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introduction

I HOPE READING this book helps you become a better father. Or to be more precise, I hope reading this book helps you to father better. Heaven knows we're in desperate need of better dads. I trust that reading through this work and struggling with the questions at the end of each chapter will stimulate your thinking regarding the legacy you're leaving.

It wasn't until I began working at Dallas Seminary's Center for Christian Leadership that I began to see the critical role fathering plays in the development of a family. At the center I direct an ongoing program called Spiritual Formation. Each of the seminary's master of theology students is placed in a small group

with seven to nine fellow students. Faculty, staff, or upper-class students who have completed the program facilitate the small groups.

While working with these groups, I listen as students share their “life stories.” It was here I first realized just how critical parenting is in the emotional development of the students. At the same time, I was working on doctoral studies in the area of human development and family issues. In addition, I was working through my own personal struggles with people pleasing and emotional distance in key relationships. This “perfect storm” of sorts led me to investigate the significant role the father plays in the emotional and spiritual development of his son or daughter.

The results have been amazing. It is from our own father that we develop a sense of “identity,” an understanding of who we are in relation to the world around us. We inherently feel a connection with our mother, understanding that she brought us into the world after a warm, internal, symbiotic nine-month relationship. But it’s the father who helps the child move into the outside waiting world. Unfortunately some fathers neglect this duty and leave their children to their own devices in figuring out who they are and how they “fit” in the world.

Encouraging fathers to make an emotional connection with their sons and daughters so they may pass on a godly legacy forms the purpose of this book. This

main idea will be unpacked and applied in the pages that follow. Dads who work intentionally and strategically at making an emotional and spiritual heart connection often become heroes to their kids. Whether you're a brand-new dad, a single parent, or a seasoned veteran, I hope you'll find insights within these pages that spur you on toward your best fathering efforts.

Let me plainly state that I write from an evangelical perspective or worldview. This view upholds the Judeo-Christian foundation of the fatherhood of God and the explicitly Christian belief that His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord Christ, joins with the Holy Spirit in a trinity of unity.

My prayer for you and those who join us in this journey toward dynamic fathering is that this will become a different kind of book. Candidly, I pray you will become deeply involved with your children, making a heart-to-heart connection with each. I'm not going to sugarcoat the difficulty of leading your family. Allow me to pass along a promise at the outset. If you promise to read this book with an open mind and a willing heart, I promise to be as authentic as possible.

I have five children of my own. I can't promise reading this book will make raising your children any easier. Fathering well is a demanding, difficult endeavor. I want to shoot straight with you. I'm reasonably sure you're not looking for some quick fix or

secret formula that unlocks the fathering code. And I'm equally confident you've grown tired of following "these nine steps" or "this proven plan."

If you pore over the same Scriptures I do, it just seems God doesn't work that way. God is mysterious. His ways are often difficult to track or explain. And yet He delights in patiently working in our messy lives. His unshakable plan for us is sovereign and secure. And I firmly believe He smiles when He sees us father our charges well.

The famous orator T. De Witt Talmadge told the story of a young man who stood before a court of justice, waiting to be sentenced for forgery. The judge had known him since he was a child, for his father had been a famous legal light and his work on the law of trusts was the most exhaustive work on the subject. "Do you remember your father," asked the judge sternly, "that father whom you have disgraced?"

The prisoner answered: "I remember him perfectly. When I went to him for advice or companionship, he would look up from his book on the law of trusts, and say, 'Run away, boy, I am busy.' My father finished his book, and here I am."¹ The great lawyer had neglected his own trust with awful results.

My deep desire is to see Dynamic Dads small groups spring up across the country. These small groups of fathers, islands of hope in a sea of fatherlessness, would meet to encourage one another in

their difficult yet highly rewarding task of leading their families. I am not trying to build a monument . . . but a movement.

A study of seventy-five toddlers reported that children who were securely attached to their fathers were better problem solvers than children who were not securely attached to their fathers. Children whose fathers spent a lot of time with them and who were sensitive to their needs were found to be better adapted than their peers whose fathers were not as involved and were less sensitive.

» **M. Ann Esterbrooks and Wendy A. Goldberg**, “Toddler Development in the Family: Impact of Father Involvement and Parenting Characteristics,” *Child Development* 55 (1984): 740–752.



It is a wise father that knows his own child.

» **William Shakespeare**
The Merchant of Venice

the power of an involved father

C H A P T E R O N E

I love being a father. I love it when I arrive home from work and my kids race down the driveway to see who can be first to give me a hug. I enjoy lying with my kids late at night telling them homespun bedtime stories. Whatever else I accomplish with my time on the planet, I'm trying to give my best energy to the fathering task.

As president and founder of the nonprofit organization Dynamic Dads, however, my heart breaks for the child being raised in a fatherless home. The statistics regarding father absence are staggering, mind numbing, depressing. The numbers are glibly tossed around on the radio and television talk shows on which I appear with other fathering researchers.

Take an unblinking look at an ugly fact: Tonight in the United States of America, one out of every three children (twenty-four million) will go to sleep in homes in which their biological fathers are not present.¹

Statistics, however, are cold, lifeless numbers. They alert us to a problem and for that I am grateful. But rarely do they move us to feel or to act. In addition, numbers don't have names. Statistics represent people and things, but numbers are not the people themselves. My heart does not break for the statistics but for the children: children who have never had a bedtime story read to them by an adult male, children who continually wonder who they are and where they came from, children who stay home from father/son or father/daughter nights at school. I admit it, kids with no dads move me to compassion. Children who continually long for a father put a lump in my throat.

Consider this sampling of the most current research:

- Of students in first through twelfth grades, 39 percent—or 17.7 million—live in homes without their biological father.²
- More than a quarter of all American children—26.6 percent, or 19.2 million—live in homes without a biological, adoptive, or stepfather present.³
- After remaining below 5 percent for decades,

the proportion of births occurring out of wedlock rose *600 percent* between 1960 and 2000.⁴

The problem of fatherlessness and father absence is compelling enough in itself. However, men who are present in a home physically yet remain emotionally and spiritually distant only compound the problem. It's as if a ghost is slinking around inside the home. How does this happen? And why is this problem so widespread?

According to the most up-to-date studies, the problem is closely related to men who spend vast amounts of time at the workplace or job site and much less time nurturing, interacting, and connecting with their sons and daughters at home. In a telephone survey of two hundred parents and two hundred children ages twelve to fifteen, 34 percent of teens and 34 percent of parents reported that parental work obligations were the *main reason* families do not spend more time together.⁵

In this book, I'll address the problem of father absence head-on. It's too devastating a problem to pull any punches. Lives are at stake—the lives of your children and mine. In addition, I'll show you my strategic plan I call a “legacy map” (see Appendix A on pages 140–141) that you can use to prioritize the future choices you make in your ongoing interactions with your son or daughter.

This is a book of hope. If you aren't one already, I believe you can become a Dynamic Dad, a man who

wins at work *and* at home. I wrote this book to address the great dichotomy I sense among the men I meet. More than likely, you're a hard worker who wants to perform a good, productive service in the marketplace. I applaud you for being a hard worker and providing for your family.

On the other hand, you also feel the tug of home. You may be an effective worker at the office and hear the applause of coworkers and supervisors spurring you on. Yet you also hear the faint, distant cry of your child

dynamic dad

▶ gary rosberg

Gary Rosberg is a Dynamic Dad. He and his wife, Barbara, can be heard daily on the nationwide radio call-in show, *America's Family Coaches . . . Live!* Each day they calmly field calls and dispense biblical counsel on relationship issues, family dysfunctions, and personal problems. They also faithfully travel across the country speaking to receptive audiences on similar topics. To look at this sharp couple from Des Moines, Iowa, one would think they've experienced smooth sailing from day one. But Gary tells audiences a different story. Living in the Rosberg home hasn't always been easy.

While diligently working on his doctoral degree, Gary continued to carry a heavy caseload of counseling patients. By his own admission, he was spending more and more time at the office, away from his home and family, and less time nurturing his own charges. Oddly enough, he was trying to fix the overwhelming marriage and family problems of those he was counseling while failing to see the large one he was creating in his own home!

pleading with you to interact at deeper, more meaningful levels of authenticity, vulnerability, and intimacy. I understand. My wife and I have been blessed with five children and it's a difficult, demanding balancing act.

If you want to win at work, you've probably formed a strategy to accomplish that task. Winning in the marketplace takes long hours of serious dedication. While the financial payoff can be handsome it's often quite costly to the emotional health and long-term stability of your family.

May I ask you a penetrating question? Are you as

It all came crashing in on Gary when his youngest daughter presented him with a crayon portrait she'd drawn of their family. She carefully explained to her daddy every detail, including each family member. Finally Gary was forced to ask where he was in the picture. His little girl bluntly told him he was not in the family picture because he was never home. Ouch!

That day Gary determined life in the Rosberg home would be different. He began to scale back the counseling caseload and make healthy family decisions regarding his packed schedule. Over time, Gary began to reconnect with his wife and children.

Now Gary Rosberg can be heard telling America stories about special times spent with his new grandson, Mason. Gary is a wonderful example of a dad who recognized he was making poor fathering decisions but stopped the bleeding before his family passed out. □

determined to win at home as you are at work? Have you learned to balance the deadlines and demands of the job *and* the tremendous task of fathering? It's my prayer that this book will take you one step closer toward accomplishing that lofty goal.

Winning at work feels heroic. Whether you're spending time capturing market share, building homes, putting out fires, or repairing software bugs, you receive ongoing financial and emotional incentives in response to what you do. But, where's the reward for heroism at home? No one's ever applauded one diaper I've changed. And believe me, if you walked into a room and lined up all the diapers I've changed on my five children through the years, placing them on the floor and then stacking them end to end, that room would smell really bad.

No one has ever awarded me a pay raise for telling bedtime stories with flair, spooning in strained carrots accurately, or disciplining with love and respect. Most of the time when I'm involved in these activities my children and I are the only ones in the room. You probably sense where I'm headed with all of this: effective fathering is often a thankless job.

It's my deep desire to change your thinking in this arena. By looking at the most current research and sharing stories that emanate from the heart, I hope to convince you that committed, involved fathers are the undisputed heroes of a civil society.

First, though, it is important to recognize that several cultural factors weigh against men becoming heroes at home:

- It takes time to invest in sons and daughters, time often spent accumulating greater income instead.
- Sexual promiscuity before marriage delays the forming of families.
- Poor fathering habits and patterns are passed down the family tree.
- Many men are insecure in their masculinity, thus in their fathering.
- No-fault divorce laws encourage familial breakup.
- Our technological, industrial society decreases fathers' time in the home.⁶

With all of these antifathering forces arrayed against building effective, go-the-distance families, can we really hope to accomplish anything worthwhile? I believe there are indeed many men who desire to accept the fathering challenge. In fact, I believe you're one of them.

One man who was a winner at work and a hero at home was the former head coach of the Dallas Cowboys, Tom Landry. Landry seems to be popping up all over Dallas these days. Most mornings I drive down the newly renamed Tom Landry Highway and play

basketball at the Tom Landry Fitness Center. In addition, an eight-foot-high bronze statue of the famous coach recently debuted outside Texas Stadium. That monument stands today as a testament to Landry's heroism. What's so unusual about Tom Landry emerging all around Dallas? He's no longer on the planet. Talk about a lasting legacy!

When he was alive, Landry would take his football team to Thousand Oaks, California, each summer for six weeks of grueling twice-daily practices. People still quote Landry's definition of leadership as the model for moving people toward a common goal: "My job is to get these men to do what they don't want to do, in order for them to achieve what they have always dreamed of achieving." If you're going to be an effective father, you're going to have to lead. Tom Landry knew how to lead.

Tom Landry's funeral was held February 17, 2000. It seemed as if the entire city of Dallas attended the event. When you're a man of Tom Landry's stature, you don't just have one funeral, you have three.

The first was a highly private, military graveside service for family and close friends. Many of us who admired the great coach for his erudition on the sidelines didn't realize he had been a World War II airman. During the war, he flew thirty combat missions in a B-17 Flying Fortress with the 493rd Squadron of the U.S. Eighth Air Force.

I was privileged to attend the second funeral service of the three. It was held in Landry's home church, Highland Park United Methodist, located in the heart of Dallas. This particular service was scheduled for those who knew Landry as friend, neighbor, or coworker. Since I assisted the Board of Incorporate Members at Dallas Seminary, of which Landry was a twenty-three-year member, I was fortunate and honored to attend. As I walked toward the beautiful gothic church building, a phalanx of radio and television reporters lined the entrance, quietly interviewing National Football League players, coaches, and broadcasters. Why so much interest? Here are but a few of the reasons:

Thomas Wade Landry was

- A 1990 NFL Hall of Fame Inductee
- The head coach of the Dallas Cowboys for twenty-nine years (1960–1988)
- The coach with the third all-time highest number of career victories (270 wins)
- Credited with introducing innovative concepts such as flex defense and multiple offenses
- Winner of five NFC championships, two Super Bowls, and an unprecedented twenty consecutive seasons

I was thinking about all of this as I nervously approached the old wooden front doors of the stately

church. As we stepped inside, a funeral home usher said quietly, “We’re asking family and neighbors to sit on the left side; friends and coworkers to sit on the right.” He then added, “And NFL players and coaches are to sit down front.”

Now, I need to tell you, I played some high school football, and I was an equipment manager for my university team, so I wondered, if only for the briefest moment, *Can I pull it off?* Could I be taken as a back-up wide receiver, maybe a third-team defensive back? Could I slip down front and sit alongside the multimillion-dollar athletes?

Fortunately, I quickly snapped back to reality and slid into one of the pews about halfway down on the right-hand side of the sanctuary. Straining to look toward the front pews I saw many of the Dallas Cowboy football players I grew up admiring: Bob Lilly, Randy White, Harvey Martin, Tony Dorsett, and Charlie Waters. Current and former all-star players all showed up to pay last respects to their beloved coach.

During the service, the Reverend Mark Craig shared how Landry was a regular at worship service. He also humorously shared how Landry provided much needed help during church fund-raising drives. (Would you have turned down Coach Landry if he had shown up on your front step?) Hall of Fame quarterback Roger Staubach brought one of the most moving tributes. It was obvious that the two shared a kind of close-

knit, father/son relationship during their many winning seasons.

Staubach mentioned how meticulous Landry was with his ongoing preparation for upcoming games. He explained how Landry would studiously watch game film of the opposing team's defenses until he found slight cracks and flaws. Then he would devise and outline a game plan to exploit those weaknesses. Once a rookie reporter, trying to embarrass the studious coach, quizzed Landry on why he never watched his own team's offensive plays but instead gazed steadily at the opposing team's defense. In typical Landry fashion, the coach calmly answered, "We've been running those plays all week in practice. I already know what my own team is doing; I'm watching to see how the defense reacts to the play I've just sent in." Few outfoxed the Cowboy's head man.

Staubach also described how the coach would tinker with the strategic game plan throughout the week. Then on Saturday night, before Sunday's big game, Staubach could always count on a late-night phone call. In fact, Staubach said, the routine became so much like clockwork, he would set the phone by his bedside and

You, too, can win at home. By being consistent, committed, involved, and authentic you can be a hero to your wife and children.

mindfully rehearse the coach's game strategy. Then, Staubach shared, "When the phone rang, I would say, 'Hello,' but Coach Landry wouldn't even say, 'This is Tom' or 'How you doing, Roger?' He would just pick up like we had never left off from practice and answer me with, 'You know, I've been looking at this jump screen pass, and I think we should run the tight end out to the flank instead of what we talked about yesterday. Whaddya' think, Roger?'"

There wasn't a dry eye in the house. Everyone present sensed Roger Staubach not only greatly admired and respected Coach Tom Landry, but that he loved him like a father.

The service was about to get even better. The next scheduled speaker was Tom Landry Jr., the coach's son. The sanctuary grew eerily silent. You could almost hear people sucking in their breath. I believe the thought racing through minds was, *Uh oh, is this it, is this where it all breaks down and we hear how Landry was a great man in the world's eye and in the football arena, but just average at home?* Instead exactly the opposite occurred.

Tom Landry Jr. rose to the pulpit and delivered a heartfelt, moving tribute to his own father. Tom Jr. shared how deeply Coach Landry loved his wife, Alicia, and their children. He shared multiple examples of how his dad was both a winner on the field *and a winner at home*. At that point there were no dry eyes,

only lumps in throats and sniffles in handkerchiefs! Grown men—NFL football players—were visibly crying at the front of the sanctuary. I had the sense that many men in attendance longed for a father like Landry, a hero they could have pointed to as their own.

No doubt Tom Landry was a hero and is now a legend. But don't think it's an unattainable position or status. You, too, can win at home. By being consistent, committed, involved, and authentic you can be a hero to your wife and children. Like Coach Landry before us, you and I can balance the difficult demands of work, marriage, and family. By God's grace we can be Dynamic Dads.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. How involved was your own father in your life?*
- 2. Do you agree that being an involved, committed father can be considered heroic?*
- 3. Why is it so difficult to balance the demands of work, home, community, and family?*
- 4. Do you have a strategy for raising your children?*
- 5. Can you think of a man in your life you would call a hero?*

legacy map

CHILD	DAILY	WEEKLY
LAUREN <i>age 11</i>	Hug	Attend worship
	I love you	Pizza night
	Bedtime prayer	Scream Team cheerleaders
AUSTIN <i>age 9</i>	Hug	Attend worship
	I love you	Soccer/football game
	Bedtime prayer	Pizza night
EVAN <i>age 7</i>	Hug	Attend worship
	I love you	Soccer/football game
	Bedtime prayer	Pizza night
HALEY <i>age 5</i>	Hug	Attend worship
	I love you	Pizza night
	Bedtime prayer	
CHRISTIAN <i>age 3</i>	Hug	Attend worship
	I love you	Pizza night
	Bedtime prayer	

net end results

Over a ten-year period I will have:

QUARTERLY	ANNUALLY	SPECIAL EVENT
Lunch at school	Family camp	Chicago's American Girls store
Dance recital	Weekend at grandparents'	Six Flags over Texas
Visit dad's office	Dad/daughter date	
Lunch at school	Family camp	U.S. Open golf tournament
Golfing	Weekend at grandparents'	Birmingham, Ala., trip
Visit dad's office	Fishing trip	Six Flags over Texas
Lunch at school	Family camp	U.S. Open golf tournament
Golfing	Weekend at grandparents'	Moody Bible Institute trip
Visit dad's office	Fishing trip	Six Flags over Texas
Lunch at school	Family camp	Six Flags over Texas
Dance recital	Weekend at grandparents'	
	Dad/daughter date	
Visit dad's office	Family camp	Six Flags over Texas
	Weekend at grandparents'	
	Fishing trip	

- Enjoyed Christian family camp: 10 times
- Sat with my child at school lunch: 40 times
- Attended worship, youth sporting event, and enjoyed family pizza night: 520 times.
- Said bedtime prayers, "I love you," and given hugs: 3,650 times.

DYNAMIC DADS

For more information on scheduling a workshop,
retreat, or seminar contact:

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www.dynamicdads.com
