

The Walking Worthy Series

Volume 3:
Walking Worthy As a Father

by Norm Wakefield



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To Hugh Smith

My stepfather, who took on three rambunctious, energetic boys, of which I was the oldest and fathered us through our teen years. Thank you for teaching and exemplifying being responsible, faithful, and diligent.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE WALKING WORTHY SERIES

It is the highest of all privileges to be called by God to be His child!

We have been called by His name, given the Spirit of His Son, and called to other relationships in life to express our relationship with God. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the *calling* with which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1). The *calling* of which the apostle wrote was a *calling* into a relationship with God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, every aspect of a man’s life will be affected.

As a man relates to God, he expresses that relationship through other *callings* in life. Biblically, a *calling* is an irrevocable act of God that establishes a special relationship with responsibilities, privileges, and promises that provide hope for the future. Paul informed the Romans that, “the gifts and the *calling* of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).”

What acts of God establish a relationship that cannot be revoked? Birth establishes a relationship between parents and children, which obviously can’t be changed. Marriage, according to Jesus, is an act of God, which is not to be separated by man (Mark 10:9). Since our *calling* as sons of God is irrevocable, then our relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ are established for eternity, and thus the gifts God gives by His Spirit for blessing His Body are also enduring.

Since God has called us to these earthly relationships to express our relationship with Him, it is important that we walk worthy of our *calling* as sons, husbands, fathers, and members of the body of Christ. In this series, we won’t treat a man’s work as a *calling* because it doesn’t fit the definition as a *calling* from God. However, the responsibility to provide for his family is one of the biblical responsibilities of a man’s *callings* as husband and father. Since work is such an important aspect of a man’s life, an entire volume will also be devoted to how a man can walk worthy of the Lord as a provider.

Contrary to the lies of western culture-shapers, God’s Word declares a man’s identity as a father to be no insignificant calling. Fatherhood reflects a glorious aspect of the Trinity, God the Father. The Living, Almighty God is not only the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He is the father of all who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. During the course of this study, we are going to

highlight the significance of fatherhood. I want to put the spotlight on how we may walk in a manner worthy of our heavenly Father who called us to reflect His fatherhood to our children in this volume, *Walking Worthy As a Father*.

INTRODUCTION TO WALKING WORTHY AS A FATHER

What training did you get before you became a father? If you are like most men, very little. I don't remember any courses in college offered on the subject. Unfortunately, the church had very little preparation available to young men to prepare them for fatherhood. Consequently, most fathers are simply doing the best they can with what they have. And that's not much!

For decades, a repeated message in our culture is that fathers are not that important. Most advertisements, TV shows, and movies make men look like simpletons. Fathers are presented as so weak and imbecilic that they couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time without tripping.

But that's not what the Bible says about men and fathers! Contrary to the propaganda of our culture, God's Word presents a father's role and calling as *the highest* in society. As the father goes, so goes the family, the church, the community, and the nation—in that order. Plain and simple: **YOU ARE IMPACTING GENERATIONS!**

You're in for an exciting, life-changing experience as you study *Walking Worthy as a Father*. Here's what you can expect in this series of lessons. Each lesson will normally have a reading assignment, including insights from the Bible passages specifically related to being a father, and life examples. Suggestions for practicing what you learn, Scripture memory, a small group interaction plan, and prayer suggestions will help make the lessons practical—encouraging you to be not only a hearer of the Word of God but also a faithful doer of His Word.

During the first lesson, you'll do the assignment and group discussion together. However, in the following lessons it will be important for you to read the brief lesson and practice the application prior to any group discussion so you will have something to share in your next group meeting. Much of what you will glean from this series will be from other men. As God works in each of your lives, share it with each other, take notes, and apply new insights to your lives. The goal of this series is not primarily to impart new information. The goal is to encourage the application of truth to your life, resulting in a life change for the glory of God.

LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

As you begin this series, please pause and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart about how you might encourage one another and learn from each other as you go through this series. Write below what you hear during the time of meditation.

OVERVIEW OF VOLUME THREE

Volume Three, *Walking Worthy As a Father*, will equip you with the practical tools for life as a father. You'll learn how you can express the gospel in your relationships with your children, providing them a rich testimony of God's love and presence in their lives. Once you understand your calling by God to be a father in light of God's fathering of His children, you'll gain practical insights into how you can father your sons and daughters. Additionally, the leadership tools of jurisdiction and vision principles will give you confidence as a leader, both at home and on the job. Everything you learn will be anchored firmly in the gospel revealed in our heavenly Father's relationship with His Son and with His children.

LESSON 1: YOUR IDENTITY AS A FATHER

LESSON 2: YOUR CALLING AS A FATHER

LESSON 3: FATHERS AS FORERUNNERS

LESSON 4: A SPIRIT-FILLED FATHER

LESSON 5: THE CALLING OUT OF SONS

LESSON 6: MORE ON CALLING OUT SONS: INSIGHTS 1-4

LESSON 7: MORE ON CALLING OUT SONS: INSIGHTS 5-6

LESSON 8: MORE ON CALLING OUT SONS: INSIGHTS 7-8

LESSON 9: THE AFFIRMATION OF DAUGHTERS

LESSON 10: A FATHER IN THE FLOW OF GOD'S WORD

LESSON 11: A FATHER OF VISION

LESSON 12: WALKING WORTHY AS A SHEPHERD

Lesson 1

YOUR IDENTITY AS A FATHER

Who are you? There are several answers to this question, depending on your callings in life. A calling from God is *an irrevocable act of God that establishes a special relationship with responsibilities, privileges and promises that provide hope for the future*. Defined in this way, your identity may be expressed by your relationship with God (a son of the living God), your relationship with your wife (the husband of _____), and your relationship with your children (if God has called forth children from your union with your wife) (the father of _____).

September 21, 1992 may not mean much to you, but the shock waves of a cultural nuclear bomb surely has impacted your life if you live in the United States or if your country has been modeling its culture. On that day the *Washington Post* ran this front-page title: “Important, But Not That Important.” Frank L. Mott, a senior research scientist at Ohio State University, published a study misunderstood and misrepresented by pro-feminist, anti-heteropatriarchal thinkers.¹

The *Post* article stated that the core finding of the study was that “a father’s absence from the home is not a major factor in behavior problems or low achievement test scores in young children.”² However, upon close scrutiny, Mott’s research repeatedly and directly contradicted the *Post*’s conclusions and message.³ Never mind that! Powerful people had a message to communicate to the world: Fatherhood isn’t necessary for children to be healthy, wealthy, and wise.

That same evening on CBS’s prime-time comedy sitcom, *Murphy Brown*, the following statement was made by the show’s heroine: “Families come in all shapes and sizes.” In the same show, a work associate commented, “I was raised

to believe that if you had a child out of wedlock you were bad. Of course, I was also raised to believe a woman's place was in the home, segregation was good, and presidents never lie." David Blankenhorn, author of *A Fatherless America* translates that for us. "If you believe out-of-wedlock childbearing is wrong, you are racist and sexist."⁴ The purpose of the show was primarily to rebuff then Vice President Dan Quayle for saying the show mocked the importance of fathers. Not only did he take it on the chin publicly and politically, but also with the *Post* article, fatherhood took a one-two knockout punch. Unquestionably, the destruction of that message is being experienced worldwide as fathers ignore their God-given calling and leave their children to be raised and instructed by the "village" schools and churches.

However, contrary to the continued lies of western culture-shapers, God's Word declares your identity as a father of your children to be no insignificant calling. Fatherhood reflects a glorious aspect of the Trinity, God the Father. The Living, Almighty God is not only the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He is the father of all who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. During the course of this study, we are going to highlight the significance of fatherhood. I want to put the spotlight on how we may walk in a manner worthy of our heavenly Father who called us to reflect His fatherhood to our children.

The purpose of this volume is not to fill your head with more information and how-to's about being a father. The goal of this volume is to lead you to walk worthy of your calling as a father, with personal application after each lesson. You'll be asked to apply what you are reading and learning with your children. If you wait until the day of the group meeting to read each lesson, you'll miss out on the most important aspect of the series: personal interaction with God and with your children.

I encourage you to read each week's lesson on the day after your group meeting. Then you'll be able to interact with your children during the week and be equipped to be a blessing to the other men when you meet together.

FATHERS MAY BE IDENTIFIED BY THEIR CHILDREN

I'm not sure how it happened, but I booked two speaking engagements on one weekend. Three months prior to the events, I discovered my error. I had agreed to speak in Alberta, Canada and Seattle, WA on the same weekend. What was the solution? What was I to say to the party who had invited me last? After prayer and consultation with my children, it was agreed that we would offer this solution: my daughter, her husband and my son would go in my name and present five messages. Four of the five would be messages I would

have presented and my son-in-law would determine another. The speakers' committee amazingly agreed to the change in plans and speakers. The conference went well, and we were encouraged and enlightened by the conference evaluations. One in particular stood out in my mind. "It was more powerful to see the son than the father." This evaluation emphasized an inescapable gospel reality: fathers are known by their children.

This truth resounds in the gospel revealed in Jesus Christ. How is God, the Father, known? He has revealed himself through His Son, Jesus. The Son put it this way, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). And again, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). The Gospel of John states it this way, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18). Later, John records Jesus' prayer, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

Not only is the heavenly Father known through His Son, Jesus Christ, but also through us, His children! Jesus taught His disciples that the world would connect them with their Father in heaven when He said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

When you see a child misbehave or do well, isn't it true that it reflects on the father? Have you ever judged a father for his lack of instructing and disciplining his child or thought well of a father for properly training his child? This occurs because identity has to do with belonging, and we assume the unruly son belongs to a father who has neglected his biblical duties and the well-behaved son has a father who loves him enough to train him. The writer of Proverbs warns that the parents' reputation is directly related to their child when he writes, "A foolish son is destruction to his father" (19:13). And again, "But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother" (29:15—Certainly the shame also extends to the father).

It is important for a father to understand this gospel principle: he is known by his children's words and actions. I'm not saying he is *responsible* for *all* of their words and actions, but that a man's identity isn't isolated from his children. God has written the gospel truths into human relationships, and we do well to take notice and apply them. They are a shadow of a greater reality.

The reason understanding this principle is vital is that it lies at the heart of God's plan for fathers. Because God is a Father and will be known on earth by His Son and children, He turns His heart toward them and

gives them His Spirit. Paul wrote these encouraging words to the Galatians, “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ (4:6). This explanation of the gospel is to be reflected in a Christian father’s relationship with his son or daughter. He turns his heart toward his children because he wants them to experience the heavenly Father’s love and care that they can expect when they come to faith in Christ. We may expect God to move heaven to our aid when we intentionally express the gospel in our lives. This is the power that turns children’s hearts to their fathers and prepares them for the Lord Jesus Christ!

THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH LIVES!

It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

Speaking of John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit revealed the work of the Spirit of Elijah working in him—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord by turning the hearts of fathers to children and the hearts of children to fathers. It is a shadow cast on human relationships by the gospel. The Holy Spirit, A.K.A. the Spirit of Elijah, is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. When the heavenly Father sends His Spirit into the hearts of His sons, they cry out, “Abba, Father.” Their hearts turn to their heavenly Father since His heart is turned to them. When an earthly father turns his heart toward his son, he gives his spirit (influence) to his son, and his son responds with the same heart cry, “Abba, Father.”

The Holy Spirit’s work isn’t a one time statement, “I love you, son.” The Holy Spirit initiates an eternal, intimate relationship enveloped by the love of God, the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. In the same way, when the Spirit of Elijah is at work in a father’s heart, he initiates and maintains an intimate relationship with his child, enveloped by the love he experiences with the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Elijah, a father reduces his relationship with his children to a formula and/or cultural standards void of spiritual power and life.

LIFE EXAMPLE—“YOU’VE HAD TWENTY-ONE YEARS.”

As I pondered all the ramifications of sending my son in my place to speak in Canada, the thought of getting him prepared consumed me. The realization that he was going in my name, doing my work, and for my glory opened my

mind to what the heavenly Father must have considered just before sending His son to earth. I wondered: Is he ready? Will he succeed? How will he greet and talk with people? Will he embarrass me? What do I need to do to get him prepared so I will look good? (My, isn't that selfish!) As soon as I framed that last question in my mind, I heard this sobering statement that I considered to be from my heavenly Father. "You've had twenty-one years to get him ready. Send him as he is, and encourage him to be dependent on Me."

How easy it would have been to put the fear of displeasing me in his mind. I could have outlined several rules and principles of ministry and public speaking to hang over his head. Had I done so, fear would have been the motivating factor in our relationship, and fear clearly doesn't represent our relationship with a loving heavenly Father. Furthermore, it wasn't the kind of relationship I wanted with my son.

Instead, a more important, wiser plan of action came to mind: encourage him to do as I do—walk in fellowship with the Holy Spirit and He will guide. I realized encouraging Micah's relationship with Jesus was more important than his making me look good. If he failed in any way, then it would give me an opportunity to communicate that my love for him isn't based on performance and then I could walk with him through the correction and learning process. Isn't that the way it is with our heavenly Father?

THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH IS NEEDED

What turns the heart of a father away from finding his identity in the world and toward his wife and children? What turns the hearts of children away from their peers and the world and toward their father? According to Malachi 4:4-6, it is the Spirit of Elijah sent from the Lord. In the midst of the disheartening moral decay surrounding us, God is doing a marvelous thing—He's turning the hearts of fathers toward their families and children's hearts toward their fathers. Maybe your heart will be the next one to be turned!

From the beginning of identifying with a people, God established an order for family education and discipleship. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses called the men together to give them God's laws, statutes, ordinances, and commands. *The blessings of well-being and multiplication were dependent upon the hearts of the fathers being turned toward God and their families.* But as a people (with a few notable exceptions such as Joshua), they never were! Within one generation of Joshua, men's hearts turned toward the idols of their neighbors, securing land, houses, means of transportation, and materialism.

In every case when God afflicted Israel or Judah it was because men's hearts turned away from God and their children to other gods and materialism. God sent His prophet Malachi with these words, "Remember the law of Moses, My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel (reference back to Deut. 6!). Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the father to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:4-6). Fathers hearts turned toward their children was still God's blueprint after 750 years!

Over 500 years later, God revealed again His heart and plan through His prophetic word regarding John the Baptist (Luke 1:17): Fathers hearts turned to their children and children's hearts turned to their fathers. The Holy Spirit was clearly the power source for this ministry.

Men can't be effective spiritual leaders of their homes without a relationship with God through Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit and a vision for preparing the next generation. When men's hearts are turned toward themselves, the children's hearts are hardened and unprepared. Consequently, the church and society spirals downward into the decadence of humanism and materialism. Could the fact that the hearts of men in the church are not turned toward their children be the explanation for why six out of ten youth in evangelical churches will not continue to be active in church after the age of eighteen?⁵

Here's what captures my attention: God uses fathers as a means of grace to prepare the hearts of the next generation for Him! When the Spirit of God turns men's hearts toward their children, the Holy Spirit then turns children's hearts and they are softened and prepared for the Lord. *An open heart to one's father is an open heart to the heavenly Father.* In this way, the father and his children become a living testimony of the gospel. This reveals how important fathers are to the home and their children. What a privilege! We can expect such an offering before God to be consumed by the fire of His delight. His joy may then flow into and through both father and child for His glory.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

You may be wondering if it's too late for you to turn your heart to your children. Perhaps they left home unbelieving, rebellious, and alienated from you. Or maybe you are aware of an uncomfortable distance between you and your children. As you look back over the years of fatherhood, you recognize your heart was not turned to God and to your children, but to your work

and materialism. Maybe your children are still in your home, however, your relationship with them is cold and professional instead of warm and loving. Is there still hope? You'll be encouraged by Tim's testimony.

Tim and his father attended a men's retreat where I spoke about fathers identifying with their sons, the calling out of sons, and the Spirit of Elijah. Tim's two sons were rebels and in serious trouble. Drugs, immorality, divorce, and bitterness were destroying their lives. One son was divorced with four children and the other, who had three children, had filed for divorce. Both were in trouble with the law and hated their parents. Tim told me they would walk down different aisles if they met in the store.

During the retreat God turned Tim's heart to his sons. He realized their problems were directly related to his own heart problems during their growing up years. His heart was turned to his work and ministry and not his sons. Even though they had attended a Christian school and been exposed to a vibrant youth ministry, his sons had turned to the world. Assuming as long as they were in church, they would turn out okay, Tim worked long hours and abdicated the spiritual instruction and relationship needed to keep his sons' hearts. However, the results were embarrassing, heart-breaking, and depressing. Tim and his wife felt helpless and hopeless.

After the retreat, God gave Tim a plan. With permission, he copied the messages from the *Equipping Men Series: Practical Tools for Life's Issues* that he had heard at the retreat. For a number of weeks, he sent copies of various messages and notes asking his sons' forgiveness for not turning his heart toward God and toward them. Instead of blaming them for their problems, he repented and took responsibility for his own heart problems. Expressing his regret that he hadn't had these tools, he asked that their relationship be restored. He invited them to seek God together and be equipped as men, husbands, and fathers.

The Spirit of Elijah moved in their hearts! When I returned six months later to lead a marriage conference, Tim, his wife, his sons, their wives, and children were in attendance. Marriages restored, his sons and their wives had become believers, and the parents and children were also reconnected. As of this writing, ten years later, all of those relationships are solid and growing—by God's grace.

THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH IS MOVING

You can walk worthy of your calling as a father with the Holy Spirit's filling and guidance. The Spirit of Elijah may move in you even as you read, pray,

and share with the men in your group. If He works in you, then He may also work in your children. I encourage you to humble yourself in the presence of the heavenly Father in prayer as you go through this study and make application of God's Word. Will you open your heart to the Father of Life and yield yourself to Him? Consider the privilege and honor it is to be an expression of the heavenly Father to your children. Then ask God to fill you with the life of Jesus who reveals the Father in heaven and any other requests that come to mind. May God grant your requests according to His Word and by His Spirit!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Who are you? I am the father of _____
_____.

2. To what degree have you been influenced by this idea? "A father's absence from the home is not a major factor in behavior problems or low achievement test scores in young children." Comment on your thoughts.

- A. Not much.
- B. Some.
- C. A great degree.

3. If you were to send your son or daughter in your place and entrust him/her with your name, glory, and work, what thoughts or concerns would come to mind?

4. From your perspective, to what degree is fear a factor in your relationship with your children?

- A. Not much.
- B. Some.
- C. A great degree.

5. Ask each of your children to what degree fear is a factor in your relationship with them. Write their names below and then their responses.

6. In order of importance, list three things that your heart has been turned toward.

1.

2.

3.

7. In order of importance, to what three things do you think God would say your heart has been turned toward?

1.

2.

3.

8. Ask each of your children this: What three things do you think your father's heart is turned toward in order of importance? Write their names below and then their responses.

9. Read Malachi 4:4-6 and Luke 1:15-17. What promises do you find in these verses? What do they tell you about God's heart and plans for you?

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Choose at least two verses below to memorize and meditate on this week.

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.”

John 17:3 “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Malachi 4:5-6 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Luke 1:17 “It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

2 Corinthians 6:18 “And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty.

Proverbs 15:20 A wise son makes a father glad.

Proverbs 17:21 He who sires a fool does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.

Proverbs 19:13 A foolish son is destruction to his father.

GROUP INTERACTION

1. Introduce yourselves to each other in this way: “My name is _____, and God has called me to be the father of _____.”
2. Share the verses you memorized with a group member.
3. Share and discuss Personal Application #3-9.
4. Close with a time of prayer for God’s presence and blessing as you continue the *Walking Worthy As a Father* study.