

How to Be a Follower Father

Dads, listen up: If you want to lead your family, learn how to follow

I met God through my father. Though I was only 6 years old, I can remember leaning over to my dad immediately after a church service one Sunday morning and saying, “Daddy, I want to be like you.” He had just finished leading worship for our small Hong Kong congregation that met in a hospital, but he knew I wasn’t talking about following his career path as a missionary or mimicking his musical talents—as admirable as both were.

No, my dad was discerning enough to sense the Holy Spirit moving upon my heart that day and to notice that my words were rooted in a deep desire to find out what made him so different from others. The peace, love, joy, patience, gentleness ... all these “things” that he exuded were the very things I suddenly sensed I needed. We spent the next hour or so talking about the Good News, and he led me to the Lord.

I met God that day because I saw Him living in my father. Most guys my age aren’t so lucky. They didn’t have a dad who modeled such Christlikeness. Some had abusive or deadbeat dads growing up; others have yet to meet their dad. But in all of us exists the same desire to encounter the Father who loves us unconditionally. And I’d venture to say that for most men, that search is intrinsically tied to our desire to find such love through our own earthly fathers.

I’d also argue that most men innately understand how vital fathers are to the family structure. Some may even be aware of the overwhelming statistical evidence of this—that countless studies prove how the lack of a dad in a young boy’s life drastically increases the odds of him eventually dropping out of high school, using drugs, going to jail, fathering a child out of wedlock or committing suicide.

So the problem isn't that fathers don't understand the importance of their role; it's that they choose to abandon this high calling because so many have never had a living example who understood the key to being a great dad. What's that key? Take a look at these familiar words from Jesus: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

The key to being a great dad is being an imitator. A copycat. As Kyle Idleman says, it's about being a follower, not a fan. Fans stand off in the distance and admire; followers get up close and stay in step with a person's every move. In Jesus' time, you could actually distinguish who a disciple was following by the way he walked and talked. It was expected that a disciple would mimic his rabbi's every move and mannerisms.

If we want to be great dads, we must take the same approach to mimicking the perfect Dad. We must be followers, mirroring whatever we see our heavenly Father doing. This sounds simple, yet like prayer (and other disciplines), it's so simple hardly anyone ever really does it.

Dads, be honest: How often do you pause to "see what the Father is doing" before talking with your kids about something they did wrong? That may mean examining your heart to make sure it's aligned with the Holy Spirit before you boil over in anger and do something you'll regret later. Or it may mean getting specific directions from the Spirit before you say a word to them. Seeing what the Father is doing in the lives of your children requires spiritual eyes that can perceive what truly matters.

The truth is, this principle isn't just for fathers; it's the key to being a great mother, sister, friend or person. Following and mimicking the Father boils down to obedience, and obedience requires laying aside our own desires. We're all

called to “take up [our] cross daily” and follow the Lord (Luke 9:23). For dads, that means relinquishing our own ideas of how we should lead our families and submitting ourselves in obedience to the greatest living example of a father.

My earthly father did this, and his following is what led me to my heavenly Father. I hope I do the same for my own boys. But even if you’ve never had a great example of a dad to mimic, here’s the good news: Being a follower can start anytime, anywhere. All it takes is a decision to be a follower rather than bystander.

This Father’s Day, whether you’re a dad or not, the same question applies: Will you follow?

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