



Author Loren Marks's late granddad, Dean Marks (circa 1960)

Fathers as Spiritual Guides: Making the Transcendent Pragmatic

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Fatherhood is the greatest thing that I could attain to. If I'm president of the United States, if I'm CEO of a major corporation—that will end. The time would come that I would be voted out of office, or I would resign and retire. Yet I will **always** be the father of my children.

— Martin, a father of six

Fathering is at the center of life for many men. Over the past decade in our work as teachers and researchers on family life, we have had the opportunity to interview more than 100 men from a variety of racial, economic, and educational backgrounds. We asked them how fathering changed and challenged them. We

asked them what having and raising children *means* to them.¹ The fathers we talked to ranged from men who were very religious to those who were highly skeptical of organized religion. Despite the differences, however, these fathers shared the commonality of being involved in their children's lives and often referred to their fathering in spiritual terms.

This chapter will explore fathering and spirituality through examples and themes drawn from our qualitative research with fathers and their children over the past decade. Spirituality is a broad concept, and its borders are larger than those of organized religion; hence most of the examples we share address sacred relationships and beliefs but may not be explicitly religious. In the chapter, we first briefly explore the father's role related to spiritual development of children and what spirituality means for some fathers. We then discuss four themes that highlight the work of fathers in being spiritual guides to their children, including being a role model, parenting with humility, "being there" for their children, and viewing fatherhood as a spiritual calling. An overriding theme of this chapter is that *father spirituality* is both transcendent and pragmatic. Our hope is that the narratives fathers have shared with us will illuminate spiritual beliefs, spiritual behaviors, and the connection between the two for the reader in a way that will be transformative.

Children, Spirituality, and a Father's Teaching

A majority of adults hold the belief that there is a spiritual reality.² In addition, a recent review of research findings published in *American Psychologist* reports that religion and spirituality are "the single most important influence in [life]" for "a substantial minority."³ Spiritual meaning or religious ideals can be a powerful motivating force in the lives of adults with such convictions. For example, John, expressed the influence of spiritual beliefs on his fathering when he was interviewed:⁴

Either you believe this stuff or you don't, and if you do and if you have a faith that is meaningful and alive, then faith is the most important thing that exists. If it's not true, it's the most important lie that exists. I am basing my life and my future and eternity on the fact that this is true.

Although many fathers are not as committed to spirituality as this father, the majority do want their children to have some kind of spiritual guidance and education. Surveys of average Americans conducted by the Barna Institute indicate that 85 percent of parents with children under the age of 13 believe they are primarily responsible for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters. Only 11 percent of parents said their church or faith community was pri-

marily responsible.⁵ In addition, nearly all parents (96 percent) of children under the age of 13 contend that they have the primary responsibility for teaching their children values. Thus, according to parents themselves, parents are the gateway to children’s spiritual education and development.

Although the data above refer to parents, historically the role of spiritual and moral guide in family life rested primarily upon fathers. Historian John Demos has shown that the father’s responsibilities before the Industrial Revolution included *pedagogue, guidance counselor, benefactor, moral overseer, psychologist, and [role] model*.⁶ We have argued elsewhere that “new, highly involved” fathering is not necessarily new but is in some ways a resurgence of previous patterns of father-child connection, including instruction and modeling in the spiritual and moral realms.⁷ The long-held historical tradition of fathers acting as spiritual guides to their children provides a template for how fathers today can attend to this need in family life.

Defining Spirituality for Fathers

At this point, we offer a general definition of spirituality to lay the groundwork for several points we will offer regarding *father spirituality* specifically. For many people, religion has an institutional connotation while spirituality is more personal and relational.⁸ In harmony with this personal view of spirituality, White and colleagues define spirituality as “an internal search for meaning and purpose that ultimately enhances the person’s relationship with God or a Higher Power.”⁹ We would like to add that this personal spirituality and relationship with a Higher Power should affect the way one behaves, particularly toward others. Dollahite and Hawkins have identified *spiritual work* as a cornerstone of father-child interaction in their perspective on generative fathering and suggest this involves both believing in and guiding one’s children.¹⁰

believing in
children or
Higher
Power?

Spirituality can bring meaning to men’s lives and also enhance the way they understand and interact with others. Seth, a father we interviewed, said:

I don’t always treat people well, but that is the target I aim for to feel spiritual; or, if I were trying to explain to someone how they should go about being spiritual, [I would suggest] everyone you meet all day, everyday—treat them well. Going to church or synagogue on the weekends seems rather small and insignificant by comparison.

According to Seth, spirituality is not only a search for meaning and a relationship with the divine but involves a pragmatic application: being spiritual through treating people well. Our definition of *father spirituality* is *care, connection, and guidance between a father and child that is moral, emotional, behavioral, and*

often rooted in a connection with a Higher Power. In sum, spirituality ultimately involves treating others well. Father spirituality involves cultivating spiritual awareness, treating one's child well, and making an active effort to promote the spiritual development of one's child.

Among the fathers' narratives we have read, one father's reflection on his feelings relating to his newborn daughter captured this spiritual sense. He said:

I learned that I would die for this person. I learned that, from this moment on, we will be linked forever. This child is my responsibility forever, to guide, to direct, and to nurture.¹¹

As sensed by this father, father spirituality is not just a sense of meaning or connection with the divine but the ongoing effort "to guide, to direct, and to nurture" in ways that reflect meaning and connection. A father may act as a spiritual guide and foster the spiritual development of his child and himself in a number of ways. We highlight four themes with accompanying narratives that illustrate how fathers spiritually guide their children through (a) being role models, (b) making spiritual commitments to "be there," (c) expressing humility in fathering, and (d) accepting fatherhood as a spiritual calling.

Fathers as Role Models and Spiritual Development

In a 1993 television ad, NBA basketball legend Charles Barkley solemnly warned the audience, "I am not a role model. Parents should be role models."¹² We believe his first statement was incorrect but his second was correct. Every adult (especially those with high visibility and public stature) unavoidably becomes a role model for children and youth. The question is not *whether* an adult is a role model to youth but rather what *type* of role model he will be. Even so, Barkley's second point is well made: parents *are* the primary role models and should strive to be positive, involved ones.

Most of the fathers we interviewed were keenly aware of their influence as role models, and many underscored the importance of their example to their children in all areas of life, with a particular emphasis on spirituality. Rashaad, a father of three, passionately asserted:

It's not what you do in the [church] building; it's what you do outside the building. When everyday struggles challenge you, are you able to overcome adversity, are you able to withstand the things that are being thrown at you? Not when you're in the church. Because we can clap the right "hallelujah" and say the right words and everybody sees, but when no one that's in your church sees you, how are you acting then? Hmmm? Are

you living the walk of faith, or are you living like the world's living? I can't say it any plainer than that. Are you practicing what you preach?

Oui, a more subdued but sincere immigrant father from Korea, said, "I can't really 'teach' my son through talking; we have to show him by what we do during our life. If we do very well for God and other people, then he will know what he has to do." Both fathers suggest clearly that the lives they live as role models have a more significant impact than lecturing on their children's spiritual development.

Other fathers also attest to the validity of the practicing-over-preaching approach to spiritual guidance. Joseph, a father of four who discussed his own upbringing, recalled, "I could see from my parents' behavior over time that faith was something that matters. This is something that is real. This is something you invest in. My parents were very formative in providing a foundation for my faith." Notice that Joseph refers, first and foremost, to his parents' *behavior*. Teaching and instruction may have been influential as well, but he did not mention them. Joseph again referred to the power of example in connection with his own fathering:

Kids just want to know the truth, and you have to represent that in a way that's meaningful and in a way that's real. Your kids live with you; they see you. They see if this is a Sunday morning thing or a 24/7 thing. When Dad slams his thumb in the car door, what does he do? When something goes wrong, does he freak out, or does he have faith?

Fathers who seek to influence their child's spiritual development in meaningful ways not only realize that they are role models but take steps to be examples that are positive and healthy. These examples illuminate a central element of a father's influence as a role model on spiritual development, which is that *fathers who accept the role as a spiritual guide practice what they preach*.

There are also other dimensions of how a father's role modeling influences his children. While the preceding examples directly reference God or faith, spiritual references may also be less direct. Speaking first of his own father and then of his efforts to be a good father to his son with severe developmental delays, Ray shared the following thoughts:

One of the things that I remember [from my childhood] is when we were working on the yard [at our] cabin in Minnesota. We children would get tired and leave and go play, but my father would always stay until the job was done. It would always impress me that I would be playing with my friends, and then I would still see my dad working on the same job until the job was done. It always impressed me and has carried throughout my life that that's what men do. They accomplish the job. . . .

I think the feeling that I have is, “Yeah, [having a child with severe disabilities] is tough; it is a disappointment. This is not fair.” But I think that this is what you are dealt and this is what you play with. You don’t just sit and whine and moan about it. You just get up and go to work and do the things that you need to do and deal with it. As far as spiritual things go, I see from my father through his example that this is my job (to be a good father). I am to finish the job, so no matter what it takes or how long it is, you just stick to it and go to work until the job is done. It is the father’s responsibility—you are responsible; you are the support.

For Ray, daily commitment to his family and the work needed to care for his son with special needs was the path of choice. We further see that his own father’s positive example affected him greatly through providing him with the model he needed to understand how to make his own positive choices and commitment as a father when he faced challenges in his adult life.

Another father, Martin, did *not* experience life with such a father. In his experience, the lack of such a role model made him realize the importance of being a good father himself. He commented:

In my youth, one catalytic experience in helping me realize the importance of a father and wanting to be as good a father as I could was my experience in being generally disappointed in my own father. I think around fifth grade I began keeping a secret list (it totaled about 111 things or something) that I would do different than my father. Being a good father was important to me.

Martin offers a living illustration of the possibility of choosing to commit to be a generative father even when this course of action was not chosen by one’s own father. We mentioned at the outset of this theme that adults do not get to choose whether they are role models, only what quality of role model they will be. The examples shared by Ray and Martin highlight this point: children observe their fathers’ behavior, good and bad. *Fathers who choose to be spiritual guides model commitment to principles, promises, and people.*

Spiritual Choices and the Commitment to “Be There”

Our second theme centers on the commitment by fathers to “be there” for their children. Much of the recent scholarly and public discourse about men as fathers has focused on the need to encourage responsible fathering.¹³ Conversely, American pop culture frequently contrasts the liberty of nonattachment with the heavy chains of familial responsibility. The masculine “good life” is portrayed as

one free of strings and commitments. Indeed, recent years have seen a rise in the number of men who do not want to be fathers—a trend we have referred to as “the rise of paternity-free manhood.”¹⁴ However, neither media images nor trends that lead men away from involved fatherhood capture the genuine reality that many men experience great meaning in choosing and fulfilling family responsibilities.¹⁵ Fatherhood can certainly bind a man to certain choices, but often it binds not with burdensome chains but with what philosopher C. Terry Warner refers to as “the bonds of love.”¹⁶ Many men viewed the choices they described to us as outward expressions of their inner spiritual understanding, part of which involves the simple but lasting commitment to “be there” for their children.

In our interviews with fathers, we found that their decision to commit to a child’s care was not a one-time choice. Instead, such commitments and choices often involved an ongoing challenge. For example, many fathers discussed occasionally working too long or “blowing it” in a variety of other ways. One father, Ollie, recalled refusing to read a story to his daughter because he wanted to relax and watch TV after a day at work. However, he also related an instance when he did “capture the moment”:

One of the kids was out trying to ride a bicycle, and I came home. One of the kids asked me to come out and help her learn to ride. I thought, “I don’t know why I’m doing this,” but something forced me to go out there. She learned to ride a bike that day. I just held her up for a second and ran along by her, and the next thing I knew she was riding the bike. You do learn things almost instantaneously when they happen, and if you miss that moment, then you’ve missed the moment. There is nothing else you can say. I was there at that one experience, and if you want to let them continue to happen, then you’ve got to catch them.

Moments of life with a child are precious. They represent, in a sense, spiritual opportunities to forge a connection between father and child. At times, children themselves provide the best reminders of this truth.

Ethan, another father who had missed important moments, shared the following experience that jolted his reality and prompted his choice to make some significant changes in his fathering. He recalled:

[My son] Bryce jerks me back to reality, to what’s really important. When he was eight years old, he ran away from home and, when I found him, I just knelt down and hugged him. We got out to the car and drove around for a little bit. I was just trying to think what to say. I’d never dealt with something like this. We ended up parking over by Green Hill Park. I just sat there thinking, and I said, “Bryce, what’s going on?” And he said,

“Dad, I don’t know you. You’re never home.” You know, at that moment, I was a leader in my church. I had a wonderful wife; I had wonderful children. I was getting research awards. I mean, by every measure I was on top of the world, and in one instant he put it all into focus.

This singular moment led Ethan to become much more serious about being responsive to his children’s needs and their input. It demonstrates the significance of missed moments. In contrast, it is the shared moments with a child that can be spiritual moments—moments of connection when fathers feel part of something larger and more important than themselves. This second theme and the accompanying examples indicate another primary element of a father’s spiritual work: *fathers recognize their daily choices to “be there” for their children are spiritual choices that enhance or diminish the quality of their influence and relationship with a child.*

Most dads want to be good fathers and feel they should provide some kind of spiritual guidance in a child’s life. However, many fathers also find themselves trying to be good fathers in situations that are not what they had envisioned. Their challenges may range from being divorced to working long hours to parenting a special needs child. However, faced with disappointment, adjustment, and challenge, fathers who embrace a spiritual role commit to their children’s care anyway.

Research data indicate the top three goals of American parents for their children are, in order, (1) happiness, (2) career success, and (3) educational attainment.¹⁷ Yet circumstances may challenge these goals. For example, the odds may be slim, at best, that some fathers of special needs children will see their children achieve significant career success or educational attainment. Are there things that matter more to them in such circumstances? Nathan, a father of a two-year-old son with severe developmental delays, reflected:

I ask myself, “Are you going to be resentful or angry or somehow punish your handicapped son for being a burden?” It is better to be Christ-like than it is to be resentful. It is better to express love and mercy to your child than it is to harbor frustration or disappointment that he is not going to live up to your expectations or do the things that you want him to do. Our boy is never going to go into soccer or play baseball—the things that you dream of your son doing. But he will be a joy to our hearts. I will have wonderful, loving feelings toward this child.

Fathers who see their relationships through the lens of spirituality often rely on that spiritual understanding to shape their perspective in such circumstances. For example, David, a father of a seven-year-old daughter with autism, said, “There is always hope. . . . I am convinced that there is a plan for my daughter, and we are a part of that plan, and I don’t want to thwart the purposes of God by

denying her ability to achieve all that she can achieve and being all that I can be as her father.” These examples suggest another important principle of father spirituality: *fathers who commit to “be there” for a child often rely on a spiritual focus to help them maintain perspective despite circumstances that challenge their parenting.*

The choice to commit time and energy to a child is inherently a spiritual one that involves the giving of self. For a few of the interviewed fathers, whose children’s lives had hung in the balance for a period of time, this commitment seemed particularly vital. Ethan, whose son Bryce eventually received a heart transplant that saved his life, recalled this challenging incident:

When Bryce had his fifth open heart surgery, he really had a hard time keeping his heart beating. Bryce just wouldn’t settle down to keep his neck still, and so they were essentially going to have to put him back on the ventilator, which is an awful experience. Bryce hates it. Well, they called me. It was about midnight. We had been at the hospital all day, and they said, “Bryce’s gonna have to settle down, or we’re going to have to put him out.” And I said, “You can’t do that. It would just destroy him emotionally.” He was really kind of at his limit. So I jumped in the car and rushed up there and said, “What do I have to do to prevent you from putting him under again?” They said, “He has got to hold his head still.” So I held his head; I held his head all night. It was one of the hardest things because he was just groaning. He would go in and out of sleep. It was a long night, but it was a great experience.

Megan, daughter of Tom, died of leukemia at age five after unsuccessful treatment and lengthy hospitalization. Tom recounted his thoughts about being there for her with considerable emotion:

I was always there for her. Megan got my time. She had leukemia, and I was going to make sure that I spent time with her when I wasn’t at work. Maybe the hospital is the part we’d like to forget but can’t. When her pain got to the point that she couldn’t go to the bathroom, I was the one that did her bedpans for her. She would only let me do it; I was the one that did that. It wasn’t a thing for Mom, and she didn’t want anybody else in the room. She kicked everybody out of the room—nurses, Mom (Mom had to be outside the door)—and I would get the bedpan as best I could under her bottom without hurting her. Moving the sheets hurt her. It was not a good thing. But she let me do that for her, and I was able to take care of her needs, and it helped me that I was the only one she’d let do it. You wouldn’t expect bedpan shuffling to be a wonderful memory, but it

was. She trusted me to do my best job not to hurt her, and that was special to me that she let me do that.

Referring back to the goals noted earlier that American parents tend to seek for their children, from happiness to educational attainment, we can envision the contrast for fathers parenting children under trying circumstances. In comparing the circumstances of Ethan, Tom, and their children, it seems clear that these children were not on the path of educational attainment or career success. Yet we find these fathers commenting that being there for their children in these most critical moments was, in retrospect, a great experience or a wonderful memory. What did these fathers find in these situations? A child that needed them. Spiritual meaning and purpose. The opportunity to give of themselves. From these and other fathers, we learn that *fathers who choose to be spiritual guides for their children strive to "be there," especially when life is tough, because that is when they are needed the most.* It may also be when the spiritual significance of their work as fathers is most poignant.

Fathering, Humility, and a Child's Leadership

Our third theme centers on humility, often considered among the most important spiritual virtues. In parenting, it is common for fathers to offer guidance and provide correction when needed. Fathers are looked to for leadership, yet humility suggests that fathers may also allow themselves to be led. This theme of humility and its importance as a dimension of father spirituality was common in our interviews with fathers.

Although a father's role in providing guidance and correction is vital, our research suggests that for a humble father correction is not a one-way street. A willingness and openness to accept correction, acknowledge error, make changes, and learn was evident in our interviews with many fathers. Some fathers specifically discussed experiences where their children had taught them or provided a corrective lesson. One father, Gerald, noted, "One of my sons the other day said, 'Dad, you never play catch with me.' That's when you know you're spending too much time at work. If parents would only listen, they've got warning signals out there in their kids." The cultivation of humility, a spiritual virtue, seems to help fathers be responsive to such "warning signals." Another father, Ty, was talking about his young daughter and explained:

I drove a truck for a while, and I think that has contributed to our being distant. She felt like she didn't have a daddy. I came home and told her to clean something up, and she said, "You can't tell me what to do. You're not my daddy." That ripped me apart . . . I stopped driving a truck really

fast and brought myself back home. She was more or less saying, “You should be home [more].”

For fathers, cultivating humility that allows responsiveness to such suggestions from a child may beneficially change their parenting. It involves letting spiritual virtues such as kindness and patience become genuine characteristics of living and not just ideals. One father noted an active effort to do this in his fathering:

I have an interesting relationship with my children in that I invite them to help correct me when I demonstrate that I’m not being patient or long-suffering or kind or those kinds of things. My oldest daughter is really quite good at it, and my son is becoming good at it. They’ll be very candid with me, saying, “Dad, I feel uncomfortable with the way you’re handling this.”

These examples generate another important principle of fathering and spirituality: *fathers who are spiritual guides are not hypocritical (or beyond criticism); they accept due criticism or suggestion and are willing to improve their efforts or behavior.*

Another aspect of humility that can affect fathers is their willingness to learn lessons for life from their children. Children, especially young children, are constantly told by parents to do things such as get dressed, eat their vegetables, do their homework, brush their teeth, get ready for bed, and other such necessities. Humility is a dimension of spirituality that also helps fathers be receptive to how their children might guide them. Mark was the father of a special needs child, Andrew, who had been born with spinal deformities, severely shortened forearms, and only two fingers. He recalled:

One time Andrew and I were alone in the kitchen, and he just looked up at me and said, “You know Dad, if I were born again, I would like to have hands like Kate and Ben” (his older sister and brother, who had 10 fingers). And I didn’t say anything for a moment, and then he said, “But this is just the challenge that God has given me for this life.” And he paused again, and he said, “So it’s okay.” You know, it wasn’t a mournful okay; it was a “this is all right,” like a little bit of spunk and possibly even enthusiasm in the tone—“this is alright; this is just my challenge.”

In another example Tom, whose daughter died of leukemia, explained what she had taught him:

We went to give blood at a church blood drive. I was happy because I’d just gotten a penicillin shot and they wouldn’t take my blood. Sandra, my

wife, had given her blood, and our friend Clyde was there giving blood. Megan went over and held his hand while he had that blood drawn because she knew what it was like to have needles poked in your skin and she felt for him. She couldn't do much, but she could hold his hand, and she did that. The impact that has on me just tells me that a little bit of loving concern for others goes a long way, not just in the life of either person in the interaction, but in the people who see that. It makes you want to go forth and do likewise.

Children, who so often perhaps are more attuned to the spiritual aspects of living, have many things to teach that adults can learn. From these fathers and their children, we see that *fathers who seek to be spiritual guides are humble, teachable, and are not so busy "leading" that they do not learn from the leadership and example of others, including their children.*

Fatherhood as a Spiritual Calling

Our final theme addresses fatherhood as a spiritual calling. Our research with fathers has covered a variety of topics, including spirituality, but one in particular has been fathers of children with special needs. In light of the significant challenges and higher divorce rates among such fathers, we have been interested in what motivates some men in these trying situations to remain committed to their families and their children. An important and central finding has been that fathers who make such commitments view fathering as a *spiritual* responsibility or commitment.

A recurring theme in many of our interviews with fathers was the notion that children were gifts from God and therefore fathering was a spiritual calling. Trent, a father of four, including two sons with special needs, commented:

I felt like I had a special calling when they were born. When they first come out, that is when I feel like my calling has begun. I don't think that calling ends when they turn 30. I think a father's calling is always a father's calling. So whether you're fathering a 45-year-old man or a two-year-old son, it's a very special calling. It means God has entrusted me with these four spirits to help them grow and to teach them the things that He thinks I need to teach them. So I think if I don't teach them I'll be accountable. It means that God has entrusted me and called me, and He wants me to be a father.

Another father of four, Stan, said:

My role as a father is the single most important role that I will ever perform in my lifetime here. Whatever I do in terms of anything else in my life will be secondary in terms of importance to me and ultimately what I achieve in this life. My marriage and our relationship as a couple to God is the most treasured thing that I have in my heart, and these children that we have were sent down to us by God to richly bless our lives.

Trent's and Stan's visions of fatherhood clearly extend beyond the biological and social roles into the spiritual realm. A spiritual perspective on their roles as fathers underlies the meaning of fatherhood for them.

Many of our fathers not only viewed fatherhood as a sacred calling or spiritual responsibility but believed they were ultimately answerable to God for their efforts as fathers. Perhaps no one captured this idea more vividly than Luke, whose son had profound disabilities. He shared this hope and belief:

After this life is over, we will meet the Savior, and my son, Robert, will be there, and he will be perfectly normal and alert and the child of God that I hoped he would be. He will look at me and say, "Thank you for taking care of me, for doing the things that you did." I think about the long-term perspective after this life when we meet the Savior, and he looks at you and says, "You did a good job as a father," and when Robert will say to me that I did good.

Luke's son, Robert, could not speak coherently at the time of his father's interview and may never do so in this life, yet hope, faith, and spiritual belief provide a sacred motivation in the present for Luke to be a caring and committed father to Robert. Indeed, *fathers who choose to be spiritual guides exemplify hope, faith, and love.*

Conclusion

Many of the fathers we have interviewed over the years have viewed their connections to their children as sacred. They have actively sought to serve as spiritual guides for their children. As with most parents, they have felt a primary responsibility to care for their children and teach them about spiritual matters. Their insights and experiences have helped us to understand *father spirituality*, which we assert involves *care, connection, and guidance between a father and a child that is moral, emotional, behavioral, and often rooted in a connection with a Higher Power.* In summary, we offer these key themes from fathers we have learned from who strive to spiritually guide their children:

- They practice what they preach.
- They model commitment to principles, promises, and people.
- They recognize their daily choices to “be there” for their children as spiritual choices that enhance or diminish the quality of their influence and relationship with a child.
- They rely on a spiritual focus to help them maintain perspective despite circumstances that challenge their parenting.
- They strive to be there, especially when life is tough, because that is when they are needed the most.
- They are not hypocritical (or beyond criticism); they accept due criticism or suggestion and are willing to improve their efforts or behavior.
- They are humble, teachable, and not so busy leading that they do not learn from the example of others, including their children.
- They exemplify faith, hope, and love.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of themes regarding fathers and spirituality. However, it provides a useful set of related themes in considering fathers’ efforts to be spiritual guides and assist spiritual development in their children.

In conclusion, father spirituality is both transcendent and pragmatic. These fathers and children provide inspiring examples of how families can draw closer to each other when fathers strive to spiritually guide and respond to their children. Our hope is that the fathers’ experiences related in this chapter will illuminate spiritual beliefs, spiritual behaviors, and the connection between the two for the reader in a way that will be transformative. Fathers who are guided by spirituality view their responsibilities to their children, wives, and spiritual values as more important and meaningful than their desire for personal freedom or escape from life’s difficulties. “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” has merit as a creed for living, but heeding the call of liberty alone is not a guarantee for a life rich in meaning and spiritual purpose. We believe the examples of these fathers are of great worth, not only because they inform but because the efforts, commitment, and behaviors of these fathers (and their children) provide an implicit invitation to us—like the one Tom described from his daughter Megan to “go forth and do likewise.”

do we need to reference Bible in original use of this--quote from Tom?

Endnotes

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I need full references for (don't see first references for) 5, 8, 12, 17.

Please verify publisher and city; I had to do a little work on this.