



THE
INTENTIONAL DAD

EMBRACE AND FULFILL THE
PROMISE OF FATHERHOOD

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ARIC MANLY



Carpenter's Son Publishing

The Intentional Dad: Embrace and Fulfill the Promise of Fatherhood

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Foreword

Ben Manly

GROWING UP AS THE SON OF AN INTENTIONAL DAD

The other day I stumbled across a documentary titled *Dads*. It was a fantastic film celebrating men who have embraced the role of fatherhood. There was one question, however, that was presented to all the dads that caught my attention. They were all asked to finish the sentence: “A father is _____.”

It’s a challenging question! And it got me thinking about how I would answer it based on the vision of fatherhood that my dad has to share with you. I can’t offer any firsthand experience for what fatherhood is like. What I can offer is insight into how a child might view their father, and what they need from him as they grow up. Which I think will be just as valuable.

* * *

I remember my days as a young boy being filled with bike rides around the neighborhood, construction of extravagant Thomas the Train tracks, and intense Nerf gun battles. And these things were al-

ways done with my “daddy.” At that age, he was my playmate. All I wanted to do was play with him every day because my father was the one person in the world I wanted to be with most. Everything was made better when “Daddy” was part of it.

Once I entered elementary school, my definition of a father expanded. I had friends at school now that I could interact with to feed my desire for play. I still had a deep desire to play with my dad, but my heart needed something new from him as well. I needed to know that I was welcomed by him and that he wanted me to join him in his adventures. He and my uncles had several activities that I was now being invited into. I started to play golf with him. And, most importantly, he invited me into an epic journey toward my initiation.

The invitation he offered me is the crux of this book. It has been the single biggest factor in shaping my relationship with him and with my Abba. At such a young age I did not fully understand the importance of this invitation, but I leapt at the opportunity because he had chosen me.

What followed was a ten-year journey of spiritual development that taught me and my dad so much about ourselves, each other, and God. Sometimes we were on top of the world and sometimes we were at rock bottom. But we did it all together. At first, the journey was mostly about learning through observation and conversation with my dad. As time went on, my adventure became more demanding as I learned to take a more active role in my own growth and development. But I’m getting ahead of myself. At age 8 my scope of the world was still very small. My father was simply the most important person in the world, and he had invited me into an adventure with him. I could not feel more special.

* * *

As I entered my adolescent years, a new desire for my own adventures grew. I needed to test my limits and discover for myself the strength and courage I possessed. I remember family vacations to na-

tional parks and longing to explore the beauty that lay beyond the beaten path. I felt this pull toward the untamed in other areas during this phase too (sports, academics, getting a driver's license, talking to girls). All of it was important in discovering my capabilities as an adolescent.

The most fascinating thing for me during this stage, however, was watching how my peers approached this need at the same time. Most tested their capabilities, primarily by pushing away their parents. But I got the sense they were doing that out of bitterness instead of a healthy desire for independence. Many kids seemed to believe that wanting a close relationship with their parents was weak or immature. It was a lonely feeling knowing that I did want to be close with mine.

Knowing how a relationship between father and son was meant to be, it was hard for me to understand. My dad and I were able to avoid that unresolved strain in our relationship because we were committed to understanding ourselves and each other. In this phase of our journey, while I was testing my limits and capabilities, I needed my father to be my cheerleader. And he was my biggest fan.

As my initiation into manhood drew closer, we both knew my dad needed to gradually "let go of the seat," much like a dad teaching a kid to ride a bike for the first time. As he released me into the loving arms of the Father, his teaching, coaching, and guidance gradually gave way to cheering me on as I began to take all I had been learning and make it my own.

The process of initiation helped give me a deeply secure sense of identity and taught me how to have a deep, intimate relationship with my heavenly Father. I never had to wonder who I was as an adolescent because my dad worked hard to make the answer quite simple and relevant for me. I was a beloved son. Nothing more, nothing less. The longer I've walked this path, the more I understand that this was, and always has been, the greatest thing I could be. If my earthly father could confirm that identity in me, how much more could I receive it from my heavenly Father!

* * *

Now I am officially an adult, and a new phase of our relationship is emerging. I still deeply value my dad's company and advice. And I will always need him in the ways I have before. But now I can feel my heart needing something new from him again. Now I am beginning to see my father more and more as my *friend* . . . the way a friend should be. Someone who is willing to give tough love when I need it and a warm embrace just as willingly.

Parents say their kids grow up fast; I can believe that we do. Our relationship has grown and changed immensely over the years, and it hasn't always been the easiest to navigate. But we have always done it together. Through the causes for celebrations, times of sorrow, and everything between, we have savored it all as father and son.

* * *

I am so proud, then, to invite you to receive the clarity and insight my dad has gained through his experiences. I know what it meant to me growing up. I believe you and your family will also be blessed as you experience the joy of intentional fatherhood for yourselves.