

# DARE TO BE A DAD

SAVE THE STORKS





**SHE'S PREGNANT,** and it's not a mistake that you're reading this right now. You have some big decisions to make, so I'm glad you opened this book.

When I found out that I was going to be a dad, I didn't feel ready. I was young, and still trying to find my own place in the world. However, those feelings didn't change my reality. There was a tiny heart beating with my name on it. I was going to be a dad, and choosing to accept her into my heart and life was one of the greatest decisions I would ever make.

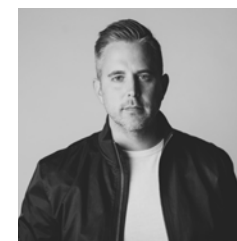
It's normal to feel anxious about what this means for your future, but being a dad is one of the greatest things you'll ever experience. Fatherhood is amazing, but it's also challenging, so you're going to need help along the way.

Here's something important to remember:

**Kids don't need perfection, they just need you.**

If being perfect is what it took to be a dad, then there wouldn't be any dads! Facing your imperfections is a courageous first step toward becoming the dad you're meant to be. One of the most valuable gifts you can give yourself and those you care about is to admit, "I don't have it all together, but I'm willing to change and grow with you."

Would you consider taking ten minutes per day, for seven days, to begin this journey with me? I've made this book short and to the point, so that it wouldn't take a lot of your time. However, I believe these seven simple conversations can make a big difference in your life right now. By the time you're done, my hope is that you'll dare to be a dad. And not just any dad, but the great dad that you are destined to be.



**Welcome to dadhood.**

**You belong here.**

*—Matt Hammitt*

Dad of four

## DAY ONE

# YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES

**IN 2004, A NEW TELEVISION SERIES CAME OUT, CALLED *LOST*. IT WAS ABOUT THE SURVIVORS OF A PLANE CRASH WHO FOUND THEMSELVES STRANDED ON AN ISLAND.**

Through a series of challenges that seemed impossible to overcome, each character discovered important truths about themselves and others. They thought their mission was to escape the island, but over time, they discovered the real reason they were there. That reason was not to find their way off the island, but to find their purpose on it.

Jack Shepherd was one of the main characters in *LOST*. His destiny was to be a great leader, but fear and self-doubt held him back from living up to his full potential. There was pain from Jack's past that made him insecure. He was always fighting the voice in his head that told him, "You don't have what it takes, Jack." Can you guess whose voice Jack heard over and over in his mind? It was the voice of the

man who wounded his heart when he was young. The voice Jack heard was the voice of his father.

Jack wasn't the only *LOST* character who carried the pain of a broken relationship with his father. John, Benjamin, Sun, Walt, Alex, Daniel and Miles were among the many characters who suffered broken relationships with their dads. If you've never seen *LOST*, those names don't mean anything to you, but I would bet you know someone who feels that same pain inside. That someone might be you.

If you pay attention, you'll see painful father-child wounds written into many of the stories we know and love. Think about that deep, chilling voice coming from behind a pitch-black mask saying, "Luke, I am your Father."

Why did George Lucas make Star Wars about the force between a father and his child? Because he knew that the father-child connection is one of the most powerful, undeniable, and irreplaceable forces in the universe.

We may not have been able to control what kind of connection we had with our fathers, but we can choose what kind of connection our own children will have with us.

All Jack Shepherd wanted was to hear his dad say one simple thing. It's something we all need to hear. So let me tell you what Jack longed to hear. Take it into your own heart, from me to you.

*You have what it takes.*

Yes, you have what it takes to be the man, and the dad, that you were created to be. It won't be easy, but I hope you choose to answer the call.

**If you feel lost, consider this. Maybe you're not meant to escape this challenge, but to find your purpose in it.**



## FACT:

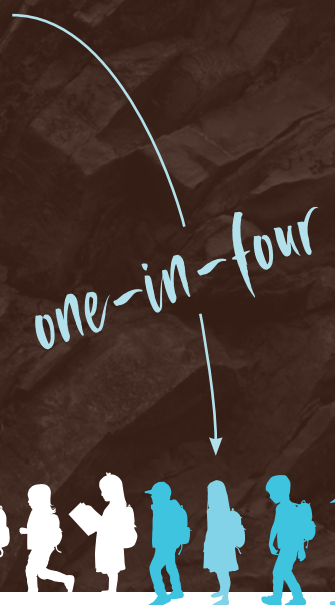
THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

HAS FOUND THAT

ALMOST 20 MILLION KIDS

LIVE **WITHOUT** A DAD

IN THEIR HOME.



### CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

- 1 Name some of the ways that your own father has impacted your life. Answer honestly about both the good and the bad.
- 2 If you grew up without a dad in your home, how has that impacted your life?
- 3 No matter what kind of father you had, you can choose what kind of father you're going to be. Write down some thoughts about the kind of dad you want to be.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

## DAY TWO

# YOUR VOICE MATTERS

**EVERYTHING STARTS WITH WORDS. EVEN THE OLDEST STORY, IN GENESIS, BEGINS WITH GOD USING WORDS, USING HIS VOICE, TO SPEAK HEAVEN AND EARTH INTO EXISTENCE.**

Genesis also says we are made in the image of God, and though human, I believe our words are powerful enough to change the world around us.

Kings, kingdoms, friendships, and families can rise and fall over words. Words can build people up or break them down. The words you've chosen to speak have had a profound impact on where you find yourself today, and where you will be in the future.

There's another powerful communication tool that you have, and that's silence. Sometimes your silence can say more than words. It's good to stay silent when you're tempted to say things that could hurt others, but staying silent when you should speak can also cause a lot of harm.

**One of the most powerful ways you can use your voice is to speak up for others in need, especially those who have no voice.**

When it comes to life and choice, it's become a popular opinion that the voice of a father doesn't matter. But that's simply not true. Your voice is powerful, and it's been given to you for a reason.

"Her body, her choice" may ring through your mind. Isn't that respect? Pregnancy center counselors can tell you the truth about how many women in unplanned pregnancies long to hear the father of their child say, "I want this. I'm in this with you." Many moms don't want to face the burden of making these life-changing decisions alone.

According to a national survey, fathers still have the greatest influence on a mother's decision when facing an unplanned pregnancy, far outweighing the influence of medical professionals or even her own family. (Care Net)

As a dad, let me encourage you to courageously step into your role. Understand how much influence you hold, and know that your voice really does matter. You have an opportunity to be a hero to your little boy or girl, by being their voice while they can't speak.

What will you do with the voice you've been given? I hope you choose to speak life into your world.



### CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

- 1 Think about someone in your life who used their words to build you up. What did they say that meant so much to you?
- 2 Now think of someone who used their words to tear you down. What did they say that hurt you?
- 3 How have you used your words to help or hurt others?
- 4 Practice the power of words right now. Write down some ways that you could use your voice to make a positive difference for life.

## DAY THREE

# YOUR CHOICE MATTERS

**IN THE COMING DAYS YOU HAVE SOME BIG CHOICES TO MAKE, CHOICES THAT WILL REALLY TEST YOUR CHARACTER AND MAKE YOU TO LOOK DEEP INSIDE YOUR HEART AND SOUL.**

Whether you're expecting your first child or adding to a growing family, new babies come with a lot of responsibility. If you're still questioning whether you have what it takes, let me assure you, you do. Stress, lack of sleep, and waves of emotion can easily cloud your judgement, but my hope is that you stay focused on what matters, so that you won't regret the decisions you make.

Just like your voice, your choice matters too. In reality, you've already made a series of choices that brought this child into the world. Now, you have to choose if you'll receive him or her into your life, and more importantly, into your heart.

I know how hard it can be to open your heart to something you don't feel ready for.

My third child, Bowen, was born with a life-threatening heart disease. Before he was born, we knew he would need three open heart surgeries to survive. I had to decide if it was worth opening my heart to something that could break it. With God's help, I answered "yes."

Bowen is twelve now, and though we've had challenges, he has brought more joy into my life than I could have ever imagined. There are many ways that God has used his "broken" heart to make our family even more whole.

One of the great joys of manhood is being a dad. Few relationships can be so meaningful. Any man can become a biological father, but emotionally present dads experience rewards that are earned through love, sacrifice, and trust built over time.



**Meaningful relationships take sacrifice, and sacrifice is all about placing the needs of others before your own. It takes an emotionally healthy man to live that way.**

Ready or not, you have to decide if your child deserves the same dignity you were given, to live. You also need to decide if you'll receive this child into your loving arms as your own son or daughter.

You have a choice. Do you have the courage to make it? Will you have the courage to receive your child wholeheartedly?



### CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

- 1 What part of becoming a dad makes you feel anxious?
- 2 What part of becoming a dad makes you feel excited?
- 3 Will you choose to receive your child into your life and your heart? Why or why not?



## DAY FOUR REALITY

**SOMETIMES IT'S HARD FOR US GUYS TO BE HONEST ABOUT OUR FEELINGS. IT'S MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE TO PUT OFF HARD CONVERSATIONS, IN HOPES THAT OUR PROBLEMS WILL SOMEHOW WORK THEMSELVES OUT IN THE END.**

Becoming good men requires us to get in touch with the reality of what we're feeling; what makes us hope, what makes us hurt, and what makes us happy. And if there's ever a time to get in touch with reality about our lives, it's right now, before you make choices that impact your life, and the lives of others, forever. Choosing to get in touch with your feelings, as cringy as that can sound, will determine your ability to cope with the important reality that you're facing. Here's something important to remember.

**A man needs to recognize the difference between what he feels and what is real.**

If something goes wrong with the engine of your car, chances are you'll have a feeling about what it could be. However, would you buy an expensive auto part to fix a vehicle before popping the hood to see what's actually wrong? Of course not. You would take a closer look, or talk to someone who could help you diagnose the problem. In the same way, how can you fix what's broken in your life without opening up and taking a look inside your heart and soul?

It may not be easy to open up about the broken parts of your life

## REALITY

that you'd rather keep secret, but it's important. Whether it's your dreams, goals, family, or relationships, I want to help you get below the surface into who you are, who you want to become, and empower you to make life-giving decisions. That takes bravery and hard work.

Dawson McAllister, founder of The Hope Line, once said, "Men are more physical and tend to work out their emotions by finding solutions and doing things. The harm is when men keep stuffing all their feelings inside, letting them simmer and brew, and potentially eat away at them, eventually coming out as anger. There are tremendous benefits to getting your thoughts and emotions out in the open, in the context of a safe relationship, and not letting them destroy you."

## CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

- 1 Are you willing to look under the hood of your heart and life?
- 2 If so, what is it in your life that you think needs to be fixed?
- 3 If you're not willing to explore what's broken or hurting inside of you, what's keeping you from something that's so important?

DAY FIVE

## WE ALL NEED HELP

IMAGINE YOU'VE BEEN IN A SERIOUS CAR ACCIDENT AND  
YOU'VE BEEN RUSHED TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

Doctors and nurses run in to help. While frantically searching to see how badly you're injured, a nurse presses on a broken rib and you scream at the top of your lungs. A doctor pokes an open wound, and you swing your arms in agony. You want to push them away, but if you do, you know you might not survive. If you reject the care you need, even if you survive, you'll live with the pain of unhealed wounds for the rest of your life.



WE ALL NEED HELP

You may already get the point I'm trying to make. Emotional and relational wounds work much the same way as physical trauma. If you're hurting inside, and push away the help you need to heal, your heart and soul will struggle to survive.

I don't know what, or who, has hurt you in the past, but I'm sure that you've suffered some painful wounds. The greatest pain is often caused by broken relationships. Hurtful words and actions cut deep. Betrayal can break your trust. As an imperfect person, you've caused others this kind of pain too.

As I said before, we men often push help away. Our unhealed wounds can make us defensive when people get too close. We don't want our weaknesses to be exposed, because that might mean we have to face the hard work of healing. Ultimately, a man needs to decide, "Will I become a man, or remain a wounded child in my pain?"

**Along with fatherhood, comes the call of manhood.** And an important part of manhood is embracing reality, openly acknowledging our wounds, and seeking the help we need. Finding help and healing makes us stronger and better, and allows us to develop healthy relationships

with others, especially those we live with and love. This might look like sitting with a therapist, a pastor, or a close friend.

Let's sum up the point. If we don't get help, our wounds will never heal. When our wounds don't heal, we overreact when people get close to them. Sometimes we even act in embarrassing ways toward people who are simply trying to love us. Refusing to deal with our pain is immature, and it keeps us from developing healthy relationships with others. I don't know about you, but I want to be the kind of man who has healthy relationships, especially with my own family.

Here's something important to remember on the path to mature manhood.

**It's OK to seek help. It's more than just OK, it's essential to your growth and healing.**

Some choose to sit wounded on the sidelines, but I'm believing more for you and your future. Don't let your weaknesses take you out of the game, use them to make your game stronger. Embrace reality, find strong teammates, and become the great man that you're meant to be.

## CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

- 1 What, or who, has caused pain in your life?
- 2 What steps have you taken to find healing in those areas where you feel wounded?
- 3 If you haven't tried to heal, what's holding you back?
- 4 Consider letting a friend or mentor help you in the process of healing. Who could that friend be?

**If** you don't know who you can turn to, consider asking your local pregnancy resource center (PRC) to connect you with a mentor. PRC's aren't just there for moms or moms-to-be, they exist to support the entire family.

WE ALL NEED HELP

DAY SIX

## Sex

**MOVIES, TELEVISION, AND SOCIAL MEDIA PORTRAY SEXUALITY AS SOMETHING YOU SHOULD EXPLORE WHENEVER YOU WANT, WITH WHOEVER YOU WANT, AS LONG AS IT FEELS RIGHT FOR YOU.**

They feed us love in highlight reels, showing the glossy surface of romance while rarely showing the ugly stuff underneath. In real life, romantic and sexual relationships are extremely complicated. Now, throw an unplanned pregnancy in the mix, and what seemed like a simple act of pleasure, isn't so simple anymore.

Sex is one of the greatest gifts that God has given us on earth. It can bring an immense amount of pleasure, but it can also cause immense chaos and pain in our lives. It forges physical and spiritual bonds between partners that are not easily broken. Your sexual choices affect your whole life, body and soul. Sex was designed by the Creator, to bring a man and a woman mutual pleasure, build lifelong trust and intimacy between them, and provide a path to grow a loving family together.

God's design for sex includes lifelong rewards, like relational trust, emotional fulfillment, sex without guilt or fear of disease, and the hope of a healthy and growing family.

Sex outside of God's design has natural consequences. It creates emotional baggage, fear of disease, a sense of emptiness, a broken family structure, just to name a few. I didn't include unexpected pregnancy as a consequence, because every child is a gift from God, and the joy of fatherhood is one of the greatest rewards that life has to offer. Although, having a child outside of marriage and God's design, causes a lot of daunting issues and distress.



## HOW PORNOGRAPHY AFFECTS MEN AND THEIR FAMILIES \*

Pornography use increases  
the marital infidelity rate  
by more than 300%

**40%** OF PEOPLE  
IDENTIFIED AS

SEX ADDICTS

lose their spouses,  
58% SUFFER CONSIDERABLE  
FINANCIAL LOSS,  
& ABOUT **33%**  
lose their jobs

**68%** of divorce cases  
involve someone  
meeting a new partner  
over the internet

WHILE

**56%** involve one party  
having an “obsessive interest”  
in pornographic websites.

Your sexual habits and history tell  
a story of how you view yourself

and others. If you see sex simply as a means for your own pleasure, regardless of how your choices affect others, you may need to ask yourself some hard questions.

Many times, casual attitudes about sex are directly related to casual attitudes about pornography. Pornography can distort a man’s view of a woman, objectifying her, and using her as a means for self-pleasure.

Look at the reality of where you are now, how you got here, and how you can create a better future for you and your family.

As part of that process, consider your beliefs about sex, and how they’ve impacted your physical, emotional and spiritual health.

\*Study by National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families, 2010

A good friend of mine told me something that I believe to be true.

**He said, “Heal the man, heal the family.”**

Take those words to heart, accept how vital your role is as a father, and why it’s so important for your mind, heart and soul to be healthy.

### CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

- 1 When it comes to sex, do you see women as objects for your own pleasure, or as valuable individuals who are worthy of your respect?
- 2 Do you believe that all people are valuable, and created in the image of God?
- 3 Have you struggled with pornography or obsessive sexual behavior?
- 4 Are your sexual habits getting in the way of your relationship with God or others?

## DAY SEVEN

# A ROCK OR THE SAND

### MY PARENTS TAUGHT ME A SONG WHEN I WAS A KID, ABOUT A WISE MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON A ROCK, AND A FOOLISH MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE SAND.

Maybe you know the song I'm talking about. The rain came down and the flood came up. The house on the sand fell flat, but the wise man's house stood strong on the rock.

Foundations are everything. Build your house, or your life, on a weak foundation and it will crumble. The choices you make today determine the foundation you will build the rest of your life on. You have to decide if you'll build your life on the rock or the sand. Storms will continue to come. When they do, will your house be strong enough to stand?

When I was doing research for this book, I found a study of nine fatherhood programs that identified some of the greatest challenges that the fathers in those programs were facing. Those challenges were unemployment, lack of money to buy things for their children, inability to pay child support, and trouble paying their bills. (Study by Dr. Jay Fagan and Rebecca Kaufman for The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network)



The truth is, behind every financial fear there are real emotional and relational challenges that aren't easy to solve without help. Maybe those challenges are similar to what you're facing right now, or maybe your challenges are different. Whatever it is that you're going through, you're not alone. There are many men in difficult circumstances, and those who choose strong foundations are still standing.

Back when I learned that song about the rock and the sand, my parents taught me something else that was deeply important. They taught me that the rock didn't represent my own strength. The rock that the wise man built his house on was God, and the thing that kept his home together was building it on God's strength and wisdom. The foolish man built his house on things that didn't matter in the end, and he didn't rely on God to hold his house together.

You may not feel ready for this child to come into your life, but if you build your house on the rock, you and your family can weather every storm that you face.

There's a heart beating with your name on it, and that heartbeat is calling you to trust in God, and to rely on His strength instead of your own.

At the end of each section, I've asked a few questions to help you think more deeply about the conversations we've started in this book. Today, I'm going to skip those questions and ask you to continue these conversations in a different way. If you haven't already, I want you to consider talking with a counselor, pastor or trusted friend. I'd also encourage you to talk with someone at your local pregnancy resource center. They want to serve your whole family in any way that they can. You don't have to do this alone.

**You were born for this great call of being a dad. Your choice matters, your voice matters, and you have what it takes. I hope you build your life on the rock, and I hope that you dare to be a dad.**

You were born  
for this great call  
of being a dad.

Your choice matters,  
your voice matters,  
*and you have what it takes.*



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