

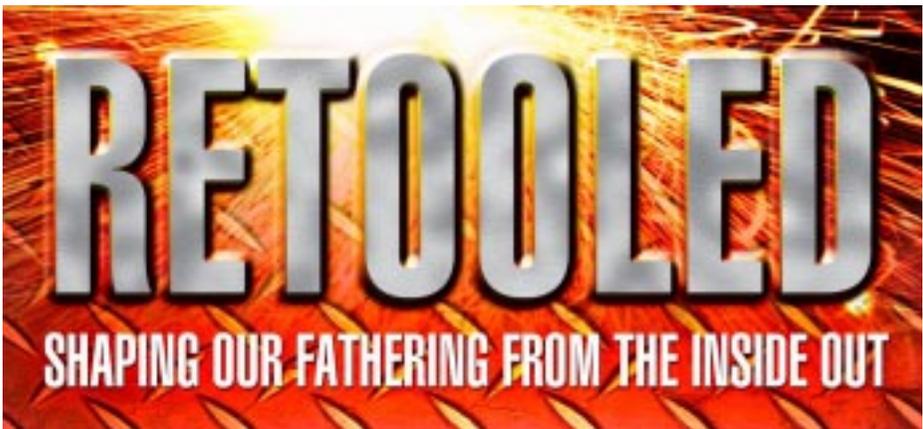
RETOOLED

SHAPING OUR FATHERING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

“But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.”

Galatians 5: 22-23

JAY COOKINGHAM



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Jay Cookingham
Retoold:Shaping Your Fathering From the Inside Out

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(22) “But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.” Galatians 5: 22-23 (Living Bible)

“A man ought to live so that everybody knows he is a Christian... and most of all, his family ought to know.” - Dwight L. Moody

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my Life

When I became a father at age thirty-three I felt like Neil Armstrong stepping onto the lunar surface for the first time. That's one small step for man, and one giant, humongous, scary leap into the unknown. How could eight pounds, six ounces feel so heavy? My firstborn son set off a chain of events that altered my life forever and I felt the weight of responsibility press hard on my chest. The man I was at that moment needed to change, and God would use fatherhood to do the work. Six more children later and guess who is still a work in progress?

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 NKJV

Isn't that great, we're a real piece of work! There is a prepared path to walk on, a journey of relational growth beginning with the Father. It is my hope that as you read this book, you will discover the power released in the retooling of the Holy Spirit. I believe when we retool, that energy enables us to be the fathers we always hoped to be. The good works on this journey include loving our families like they need to be loved, enriching the soil of our children and caring for the fields of our marriage. Bearing fruit is all about cultivating our landscape, nurturing growth in all the lives around us.

Hmmm... isn't fruit also a result of using a tool, the whole fruit of our labor deal? (In my case, that means my father-in-law's labor, more about that in

chapter one) Yes, and yet there is so much more to add to this thought. Fruits are nourishment for our bodies, instruments (tools) of growth and health. They are, of course, the natural result of proper growth. When the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives He has that “home repair” effect on us. We are remodeled from the inside out, retooled to be like Him.

Webster defines retooled this way:

1. To fit out (a factory, for example) with a new set of machinery and tools for making a different product.
2. To revise and reorganize, especially for the purpose of updating or improving

You know, I like this definition. The Father uses the Holy Spirit to work continuously in my life. Retooling me on a new assembly line with the expressed purpose of making a new product...a new me, refitted with an updated and improved character. Now, the Holy Spirit defines retooled by the fruit that He produces in us and that definition is in the book of Galatians.

“But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.” Galatians 5: 22-23

The Living Bible

Through this inner retooling the Father’s character, His goodness, strength, compassion and staying power is changing us. Sounds like an extreme home makeover to me, a complete transformation from the inside out! Father God is looking for dads who sacrifice, who are disciplined, and who are willing to follow hard on the journey with Him. This is an expedition of emptying oneself, resulting in transformation (to Christ’s image) on the way. The best thing about this journey...the Heavenly Father initiates and fuels this discipleship adventure!

“God is faithful; by Him you were called into companionship and participation with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1 Corinthians 1: 9

God has transformed our *landscape* (I'll explain more about this concept in the chapters ahead) through His Son, strategically planning for our salvation. He deposited Himself right in the mainstream of humanity, desiring deep relationship with His creation. Through this powerful covenant He awakens purposes, plans and releases His power in us. That power to help transform lives is released (I believe) through fathering.

One of the Messiah's titles is "The everlasting Father." (Isaiah 9:6) He modeled fathering throughout His ministry. Remember those twelve guys he hung out with? He mentored, he led, he developed, he taught, he coached, he befriended, he influenced, he encouraged, and he impacted! That was fathering at its best and it changed the disciple's view on their landscape forever. It prepared them for the release of Holy Spirit power through their lives. For us it's no different, seeing our landscape through God's eyes, we gain a special perspective. That's a new retooled outlook, helping us discover and decide how best to lead our families. The fathering release in us also adds up to some genuine fruit bearing, making us more like Him.

"Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; and so shall ye be my disciples" John 15:8

I wrote this book to encourage men on their journey as fathers, but more than a "how to" book, it's an invitation to a deeper relationship with Father God. That crucial connection is the fuel that drives the way we love our family and the world we walk in everyday. Cultivating a life that mirrors the Father's love requires the Holy Spirit to work on us from the inside out. The Fruit of the Spirit is essential to our success as fathers and the mission we're on. The components of that mission are discipleship and restoration; both depend heavily on our commitment.

That commitment zone is where we're attacked daily. Pulled, tempted, distracted, the enemy's strategy, purposed to throw us off stride, is effective in many men's lives. It takes walking in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control to combat those effects. Against such powerful life changing fruit there is no law and nothing that can stand against it.

To me the Fruit of the Spirit are disciplines not only the result of right living in Christ. These disciplines are part of a personal spiritual workout program designed by the Father, engaging us, entreating us to be like Him. Much more than strict adherence to a list of rules, it's more than an application of truth and it's more than practice. This is an "inside job" that's done by the Spirit of God working in us.

For us, the discipline part is our willingness and our cooperation with that plan to change us from the inside out. This is the journey offered, to follow Christ and be changed men, the choice is always ours. Not merely trying to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled . . . but allowing the retooling that fuels the transformation that releases that fruit in our lives. The benefit of such discipline increases the health of every relationship we have.

Throughout RETOOLED I also talk about sonship . . . a lot! You may be thinking what connection could there be between sonship, the Fruit of the Spirit and fathering. I believe there are powerful connections between all three. You and I were called to be the husbands our wives need and the fathers our children need. The same calling defines the man we are to be for our brothers in the faith. Most of all, we are called to be His sons. That calling is a relational union of purpose, freedom and mission.

Our faith is essential to this mission; it's the key ingredient for its success. Knowing and connecting with the Father daily is huge in keeping the mission on target. That relational power translates to great miracles happening in our lives. In my eyes, there is no greater miracle than having your children follow Christ with all they have. Home is the place where discipleship starts and the words in Deuteronomy 6 speak volumes.

"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Brothers, a discipleship plan within a family begins with the father, with the word of God already on our own hearts. We cannot impart into our children's hearts what is not already deep in ours. Every moment of family life can be an opportunity to proclaim God's goodness; leading them to a strong love for God. I'm not talking about family devotions but a family devotional flavor that flows into their lives. Discipleship is wrapping prayer, worship and the Scriptures around every avenue of family life.

Sonship retooling is a commissioning by the Holy Spirit, filling and anointing us for the mission of leading our families. There is great adventure ahead, but real men are not merely thrill seekers, who are just in it for the ride. No, they are sons, whose masculinity is undergoing a refit from the inside out to look more like Jesus. There is enough challenge in that transformation alone to last a lifetime. This transformation upsets our status quo and hopefully wakes us up to be about our Father's business! There is this ancient prayer credited to Sir Francis Drake, it is one of my favorites and a great one for fathers to meditate on.

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves;
 when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little;
 when we arrive safely because we sailed too close to the shore.
 Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess
 we have lost our thirst for the Waters of Life;
 having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity;
 and in our efforts to build a new earth,
 we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.
 Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly -
 to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery;
 where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.
 We ask you push back the horizons of our hopes,
 and to push us in the future with strength, courage, hope and love. Amen.

I'm glad that God loves us enough to disturb our slumber and our comfort. Following Him is everything; the path ahead is daring and life changing. This journey challenges us as providers, in the way we lead, and the manner in which we care for our loved ones. It probes and tests us daily as men of action and as men of faith. Along the way surrender, submission and sacrifice shape us. It's accepting that "His ways are not our ways" and understanding that God knows what is best for our lives. Read these Scriptures from Psalm 37: 3-9

*"Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. (4) **Delight** yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. (5) **Commit** your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And **He shall** bring it to pass. (6) He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. (7) **Rest** in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. (8) **Cease** from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm. (9) For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who **wait** on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth."*

Here is what I think when I read these Scriptures.

- When I trust in Him it disturbs my faith to rise up.
- When I delight in Him, it disturbs my heart to fall deeper in love with Him.
- When I commit my way to Him, it disturbs my direction and I find my way.
- When I rest in Him, it disturbs my strife and I find peace.
- When I cease from anger, it disturbs my resentment and I forgive.
- When I wait on Him, it disturbs my restlessness and I linger in His presence.

Trust, Delight, Commit, Rest, Cease, Wait, and in the middle, he shall! In the middle of everything we go through, in the middle of every aspect of our

life...He shall be with us. He shall bring us to the place where we are free...Father God will finished us off!

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1:6

Deep inside us is a yearning for a deeper relationship with the Father. We can try to push it aside or ignore it but the longing will never be silent in our souls. The power in God’s love will undo us; it will unravel our sinful nature and turn us inside out. If we follow, if we seek, if we hunger and thirst after the Father’s Kingdom, we will be changed men.

“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.” Colossians 1:10

Retooled for His Service!

Jay Cookingham

RETOOLED

SHAPING OUR FATHERING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

“And he said some day I hope you get the chance, to live like you were dying.” – Country song by Tim McGraw

“Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.” Romans 6:13

“It is not enough for man to simply to recover right ideas about God, or to obey his will in the isolated actions of his life. No, man must be refashioned as a living whole in the image of God. His whole form, body, soul, and spirit, must once more bear that image on earth.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

CHAPTER 1

Live Like You Were Dying

Your Calling

“For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father!” Romans 8:15

The calling to be dad is an awesome one and make no mistake, it is a calling. This call to is simply following the example of Father God fleshed out in the life of Jesus. The power of this calling is born in the spirit of adoption, the extreme makeover of people into sons and daughters. The flow of the Holy Spirit through our lives is essential, not just as fathers of course, but as followers of Christ. The love of God, the example of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit are the building blocks for a strong father.

It is here our journey begins but it does require an unusual first step to be a more effective dad and a greater influence on all those in your care. This one step is a powerful, revolutionary difference maker. It will set you on a challenging course; and begin a journey of unbelievable adventure. It will change your life in ways that perhaps, you did not think possible.

What to know the one thing, the one step? Well, here’s a scene from one of my favorite Bond movies that might give you a hint to the answer. In the movie *Goldfinger* this small exchange takes place between Bond, super-cool spy guy, who is tied to a table, and the bad guy pointing a nasty laser device towards 007.

Bond: Do you expect me to talk?

Goldfinger: No, Mr. Bond, I expect you to die!

That's it, that's the one step. Lao Tzu, once said, "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step. "I say it begins with, "Are we there yet?", at least, when it concerns the family vacation! When we talk about the journey with God, the Father does expect the "old self" to die to allow real life (His) to emerge in all we do. The wonderful gift of Salvation guarantees a new life from a lost one. He states it over and over throughout the Word.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me." Galatians 2:20

"For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3

"I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service." Romans 12:1

The New Testament is full of "new life" instruction that involves living like you were dying moments. The process of dying to self is the deep purging of all the barriers that block our growth as Christ followers. This spiritual power wash enables us to discover more about ourselves, and not just our weaknesses and our strengths. It gives us insight to see who we really are. Allowing this Holy Spirit retooling frees us to see the man we can become in Him. So what does dying to self look like? I believe it looks like Christ who modeled selfless living faithfully. If Jesus had a motto for this retooling life style, I think it would be the following.

"Greater love hath no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

Dying to Self = New Way to Be Human

There are many "voices" trying to describe our humanness, and the kind of man we need to be. Society always has an opinion and the media (TV,

movies, books, music) shouts at us with all kinds of images it would love for us to follow. The educational system has its own idea what human beings should be like; even the church has a few ideas to throw into the mix. The loudest voice may be our past. The mistakes or choices we have made; all competing for the final stamp on our humanness. All of these voices conflict with God's definition and description of how He wishes humans to be.

Being human wearies me sometimes. I grow so tired of my own human nature and hearing others say, "Well, I'm only human." It seems like a sad condition, this humanness, and coping with it seems pointless at times. In fact, dealing with my humanity is much like eating a baloney sandwich. Exciting? I don't think so. Filling maybe, but not *fulfilling* at all. There are days when I try to live beyond the dreary baloney sandwich mentality. I have wishes of making a difference in the world, of leaving my mark on society. Days when I want to "lay my life down". That's when my humanity strikes again and the compulsive disorders of selfish living take control. In this state, eyes and ears quickly close to the needs of others. My own version of humanity was suffering from something I couldn't indentify, that is, until Coach Riley came to town.

When Pat Riley took over as coach of the New York Knicks in 1991, he said their poor team play was because of a disease they all had. To coach Riley, the player's team focus was far less compared to the attention they paid to their own stats, playing time and salary. He called it "the disease of me." After watching the press conference, it became obvious to me that I was a carrier of that same sickness; too much "me-ness" is a sure symptom. Is this what God created humans to be like, totally me-centered? No, I believe there is a new way to be human.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...' Genesis 1:26

God created humanity in His image and stamped His likeness on us. We can share His character, His creativeness and vision. Seeing like God raises our awareness, and our spiritual eyes open to all sorts of new possibilities. Think about it, what would happen if we started looking at one another like God sees us? Imagine what would happen if we saw the poor, the needy, the unwanted like God sees them? We would see people far differently...even the person you see in the mirror each morning. You see it's because of Jesus we

look different, because of His death and resurrection. When Father God looks at us, He sees the individual He created, seeing past our sin to the person He created us to be. We can share that same wonderful vision; we just need our eyes opened.

*Open my eyes so that I may behold wondrous things.
Psalm 119:18*

It is through Jesus we have the best example of a new way to be human. He looked into people's eyes and saw the image of God reflected on their faces. While He walked this Earth, Jesus poured His love through His humanness, through His flesh. He was love in a skin suit. I'm glad; humanity needed that love, that perfect example of a new way to be human. Through it, Jesus redirects our vision towards the Father and His viewpoint. What does God see? How does God see? These become questions that empower our imagination, giving insight to the heart of God. When we do, that's when the wondrous things appear. Our own humanity looks different, neighbors look different and more importantly, the people we see as our neighbor changes.

“For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 5:14

To see through new human eyes will surprise us because a retooled, new way to be human outlook has a heavenly spin on it. The ordinary, the status quo, the routine, a Divine definition of who we are disrupts them all, filling my every nook and cranny of my life with God's purpose. That purpose is centered on life with the Father because that's the life that works for our families and us.

This new way to be human is all about knowing the Father and pursuing a deeper relationship with Him. This pursuit ignites our spirit and we become fully alive and set free to love like Him. Life experiences touch and teach our humanness, but relational communion with the Father restores it. The result is brand spanking new humanness, with the capacity and freedom to embrace this “living like you were dying” journey. Through it all God is saying “Here's life more abundantly” and stuffing every single pore with it. Always enthusiastically reminding us of our true DNA and the man He intends us to be.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16

Because of that Spirit living in us, we are free to live out the life He has designed for us. It’s a life of transforming power, enabling us to be like our Father. It’s the only life that works for us and allows us to love like a new human being. This new way God is describing is a challenging journey for sure, but now we give off a “*new human smell*” as we go along. Traveling on this road of “living like you were dying” requires four things.

- **A Decision**

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:30

Our plans, our personal agenda must give way to His. It’s about taking the attention off us and directing towards the Father. We are “son reflectors”, reflecting the love and mercy of God towards a dying world.

- **A Strong Back**

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” Matthew 16:24-25

It’s actually all about winning, and gaining the life we were created for. The new way to be human breathes purpose in us and then helps change the world around us. A new way to be human doesn’t worry about what they are losing.

- **A Humble Response**

“For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, (7) but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:5-8

A new way to be human embraces humbleness. That embrace sets us free to do the Father’s will whatever the cost. We’re not worried about what’s in it for us.

- **A Good Imitation**

“Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; (2) and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell. Ephesians 5:1-2

You should see my oldest son Josh imitate me sometime, it’s funny. Am I offended by the show he puts on? No, not a bit, because of the relationship we share. He’s not doing it to be disrespectful but it shows he knows me. And that is what this Scripture is saying, because you know Christ. . . imitate Him, love and live like Him. It’s about relationship! The new way to be human is always about relationship.

These four points show why we need to be in a daily state of new human retooling, our blurry “self-vision” needs clearing up. This inner transformation allows the selfish part of our lives to be reworked by the Holy Spirit, making us more like Christ every day.

*“Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.”
2 Corinthians 5:17*

“If one first gives himself to the Lord, all other giving is easy.” - Robert Harris

Denying oneself is a powerful agent of change. The Greek word for deny in Matthew 16:24 is a strong one; it’s the word *aparneomai* (*ap-ar-neh’-om-ah-ee*) and basically means to disown oneself. So, denying “me” is fully accepting the fact that I am no longer the center of my world. In my own journey with Christ, I’m discovering more and more that fatherhood is so NOT about me!

What *is* it about then? Sacrifice? Surrender? Yes, but it’s much more than a willingness to give up stuff, more than just being obedient. This retooling of the Holy Spirit is relational and deeply personal. God is imparting something deeper than a set of instructions and a list of rules. He’s calling us to a life-changing journey with Him and He calls us by name!

“But now so says Jehovah who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel; Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by your name; you are Mine.” Isaiah 43:1

Here the Hebrew word for called is *qara'* (*kaw-raw'*) which means; to call out, recite, read, cry out, or proclaim. The picture is of a proud Father calling His children by name, reminding them of their security, their protection, and their value to Him. The Father makes this moment a declaration, a heavenly proclamation of distinct identification of us and with us. Throughout scripture He speaks of a global positioning with Him, the creator of the universe. This is the nature of God—to be intimate with His kids—on a first name basis with all of us. Drawing us to Him, calling our name, grafting us onto the family tree and declaring universally, “you are mine”. As we walk in relationship with Him, our desire for living like our Daddy becomes alive and passionate. The focus changes from “what must I do to be good?” to “how can I be more like my Father?”

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Ephesians 3:14-15

The Father names us; this acknowledgment by Paul—the writer of Ephesians—should strike a cord deep within us, waking us up to the promise that has been revealed to us, the promise of being *named* into a family by Father God. His naming principle not only identifies us as individuals—each with a certain gifting and purpose—but as family units that increase those gifts into possibilities beyond our imagination. His naming us is meant to bring life. His calling is meant to bring life and purpose together for our benefit. So we begin to understand our role, our place, and to recognize the scope of our landscape.

I believe that a man’s landscape is the sum of the many tracts of land that intersect his life. The social, emotional and physical features of our territory are deep and varied. Parts of our terrain may have scars caused by many years of drought and neglect. Perhaps, failure to plant and cultivate wisely has left our soil fallow and dry. It becomes a hard place to see correctly.

A landscape by definition is an expanse of scenery that can be seen in a single view. However, a single view is incomplete and inadequate when it comes to a man’s landscape, that’s why we need the Father’s view. Seeing our landscape like the Father empowers and recalibrates our surveying skills. The ho-

rizon, once lost in the haze of pain and loss, is brought to focus and we see the person God sees. We are valuable real estate, bought at a great price. This is the way the Father views the landscape of our lives.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us (even when we were dead in sins) has made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved)”

Ephesians 2:4-5

He makes us alive! Think about that for a moment. Maybe this Father focused moment is about discovering for the first time, just how much He loves you. He wants you alive so your life makes a difference in this world. Father God wants to rock your world with the knowledge that you matter to Him! Truth is, there’s more to this story. You, the person He created you to be, matter to the world; your life is a powerful statement of who God is. As God restores our hearts we can move in our world, as examples of His redemptive power.

Grab hold of that power, let the awareness soak you, I bet you can’t stay the same! I know the muscle of this love transfusion, for it changed my orphan status forever. I am God’s son and that truth powers the passion for loving my wife, for fathering, and all that I am. Personal experience and the memories of an abusive father (More about this story in chapter 5) also add to the zeal equation. I know the pain of father abandonment, even though he was still living at home. The cycle of abuse threatened to scar the landscape of my life with barrenness. Except for this truth I discovered years ago, Father God never deserted me.

“For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up.” Psalm 27:10

“You have seen it; for You behold mischief and vexation, to repay it with Your hand. The poor commits himself to You; You are the Helper of the fatherless.” Psalm 10:14

“In His holy dwelling God is the father of the fatherless, and the judge of the widows.” Psalm 68:5

Discovering that Father God loved me and that He would “take me up”, started something new in my life. When God becomes your Father, it changes everything. It changes your “*upbringing*”; your landscape! I can give testimony to that fact. I have a wonderful marriage and seven terrific kids; my life is blessed. There was pain and hardship but God was with me through it all. What the enemy meant for evil, God worked it out for good. Still, I know some people still struggle with the way they were fathered and with feelings of abandonment or rejection. These feelings sometimes cause a rift between them and God. For example, here’s a quote from someone’s diary, see if you can guess who it is.

“Because I was forever smiling, people thought my faith, my hope and my love are overflowing and that my intimacy with God and union with him filled my heart. If they only knew...I feel that God does not want me, that God is not God and that he does not really exist.”

Know who wrote that? Mother Teresa! Even that great servant of God struggled with the love of the Father in the midst of her life story. As I talk to more and more men, I hear similar themes. It doesn’t matter where on the journey with Christ they are; some have difficulty seeing Father God’s interest in their story...in them. They know they’re redeemed, saved, born-again, but knowing Father’s love and believing in His delight for them, well, not so much. The truth is that many men live like orphans in the family of God, instead of living like sons. Being accepted by God is awesome, but to know you are *accepted* because Father God loves you is a huge pile of awesome! The difference is simple, one is an orphan’s viewpoint and the other one is a son’s.

“See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for He allows us to be called His children, and we really are!”

I John 3:1 NLT

“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. (7) So that you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, also an heir of God through Christ.” Galatians 4:6-7

I know that sometimes our story seems faraway from a happy ending or a new beginning for that matter. Maybe right now yours is full of unpleasant lines. Sorrow and pain are the main chapter headers and turning the next page is scaring you to death. Here is the truth that Father God wants you to know. Nothing that is happening in your life right now comes as a surprised to Him. He's always been interested in your story, where you are in your story, and who you are in your story. There isn't a part that escapes His focus and plans for you. He loves you right now, He's guiding you right now and He's changing you, right now. Are you afraid of a few blank pages and lost chapters? Who isn't? Thankfully, we have an author for our faith story, one we can look to finish that tale.

“Looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

Father's love focuses on who you are, not what you have done. The challenge of fully accepting His love for us involves the action of letting go. What are we still hanging on to that blocks us from growing closer to God? What are we still embracing that hinders the flow of love between us? We can choose to live as orphans or as sons. It's letting go of what others think of us. It's letting go of past mistakes, decisions and failures. What about the pain others have caused us? Yep, it has to go, into the hands of a loving Father. In the middle of a dark chapter in my life Father God spoke hope and promise. Sure I endured abuse, pain and neglect but they did not author my story... God did, through His son Jesus. The Greek word here for author is *arche⁻gos* (*arkhay-gos*'), which means captain or prince. That's so cool to me that in our story, our prince did come, and He has written Himself into our story!

Turf Wars

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy... John 10:10

In this story there is also one major challenge; there is an enemy after your turf. He's a thief, he comes to rob, steal and destroy. He wants to mess with your landscape, capture your territory. Listen to this warning by Jesus in Matthew 13.

(24) *“Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.”*

The enemy doesn't always want to take us head on; he's willing to fight a war of attrition, waiting for us to fall asleep. We can't allow the enemy to plant seeds in the soil of our families. The enemy wants a land grab, he wants to make your territory his. I liken “sleeping” here to passivity and that's a nap we can't afford to take. Passivity is the trait of remaining idle, and opposed to activity. Listen to the defining words of passivity; they're not likely to stir up anything.

- Apathy
- Compliance
- Fatalism
- Inactivity
- Indifference
- Listlessness
- Numbness
- Submission (the bad kind)
- Dullness
- Lukewarm

I'm not an engineer (that info is probably not surprising) but I found this definition fitting. Passivity (in engineering terms) – is a passive component, depending on field, may either refer to a component that consumes (but does not produce) energy, or to a component that is incapable of power gain. Now, I have no idea if that's a good attribute or a bad one in engineering. I do know that for a man, a passive element is deadly.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” - Edmund Burke

I think that thought is expressed in this Scripture in Titus; it's talking about Jesus, who showed how to confront passivity head-on.

“Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify to Himself a special people, zealous of good works” Titus 2:14

The Father started dealing with me about passivity with series of questions that took place over a period of a few weeks. You know, Father God really knows how to ask a question. When He asks me a question it's always to get at something in my life. He knows the answer, so He is not seeking information. What is he after then? I believe He is giving me a heart shake-down, making me check out my heart from the inside out. Through questions God causes me to re-think where I place Him in my life.

So one day, God asks me:

Jay, what breaks your heart?

So, I start to think and muse about the answer (because I want to impress God with a good answer) and a few days later He floats another one.

Jay, what makes you angry?

Ok, so now I have two questions to mull over and they seem somewhat connected, so that's cool. A couple of weeks pass and... you guess it, He asks me another.

Jay, what gifts have I given you?

Now, I begin to think God is up to something (I'm a little slow) so I ask God a question of my own... how many know that when you ask God a question, you better be ready for the answer? Well, like I said, I'm a little slow; I asked the Father why are you asking me all these questions? His reply was in the form of a question, and it stung sharply in my spirit. The question opened up my heart and revealed something that was painful, but totally needed.

Jay, what's keeping you from obeying me?

WOW, that examination from God startled me! I hope you see how much of a challenge this is to all of us and how free we can be when we face this issue of passivity head on. One of the many problems this form of power failure is the addictions it leads to. Remember all those questions God asked me? Well, they revealed an addiction that I have and it's a huge one. Hint, it's very similar to a disease I mentioned earlier.

The draw is very powerful. . . I am addicted to ME. I'm obsessed with my wants, my desires, and to having my own way. This addiction shows it ugly head when I bow to the safety net of convenience or comfort; otherwise known as "playing it safe." This is SO not like Jesus! There were/are areas of my life that God needed to expose. I had given in; I surrendered to lesser things just because "some thing" (dreams, plans, etc) didn't work out the way I hoped. I used it as an excuse to become numb to God in those areas and I lost heart. This is why passivity is so deadly; it causes us to settle for less than God's best for us. This disease addiction combination fuels the powerless state reflected in many men's lives. Left untreated passivity makes you lose heart.

To lose heart means.

- You stop believing that you can succeed
- To lose one's courage or confidence

When we lose heart, we feed on those words of passivity I mentioned before and many more like them; they become our bread and butter. Your heart grows cold and four dangerous problems arise.

When you lose heart, you lose vision. When you lose vision, you lose your way.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he who keeps the law, he is blessed." Proverbs 29:18

In Deuteronomy 1:26-33 there is a prime example of losing sight of God's best and choosing something less. Israel was on the verge of entering the Promise Land; balked at God' plan and lost heart. They saw the size of the enemy instead of remembering the size of their God. Even when God promises to fight for them, Israel became passive in their faith and it caused them to wander 40 years in the wilderness.

"(26) Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God: (27) And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.

*(28) Whither shall we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there. (29) Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. (30) The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall **fight** for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; (31) And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. (32) Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God, (33) Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.”*

A father can't afford to lose vision, losing our way is too costly. In doubting our call to father we can lose sight in leading our families. The enemy may come off as all big, buff and nasty but we must remember all the victories won and who our Father is. Trusting in the Father's plan and the Holy Spirit's guidance is essential to seeing ahead.

When you lose heart, you give up dreams

In John 21: 1 – 19, after the death of Christ, the disciples went back to fishing. They gave up dreams of partnering in a kingdom of freedom. So, they went back to what was safe, what they thought they could control, but it wasn't the same. Let's read the account from the *Message Bible*.

After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee). This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed "Twin"), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing." The rest of them replied, "We're going with you." They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him.

Jesus spoke to them: “Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?”

They answered, “No.”

He said, “Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens.”

They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren’t strong enough to pull it in.

Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Master!”

When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea. The other disciples came in by boat for they weren’t far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.

Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught.”

Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn’t rip.

Jesus said, “Breakfast is ready.” Not one of the disciples dared ask, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Master.

Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

He then asked a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Shepherd my sheep.”

Then he said it a third time: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, “Do you love me?” so he answered, “Master, you know everything there is to know. You’ve got to know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. I’m telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you’ll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And then he commanded, “Follow me.”

They didn’t catch any fish, not one! Jesus shows up and demonstrates (again) what was possible with Him. He feeds the disciples a breakfast of bread and fish, reminding them of His care for them. After eating together (again, everything done in relationship, Jesus restores Peter and the mission for his life is reborn.

Dreams are fragile; they can get broken easily on our journey following Christ. Like the disciples we try to return to something familiar, something safe. Of course there are times when our dream takes center stage over God’s dream for us. Maybe our dream (or our part in the dream) is not as big as we imagined it to be (the disciples’ question of who is the greatest?). In all these cases, losing heart is a big contributor. The danger is not living the life the Father intends for us to live.

When you lose heart, you grow distant to the voice of God.

You tend to wander or drift on the path of passivity. Hebrews has this warning sign.

“For this reason we must pay closer attention to the things we have heard, or we may drift away” Hebrews 2:1

What have we heard? We have heard the Gospel and the truth of how valuable we are to the Father.

These are the words that keep us from drifting and winding up on the rocks of brokenness. We need to heed the signs warning us of the dangerous currents ahead. One year on vacation in Hatteras, North Carolina I put this to a test. I ignored the signs the lifeguards put up warning swimmers about dangerous riptide conditions. While body surfing I failed to notice that I was being carried out to sea, I was drifting further from the shoreline! Thankfully, due to some great observation skills (I turned and could barely see the beach) and in all honesty, the grace of God, I noticed my predicament way before it was necessary for the Coast Guard to rescue my sorry butt!

The danger of drifting spiritually is just as dangerous. Losing heart makes us lose interest and we fail to notice how far we are from the Father.

When you lose heart, you surrender to lesser things.

You accept pleasure and distractions as a substitute for real joy. You allow circumstances to dictate choices and directions instead of your relationship with God.

I love the movie *Braveheart* and it once spoke to me about this very subject (Don't judge me now). In my opinion the movie is a powerful metaphor for spiritual warfare. You have William Wallace leading the everyday folk in revolt against England, fighting for their freedom. Then you have Robert the Bruce, the leader of the Scottish Noblemen feeling the tug of joining the fight or staying the course of entitlement. His father (dying of leprosy) keeps whispering in his ear to bide his time to “rise up” but in reality is keeping his son from becoming a great leader.

Seeing this movie makes me think how much passivity makes us like Robert the Bruce. We get all inspired by a leader and want to run off and join a cause. BUT something reminds us of our holdings, the land and comfort we possess. We begin to believe the lie that the enemy is too strong and it's not the right time for to be so bold. We think that if we're patient, if we bide our time,

then we can overthrow the enemy in our lives. The truth is that the waiting, the laying back, lulls us to inactivity and eventually spiritual slaughter. All we thought we possessed has actually fallen into enemy hands. We don't realize how "occupied" we have become. It is worse than the disease that was wasting his father's flesh; it's the decay of true nobleness. In the movie, the chance of having their own freedom didn't motivate the "nobles". It meant risking losing what they already had. Contrast that to this Scripture in the book of Isaiah:

"But the noble thinks noble things; and by noble things he shall stand." Isaiah 32:8

A noble heart is a willing and active heart, not one bound to passivity. It rises, willing to stand for what is right. Staying the course, and surrender to His will are some of the trademarks of a noble man. On the trail of obedience sons reflect their Father's character, giving hope and marking the trail for those who follow. How do we give hope? By coming alongside someone when they're in need and helping. By allowing someone's voice to be heard when no one wants to listen. We mark the trail of hope by believing in someone when no one else will, everything the father's does for us!

Nobility is indeed a positional marker of who we are in Christ but it is also an action. Your *No-bility*, is the power to say no to lesser things and yes to Kingdom things. That's the inner strength needed in the fight for your heart. Fathers need to be noble men, if there is a war for you heart; your children's hearts are also on the hit list.

How do we lose heart?

The usual suspects of discouragement, sickness, difficult times and disappointments can cause us to lose heart. Another way is when we're afraid of making mistakes, afraid of our weaknesses being exposed. So, if we take the path of least resistance, we can hide. If we don't make a scene, if we don't rock the boat and play it safe, if we don't expose our self, if, if, if! We *IF* ourselves into a passive position and the result is we lose heart along the way. It's like hedging your bets against losing.

There are times my children will try to “hedge their bet” with their parental units. They will, on the sly, ask both of us the same question, hoping they will receive the answer of their dreams from at least one of us. If by chance one such unit says yes to their request, in their minds they’re covered! They go merrily on their way; enjoying whatever clearance they have wrangled out of their mom and dad.

To “hedge your bet” simply means to protect yourself against a possible loss. It is a term commonly used in financial markets and the betting world. Here’s what I mean, in times of economic uncertainty the experts of high finance always recommend the purchase of precious metals, namely gold. A gold bar or two, coins, teeth (well, maybe not teeth), investing in gold is the classic hedge—financial protection—against a falling market. A gambler would probably say that wagering on several horses rather than just one is the classic hedge—bookie protection—against having a “bad day at the races”.

We get this strange phrase from our old European friends across the ocean. The early farmers of northern Europe planted hedges to serve as fences and barriers to their land. Over the years the phrase came to be used in connection with many different kinds of safeguards. Hedging can also describe the action of a person trying to dodge personal loss by avoiding making direct promises and solid commitments. The theory is that while they won’t get close to anyone this way, they won’t get hurt either. Ironically, it’s a theory that leads to a deeper hurt and keeps one from becoming all they were meant to be.

We lose heart when we bow our knee to:

- **False expectations – Hoping in the wrong things.**

Healthy expectations focus on truth and the faithfulness of the Father. False expectations are dangerous, for they feed on lies. They set us up for disappointments. In our journey with Christ they can create blind spots to the purposes of God.

A few years ago I wanted to be on staff at a local church, I thought God was leading me into the ministry. Well, due to some circumstance (Don’t you just hate circumstances?) that plan didn’t work out. I grew very disappointed and that lingered deep inside and I started to doubt the calling on my life. When I came to my senses and saw that my calling had more

to do with relationship then position, I was free to be who He wanted me to be. My hope was now centered in Him and that made all the difference.

“God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

1 Corinthians 1:9

- **False labels – Believing people’s description of us over the Father’s view.**

These make us lose sight of the fact that we are uniquely designed by God for the strategic mission that only we can accomplish. Look at Jabez, whose name means to grieve or be sorrowful. Not exactly a top-ten name in my book but to God it’s a different story.

“And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow.” (10) “And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, ‘Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!’ And God granted him that which he requested.”

1 Chronicles 4:9-10

The Bible says he was more honorable than his brothers, so much so, that God grants the request of his prayers. Jabez lives up to the calling of his maker, not the meaning of his name. When the Father calls our name, there is approval, not shame; loving correction, not condemnation; and acceptance, not rejection. God put out a call to Jabez, and it wasn’t his prayer that God found special, it was his character.

The whole thing is a significance issue. We try to find significance in our work, in what we do; even in the way we serve Him. Real significance is found only in *who* He says we are. When we work or minister out of that place, the importance is not what we do but who we are in Him. My point, don’t accept false labels – Who people say you are, do whatever God puts into your heart! Accept and believe God’s name for you, and His role as a man for you.

Society has tried to cure masculinity, tried to tame it or define it as being unnecessary. This is another false label that has caused men to lose heart. When a man does not feel needed or important, something inside him dies. The truth is that our masculinity is rooted in Father God and in His love. Our masculinity is defined by our redeemed heart and identity given to us by the redemptive work of Christ. We don't have to be ashamed or afraid to be men.

The enemy tries to have a say in this as well. He camouflages his lies about you in innuendos, half-truths and deception. You can let the enemy put an ungodly spin on your image with his accusations, and distortions or you can believe what the Father says about you. The Holy Spirit comes through big time in leading us to the Father's truth.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” John 16:13-14

Everything the Father speaks will be through the Holy Spirit and His Word and it will be the truth, all of it.

- **False priorities – People pleasing rather than pleasing the Father.**

Trying to be someone or something you're not instead of WHO God made you to be. People pleasing, rather than pleasing the Father is harmful to our relationship with Him. The danger is being a slave to other people's plans. We could be worshipping at the altar of people's opinion, a sad place to be. Of course I need to remember that one of those *people* could be myself. This is an easy way to lose heart and wear chains of manipulation for a longtime. Thankfully, God has a get out of jail free card and it has two sides.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” Galatians 5:1

“So whether we are at home or away from home, our goal is to be pleasing to Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:9

Pleasing the Father is true freedom...anything else is shackle time! So, how is a new human to live? The real question to ask is not what would Jesus do? But rather what is Jesus doing? It's a better question to focus on if He's truly alive in us.

“When our deepest desire is not the things of God or a favor from God but God himself, we cross a threshold. Less self-focus, more God focus. Less about me, more about him.”
- Max Lucado

That is a powerful statement! The threshold we cross over is freedom, powerful, relational freedom. Self-promotion, self-preservation, and self-centeredness, all fall away from a new human being. You finally become...are you ready for this? *Yourself!* You become the new human being that God intends you to be; a son set completely free.

“May you choose life and love and truth with God's help and become the Heavenly creature you were meant to be. “Now, with God's help, I shall become myself.”
- Søren Kierkegaard.”

What a liberating thought: “And now, with God's help, I shall become myself.” Not what others expect me to be, not some unrealistic image I have of myself. No, with God's help I shall become who I really am. I will follow God's vision and be *me*. What freedom! Not bound by false labels or false priorities but set free! Imagine what an impact that will have on your fathering when this becomes real in your life.

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36

“Let a man set his heart only on doing the will of God and he is instantly free.” - AW Tozer

I really don't have to worry about “me”...God has me covered. The threshold we cross is freedom...relational freedom. Know what I wish for you all? The same thing the Father wants for you, freedom. Father God wants you

free, He wants you whole and He wants all of you...and He wants all of me. There is something great inside you; I pray that you never forget that! Father God has deposited His life into you so that you become all you're destined for. In his book *Cure for the Common Life*, Max Lucado says this:

“Remember, no one else has your talents. No one. God elevates you from common-hood by matching your unique abilities to custom-made assignments.”

This describes a God ordained freedom. That is my prayer for you and for me. The great adventure of serving God with all we have awaits us. It calls to the deepest part of who we are and whispers to every corner of our heart. Don't you feel it tugging relentlessly at your sleeve? Does it wake you at night...disturbing you in a righteous way? If you're like me, you feel yourself speechless when you try to put words to this call...it is hard to explain...but it burns doesn't it? My suggestion...let it burn.

“I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to your testimonies. (60) I made haste, and did not delay to keep your commandments.” Psalm 119:59-50

Father Hacks: Freedom

1. Helps us to stand firm

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

2. Helps us to serve God

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. (29) For our God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 12:28-29

Prayer

*Father, I want to be free and completely yours. Help me dive into your will and plans for my life, trusting in you all the way. I ask that you help remove the false labels and priorities clouding my view...I desire to see with your eyes.
Amen*

RETOOLED

SHAPING OUR FATHERING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

A lot of people ask me what my ministry is and I tell them that's it's the Jesus ministry...*I come to do the will of the Father.* I figure if I approach the rest of my life in that manner I'll be in the right place for ministry to happen through me. The book on me is that I am passionate about being married to my wife, crazy about my kids, and extremely motivated to be the kind of brother that honors God.



find out more at:
www.strategicfathering.com