

7 Questions Every Father Must Ask

I have a confession to make. As a father, leader and husband I've often failed. *Often* is not a hyperbole either. I mean, I have **often** failed. If Paul had a thorn in the flesh, I've got a briar patch.

But as a Christ-follower and a man, I can do two things with my failures. First, I can learn from failures and actually grow, knowing that God often restores the messes we have created. Secondly, I can teach others out of the abundance of my experience.

That's why I am so thrilled to share these seven questions that I ask myself every week. Perhaps this week you'll ask them as well. I believe these questions have been game changers for me.

1. Am I **really** available?

In other words, are my kids and wife having to compete with my cell phone, my fantasy football league, my Netflix, my twitter, and my golf game for my attention? This is a difficulty for many men because we are mostly wired to be focused on one thing at a time. Women can answer the phone, fix a sandwich, text and understand the subtleties of adolescent nonverbal codes all at the same time. If I tried that mustard would be all over my phone and I'd be texting with the microwave! It just doesn't work so well for most men. We've got to work on being there. And when we are there we must be present. Eliminate distraction. Look them in the eye. Communicate their importance. Develop the skill of single-focused fatherhood and marriage.

2. Have I grown up?

There's a big difference between growing up and growing old. The Apostle Paul said it like this: *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things* (1 Cor 13:11). So what are some childish things that we need to put away? For many of us, it's how we handle conflict. It means not slamming a door or throwing a tantrum. For others of us, it's not withholding affection based on how our day is treating us. Childish things are lust, greed, bitterness, emotionally connecting with other women, spending sprees, and vulgar joking. All of these will affect our kids and our wives, even if they aren't done in their presence.

Growing up also means owning our failures rather than making excuses or defending our poor choices. If you want to see a real man, look at Psalm 51. It's the best expression of what a man does when he is found in the wrong. Real men have the integrity to pick the right side of a battle even at the expense of admitting past sins.

3. Do my kids know I love my wife?

There's nothing that makes a child feel safer than seeing a mom and dad who truly love and cherish each other with their eyes, their words and their touch. Being "in it for the kids" is not enough. If you are finding it hard to love your wife, you need to address it *now*. Not when it's convenient, not when you have enough money to see a counselor, and not when you and your wife are living in to parallel universes of emotion. Invest and love your wife. Get help. Remember how much we are to love our wives (check Ephesians 5:25).

4. What do I say when I talk about God?

If you are anything like me, this doesn't come easy. I have to work at it. Find moments to express your faith. We can do this basically by "exegeting the day". I know, I'm getting a little fancy here. What I mean is that we find a way to view our

daily struggles through the lens of scripture. What did your neighbor's sorrow cause you to do? Share a part of your day with your son or grandson and how the Bible instructed you on how to respond.

5. Do I practice vulnerability?

Perhaps the most daring thing I will ever do is to let his children in on my true feelings, hurts, fears and loves. Our male ego is the enemy of this front. Your ego will try to convince you that its job is to keep you safe. Your ego doesn't believe the risk is worth the reward. When was the last time you really risked vulnerability to let your kids and your wife see who you really are? When was the last time you allowed people into the darker places of your heart? Vulnerability is not a weakness. It is a man-sized virtue.

6. What am I hiding?

Yes, God uses imperfect men. In the same line, God has never called a sneaky man. And God doesn't want us to be sneaky as husbands, fathers and grandfathers. Secrets are insidious. They damage our families and our selves. Whether it is erasing the history on your internet browser, the private messages on Facebook that you send to an old flame, or hiding a grudge – secrets will damage others before they are ever even revealed. Let's challenge each other to be "secretless" in our private world, struggling together to make what's outside become a true reflection of what is inside.

7. Do I model generosity?

Perhaps one of the greatest legacies a man could leave to his children is the joy of generosity. The givers are the happiest people on the face of the earth. Our kids need this lesson. There's a certain deep feeling of bliss that comes from giving with no regard for receiving. By modeling generosity, we are teaching them that it wasn't ours in the first place and so money takes on a transcendent meaning that can't be found in

wealth accumulation. Tithing has taught me how to avoid the virus of materialism and learn the bliss of generosity. I learned it from my dad and I continue to speak it into the lives of my sons.

These seven questions can be touchstones that continue to shape us as fathers. Even more than that, I believe in the long run they will shape the destiny of our families and marriages.