DADS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A SIX-WEEK STUDY TO HELP YOU DISCIPLE CHILDREN TO LOVE GOD AND OTHERS.

PROTECTION
Freedom Within Boundaries

CONFIDENCE
Encourage Them to Trust Christ

IDENTITY
Saint and Sinner Totally Accepted by Christ

AN OPEN SYSTEM
Focused on the Heart

man in the mirror
What does it mean to be a dad—or grandfather or mentor—that makes a difference?

Cut can only remember his father teaching him once. When he was seven, his dad put his hand on Cut’s knee to position him. What’s so amazing about the story is not the absence of physical correction, but that a single touch would still be so vivid 70 years later. It reminds me—a dad to two young adults—of both the power and the responsibility that comes along with the role of father or father figure.

Are there any men doing this with the power and responsibility? The bad news is fewer and fewer men are even stepping up to the plate per a 2015 national population survey by the U.S. Census Bureau. 31% of children under the age of 18 are living without a father in the home. No, filed, it was just 22%. But the good news is men who are present in their children’s lives today are more actively engaged and involved as fathers.

If you’re taking the time to complete this study, you’re likely one of the latter—that dad, even though most Christian fathers, grandfathers, and mentors would say they love and care about their children deeply, many are operating on autopilot. If you want to be more effective and caring about your children’s growth, this study will provide you with the approach and practical tools to get you there.

The purpose of parenting is to create an environment that helps our children be God’s children. But we can do it. By facing the challenges and shaping them, we can be the instruments God uses to shape our children.

Undoubtedly, all of us have made mistakes along the way. But I want to assure you that God’s grace is sufficient for all our situations and regrets, and He’szeichnet you with the role. He wants to equip you for it.

This workbook can be used for individual study, but ideally, you’ll walk through it with a small group of guys.

As you read each week, you’ll get to know each other, and you might find yourself forming deeper bonds of friendship and even brotherhood. Fishing isn’t an easy job; we need each other. So lean in, talk more, ask questions, find one another. This time is for others’ lives, and fight to make a difference together.

With you on the journey,

Scott Cramer
President, Man in the Mirror

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This workbook corresponds with the Dads That Make a Difference church event from Man in the Mirror.

The event was developed in partnership with Larry Krider and The Gathering USA, based on the book by Chuck Arwick, The Clear, The Open, and Closed System model is from Dr. Red Cooper; we owe a deep debt of gratitude for his insights and generosity.

Creative design for this workbook was done by Cathleen Kerr.
The Fathering Imprint

What the Bible Says About Fathers

Jim had two younger sisters. Their parents were loving and provided well for them. However, his dad had a hard time relating to his son. With his daughters, he found it natural to be warm and affectionate. For Jim, he had higher expectations and a shorter fuse. Physical affection didn’t come easily. Growing up, Jim couldn’t articulate these differences; it was just how it was at home. He still knew his dad loved him.

When Jim grew up and started a family, he, too, had an older son and a younger daughter. He was a very involved father when the kids were young, planning birthday parties, coaching little league, and helping with art projects. But he, too, found it difficult to show affection and encouragement to his son. With his daughter, he was tender, patient, and playful; but with his son, he often was harsh and critical. By the teenage years, their relationship was strained at best and volatile at worst. Years later, watching home videos of when his children were little, Jim was genuinely surprised to recognize the difference in how he treated them. He’d had no idea, as he was just repeating the model he’d experienced himself. By then, the damage was done.

Your Life Experiences

We are all influenced by the circumstances and experiences of our lives. One of the most powerful influences to our fathering is our relationship with our own father.

How would you rate your relationship with your father on the following scale? (Put an X on the line.)

No relationship

Ideal relationship

What about your emotional connection?

Not connected

Very connected

How well do you feel you were prepared to be a father?

Not prepared

Well prepared

Almost all men can see their father’s impact being played out in their own behavior. For some men, this is a blessing as they see positive values being passed on to the next generation. For others, however, it is painful as they see the hurt and shame of their past repeated in their own efforts as a father.

What is one area of your fathering that has been influenced by your father?

Express your feelings to your dad. Meet face-to-face or write him a letter. Be sure to include gratitude for the good, as well as your hurt over the bad, if there is any. If your dad is deceased or has never been a part of your life, consider writing in a journal.

Confess your faults. No one is perfect. Just as they affected us, our reaction to our fathers likely influenced them. If this applies to your situation, take ownership of any role you might have played.

Forgive your father, if necessary. What does forgiveness not include? Don’t condone negative behavior. Don’t deny the pain. Instead, face it head on, admit what you have lost, and be willing to move on, with God’s help.

Commit to the relationship. Start over where you are now, in whatever ways you can. What really matters is how it ends.

If we do this, what does this passage say the children will do?

What are some practical ways you can encourage them?

My Next Moves to Make a Difference

1. Share a story about a man who influenced you when you were growing up. What qualities about him impacted you?

2. In your own words, paraphrase what the Bible says about fathers in these passages. Which aspects come easier to you? What aspects are harder?

3. What legacy has your father left in your life? Have you dealt with any ways he has impacted you negatively? How? If you would like to make a commitment to begin a healing process, why not ask the other men to pray for you?
OPEN AND CLOSED SYSTEMS

When Scott’s three boys were growing up, he and his wife decided to reserve spankings for things that were dangerous. Playing in the street was at the top of the list of possible spanking offenses.

One summer day, when the boys were young, Scott looked out the window to see them sitting on the curb. Technically, they weren’t playing in the street, but they did have their legs and feet out in the street. So he went out and asked them to get out of the street. No more than five minutes passed when he turned around to see them back on the curb. This time, he told them to get out of the street with his voice raised. But within minutes, all of them were once again sitting on the curb. They were being disobedient for the sake of disobedience!” Furious, Scott marched down to the street to administer their spankings. At the last second, he felt motivated to ask them: “What in the world were they thinking sitting on the curb?—especially when he’d asked them to not do so? “Well, dad,” they said, sheepishly, “we want to be just like the guys who filled the potholes in the street last week. We want to grow up and be street workers. And this is what most of them did.” Scott led the boys away from the curb, before walking back inside, fighting off laughter. No spankings were given out that day.

Memorize This
James 3:17
But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Your Family System: Take the Quiz!
Rate each of the below statements on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being NEVER and 5 being ALWAYS. (If you have adult children, you may base your answers on how you respond to them now or how you responded to them when they were growing up. Mentors, consider how you respond to those you’re mentoring or coaching.)

1. When my children make honest mistakes, I calmly treat them with respect.
2. I allow my children to take risks and make mistakes, helping them experience the consequences.

The Open System of the Bible
The primary aim we have, as fathers and mentors, should be to disciple our children to love God and others. As we see in the scriptures, this is best accomplished within an open system, as God uses in dealing with us.

John 8:3-11—The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the night they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the elder ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

How does Jesus’ response to the leaders and to the woman reflect an open system?

John 21:15-17—When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

The shame Peter carried about denying Jesus must’ve felt unbearable in this moment. What impact do you think Jesus’ words had on him, and how do they reflect an open system?

Your Next Moves to Make a Difference

1. What aspects of Scott’s interaction with his sons demonstrated an open system?
2. What kind of system did you grow up in? How did it impact you?
3. Were you surprised by the results of the quiz? How would you characterize your current family system and why?