

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.

The Parable of the Three Tenors

What does it take to hear God's voice? Does it take money and importance? Actually, the pursuit of hearing God's voice will ultimately lead to spending less and being less. How's that? The pursuit of God is more about subtraction than addition.

The Kingdom of Heaven can be likened to a concert. Let's say you want to hear your favorite vocalists. Let's call them "the three tenors." (Not original. I know.) You arrive at the concert hall with high expectations, ready to tune in to the sweet melodies you've come to love, but to your dismay, you can't. You can't make out those three voices because they are buried in a 200-voice choir of dreadfully tone-deaf lounge singers. You leave the concert hall demanding a refund because you really didn't get to hear what you wanted to hear.

Those three tenors are the voices of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The powerful, dissonant voices are the static and meaningless noise of the day to day. Do you see the issue?

If we want to hear from our Holy God, at some point we must tune out the noise and tune into His voice. God's Word, silence, private worship, and time are elements that create an atmosphere that allows us to hear what God has to say.

We often fail to hear from God because we have taken our faith and made it into a busy barrage of activity. What if Jesus' schedule when He was on earth looked like yours does today. Can you imagine the Bible reading like this?

Thus Jesus hurriedly got up realizing what an important day this was going to be. He ran to Galilee and there He created 13 lesson parchments, visited 15 lepers, and had a confrontation therefore with Judas who wasn't behaving.

Hitherto, Jesus went in haste to the zealots committee where He talked for three hours. He encountered many voice messages from the throngs of Judeans and tried to return all of them with at least a beatitude or warning.

Exhausted, the disciples verily tried to keep up with the Son of God but nay, they could not. They marveled at His time management skills and His strength in persuasive skills. People flocked to Him and stayed with Him, for they knew that if He could accomplish such tasks with great haste, effort, and fluidity then He must know what being an effective person required.

It's exhausting to read, isn't it? Jesus came to bring us rest. He lived the kind of life He wants us to pursue. He connected with the Father honestly and dynamically. We, on the other hand, are often so busy doing things for God that we miss entirely the presence of God.

Before you get so caught up in the whirlwind of life—before staring at death's finality—ask yourself if you are willing to walk daily into the quiet place where God is. Ask yourself if you are willing to mute the dissonant choir in your life and tune fully into the sound of His voice. Ask yourself if you

are willing to let His words wreck you and draw you into a lifelong habit of conversation with Him.

The Truth About Significance

Our significance is not based:

on how we look,

what we do,

what we achieve,

how much experience we have,

when we graduate,

how much we make,

how we play,

who our friends are

the things we accomplish

the good deeds we do

where we were born

the notes we can sing or play

the messages we preach

the battles we've won.

And our significance is not deflected by:

The scars on our body
the hurt that we feel
the past we want to forget
a bleak tomorrow
a job loss
a parenting failure
the label – divorced
the demons we battle
the death we face
the depression we can't seem to shake
the tragic choices we make
by friends who forsake
the 15 minutes 10 years ago we wish we could erase
our relapses and reboots
our poor financial decisions
the number on the scale
the people who criticize us
the ones who reject us
the ones who neglect us.

Our significance is best defined by a holy God who sent His only Son to be falsely condemned and violently murdered in our place so that we could be called His beloved.

Simple is Better

The sad tale of Bernie Madoff reminds us of the hubris, greed, and tyranny that lurks in every heart of flesh. The inventor of the world's greatest Ponzi scheme began his descent into madness out of the deep cavernous craving for more. How about us? Certainly we're not Bernie, but a little Bernie resides in all of us. What owner of a 401K doesn't squirm as he watches the Dow fall 4% in a day? What guy doesn't look at a nice car, a bigger house, a better position without that whisper for more. Jesus calls us to a greater adventure: the adventure of simplicity. Why is it that most lottery winners report being less happy than before they won it? Here's an even better question: Why spend 50 years accumulating wealth when an eternity awaits us? That's something to invest in. Live simply in this life and enjoy the extravagance of joy in the next.

It all begins with simplicity. Simplicity says: It wasn't mine in the first place, so I don't have to fight to own it. It's best given away. And once I do, life becomes less difficult. Fewer locks. Fewer statements. Less paperwork. Less maintenance. We can whittle life down to important things and we see that the best things in life are not found in malls. Needful things become fewer. Beans, Rice and water will begin to taste better than burgers and sodas. The pace slows down, the rashes disappear and sleep is less frenetic even in dreams. The body understands itself more, even on a cellular level because we were never created to endure the stress of obsession and hyper-accumulation. Preoccupation with phantom

concerns and paper tigers dissolve. We encounter God because we have fewer things to hide behind. In Matthew 5-6 (*the Sermon on the Mount*) Jesus offers this truth more than once. Treasures on earth are *so* not eternal. Birds are happier. They don't worry about their kids when they fly away. They don't stay up late freaking out about the shortage of worms in the month of June. Just look at those birds and you'll forget the bucks.

I Can Use THAT Guy

I am so thankful that God didn't candy coat the chaotic journey of men in the Bible. We're easily intimidated by guys who seem to glide through life with little mess, a perfect backyard, six-pack abs and a white-hot marriage.

Instead, God gives us a book that reminds us on every page that He uses men who are still trying to figure things out. When I have one of those *man-what-was-I-thinking* moments I remember Abraham who actually said to Pharaoh about his wife, "No, she's not my wife, she's uh... my sister. Yeah, that's it! My sister!"

When I think about my embarrassing, *trip-over-my-own-feet-to-save-my-integrity* moments, I think about Joseph who, when propositioned by Potiphar's wife, admirably ran away so fast he literally lost his clothes. We celebrate his virtue, but we have to agree that he needed a better belt.

Eutychus must be thanking God that there wasn't YouTube in the first century because a video of him falling out of a three story building during Paul's Bible Study in Acts 20 would have

gone viral.

One universal truth of man is that we've all missed a rung, slept inappropriately, and said some epically stupid things and the exact time we shouldn't have. The mic was on, the occasion was not apropos, our judgment was obscured or we just plain blew it. Period.

But it's all there in the Bible and God manages get the glory and make something amazing in spite of all the kooky conundrums we manufacture in our spare time. This is the book I love because it makes me feel like God could actually use a enigmatic, flawed, perplexing man like me. In fact, the Bible hints to the fact that He not only works with people like us but He kind of enjoys telling the story. It's almost like he's saying, "Look at this! I can even use that guy!"

7 Reasons Why We Don't Need Gun Reform

(...and why none of them make any sense to me.)

(Note these are my opinions only and not necessarily the opinions of my workplace or church.)

After every mass shooting we are rebuked that now is not the time to talk about gun legislation. Is there a better time?

As believers, many feel a strange reverence toward their guns. I'm not a gun expert or politician. I do, however, believe that we have to hold our representatives accountable for facilitating the culture of violence we have created.

Below are 7 reasons why we don't need gun reform and why **none**

of them make any sense to me.

1. "The second amendment declaring our right to bear arms protects us from a government that we might have to defend ourselves against."

Let's look logically at this argument. Our government has nuclear weapons. Do you believe that owning semi-automatic weapons will somehow protect you from the fire power of the greatest military arsenal the world has ever known?

2. "Banning certain types of guns will not decrease the power of crazy people to kill."

That's just not true. We have the distinction of having more mass shootings than countries that don't allow semiautomatic weapons. The U.S. has 5% of the world's population and 30% of the mass shootings over the past ten years.

3. "If we ban military-styled semiautomatic weapons, only the bad guys will have them. How will we defend ourselves when we are so outgunned?"

I don't know about where you are, but I've never seen anyone walking around on a daily basis with a semiautomatic weapon to defend themselves from the bad guys. The federal government banned military-style semiautomatic assault weapons for 10 years between 1994 and 2004, and deaths from mass shootings fell. Once the ban was lifted the number of mass shootings skyrocketed.

4. "We are no worse than any country when it comes to homicides by gun shooters."

There's never been a more salacious and pernicious lie. We have 29 gun fatalities per million. the closest country is Switzerland at 7.1 per million.

5. "We need to just pray."

The Book of James warns us that faith without works is dead. It's time for our representatives work on this issue instead of playing political games and pocketing copious amounts of

Super PAC money. If a person prays for her lost friend to come to know Jesus and never tells them about Jesus, is that she truly engaged in the effort?

6. “We will be taking away our right to hunt.”

No one needs a semiautomatic with armor-piercing bullets to shoot a deer. Make it a fair sport and use a standard riffle or shotgun. Using such firepower doesn't make it a very interesting sport.

7. “Guns don't kill people. People kill people.”

Right. But people use **military-styled semiautomatic weapons** to kill large numbers of people. Rather than falling back on some easily spoken platitude, think logically that certain people with the military style weapons will kill more people than people with pistols and standard rifles.

The Holy Season Begins With Stopping

As a native Louisianan, I grew up in the midst of king cake, gaudy beads, and all things purple and green. I don't understand it all and when I ask, everyone has a different take on the nuances of this season. One thing that I love, after all the weird, freaky rites of late winter, is the beginning of the Holy Season. Some may look at it suspiciously. Lent to them is the by-product of laundry dryers and nothing more.

But we all need to burn some grave clothes every now and then. The holy season just happens to provide a schedule for it.

Here are a few things we can all stop doing this year even if

we ancient liturgists.

- **We can all stop placing expectations on everybody or anybody.** We pray and expect great things from God- as we should. But when we heap expectations on others we all risk disappointment. When we stop expecting things from people we tend to be happier with them. And every gift and promise of growth we experience from them becomes a wonderful surprise full of grace.
- **We can all stop just getting through the day** and start being an active participant in the day. May me stop enduring and ask God for holy resilience and the gift of moment-by-moment abundant living.
- We can **stop blaming**. Blaming was one of the first things we started doing when the mess began. The problem is that blaming never works on any level. Indeed, blame fuels the cultural narrative of racism, pride and pious pigeonholing, attitudes. We must change the conversation.
- **We can stop worrying about the government**, pay our taxes and focus on the things we can actually change in our community.
- For that matter, we could **stop worrying. Period.** (This will be impossible but it is something of which to strive.) The only one allowed to worry is God and He's not. For me, every time I start to worry I'll bring it to God and worry to him. Actually, that is what we call prayer.

The Holy Season leads us toward the cross and challenges us to stop being so tethered to the world. Everybody can do lent. You don't need a robe, an incense burner, or a bingo tournament. Stop doing internal things like these and it will change you.

Enjoy stopping and let's have some fish.

Blame or Bless

There is nothing worse than the sound of cars colliding. A few weeks ago I heard the sound. It was so loud, I first thought someone had hit *my* car. It was on the side of a busy, complicated intersection. After the collision, a man jumped out of his car infuriated and screamed immediately about how the car he hit was too close the shoulder of the road. Inside the other car, a young mother, obviously pregnant was attending to her daughter in a car seat, panic-stricken, weeping and obviously in shock. As we called for help, the man continued to plead that this accident was not his fault. Nothing he said would be quotable here, of course.

After I got home, still reeling from what I had witnessed, I felt this absolute rage welling up inside me. I couldn't shake it. How could a man who had just hit a pregnant woman be so consumed with his own innocence? He was interested in blame. As men in every instance of life, we can't be focused on blame. We are never a blessing when we blame. The last thing we should want to be is the guy that heaps heavy burdens on the hurting, broken people we encounter. When blame becomes our default position, we are incapable of empathy, responsibility and love. Since the garden days of Eden, when the first man gave a lame excuse to his Creator, we've been blaming other people. The truth is blame never helps. It stunts your spiritual growth and destroys your character. Remember, when we stand before God, we won't give an account

for other people' lives, only our own.

12 Things I've Learned From My Sons

As the father of four sons I've picked up a lot of life experiences and I understand much more about the journey to manhood than I did when I began. Here are a dozen things I learned in the process.

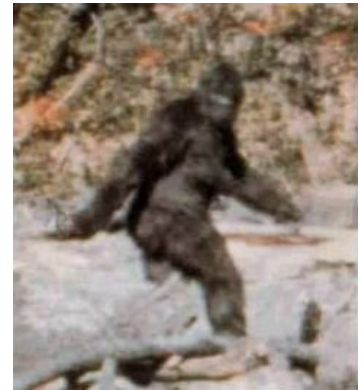
1. There are a million types of odors that can emit from their bedrooms, cars and duffle bags. One day with my guys could send a bloodhound into shock and awe.
2. Their competitive nature can spring forth in almost any sort of daily experience from car seat assignments, trampoline brawls, frog populations in their bedrooms, and superpowers they are convinced they have.



3. They have more words for gas than Eskimos have words for snow.
4. In a matter of one day during puberty they go from inappropriate nakedness at the drop of a hat to the sudden modesty of an Amish elder.
5. Unlike the girls, when it comes to the boys, clothes are no big deal. Just make sure the five year old doesn't get creative and wear his underwear over his pants.



6. Another note about apparel... Always, *always* check the pockets before washing. Pockets are usually the storage and filing compartments for all types of boy-stuff that can ruin the clothes or ruin washing machines or both.
7. Boys have no concept of time, when they are in “time-out” for five minutes, it is the equivalent of a presidential term. If it is a day at the amusement park,



after 10 hours—“They just got there.”

8. The boys, I have discovered, are far more gullible than the girls. They easily accept Big Foot sightings, zombie apocalypses, U.F.O.s, and the existence of organic Capt’n Crunch Berry.
9. For boys, unlimited soft serve ice cream is the closest they will come to a spiritual experience before the age of accountability. It’s so unbelievable that their brains can’t process the idea.
10. Emergency rooms are an unavoidable destination (and you’ll be back. Again. And again.) They will go there and so will you, with stories and explanations that will seem impossible to you even though you, yourself, witnessed the feat of daring they attempted.
11. Unlike in the movies, animals *will* be harmed in the raising of this child. Boys don’t intentionally harm or torture them. And the animals always survive. But there

are just certain things boys want to try out. They learn that large dogs should not be ridden as horses and pillowcases don't work well as cat-parachutes when catapulted from the roof of the house.

12. In the end, boys do grow up and you'll have a lifetime of stories to tell. You'll also learn to love the Sharpie™ Dinosaur drawings on your white leather couch.
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He's Everything from A to Z

The incarnation is God's message that God the Father holds nothing back in order to make room for us. So common and yet so extravagant! Heaven and earth embraced that night and this is what we celebrate.

It's also is a grand proclamation that if you enter the story, you've got everything you need in the person of Christ. All else becomes trivial in the light of His appearance because He's **EVERYTHING** from A to Z.

"I AM the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End."

AUTHOR of my everything, my story A to Z

BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR above, my blinded eyes can see

COMFORTOR of weary souls, **COMPANION** of the lost

DELIVERER, **DEFENDER** despite the cruel cost

EXALTED ONE who stooped to save, found in a humble place

FAITHFUL ONE of Glory who came to me in grace
GUARDIAN of my destiny, GOD in flesh and bone
HEALER of my solitude, I never walk alone.
INTERCESSOR standing tall, speaking for me, still.
JEHOVAH God creator, with hands of grace and skill
KING of all the universe, immortal God of love
LORD in every circumstance, watching from above
MAN OF SORROWS, MIGHTY ONE who came to seek and save
NAZARENE of providence whose life He freely gave
ONE AND ONLY Sacrifice, The lamb upon a cross
PIERCED for my transgression, my gain found in His loss
QUIET ONE, a still small voice, whispering His plan
RABBI in my ignorance, Redeemer,
SON OF MAN
TREE OF LIFE, evergreen, The fruit of holiness
UNFAILING LOVE, UNENDING JOY, and UNBRIDLED BLISS
VICTOR of my battles. He fought to set me free.
WARRIOR like none other, battling for me.
X-RAY of the human heart, restorer from the fall
YESHUA, redeemer
ZENITH of it all...

Don't you need Him? Reach out to Him this day and you'll see
that He'll give you everything your wounded soul craves.

Because He's everything...
