

Fatherhood is in you. It's inescapable. However you are a father, either by birth, marriage, or court order, the way you manage fatherhood is between you and God. But having the power and authority to be a father and allowing God to use you as a father to accomplish His will in heaven and on earth are two entirely different things. And His way is always better. When He calls you, He will move heaven and earth to make sure His plan comes to pass. Because every action of God springs from His love for you.