



THE  
SEASONS  
OF  
FATHERHOOD

WHY DADS MATTER AT  
EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

KIRK GILES

EDITED BY BILL FARREL



What people are saying about ...

# THE SEASONS OF FATHERHOOD

The task of fathering is so important and this book is so helpful and easy to read, every dad should read it. Written from his perspective as both a father and a leader of men, Kirk shares a wealth of wisdom, anecdotes and guidance for dads and grandads. This short book will make a long impression on each one of us who engage with it. Please read this book and be the best father you can be.

– Neil Josephson, *National Director of FamilyLife Canada*

The Seasons of Fatherhood is an empowering guidebook for men who want to succeed as a dad. Kirk's sage advice helps fathers recalibrate their thoughts to focus on what matters most. It is inspiring and a book every dad should read more than once.

– Terence Rolston, *President of Focus on the Family Canada*

Dads need this book! Whether you've blown it, feel overwhelmed or want to be more intentional, Seasons of Fatherhood is a quick read filled with hope, encouragement and very practical wisdom for dads at all stages of parenting.

– Dr. Steve Brown, *President, Arrow Leadership and author of Leading Me: Eight Keys to a Christian Leader's Most Important Assignment*

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I thoroughly enjoyed reading through *Seasons of Fatherhood*. I found it biblically-solid and highly-useful. I was challenged by the section on adult children (a new experience for Linda and me). I'm happy to endorse it. Kirk Giles is uniquely qualified to coach men on effective fathering. He combines a solid understanding of God's truth and with personal experience as a father of four. On top of this, he's worked closely with men for over twenty years with Promise Keepers Canada. *Seasons of Fatherhood* is a readable, practical manual for dads of all ages and stages. I'd pass this book on to any father I know.

– **Dr. Rick Reed**, *President, Heritage College & Seminary*

If anyone knows the heart of men it's Kirk Giles. You know he knows men because this book is short. But seriously, in this short book Kirk shares a wealth of immensely practical, wise and godly counsel for fathers at each stage of their parenting lives. His advice not only comes from his years as a husband and father, and it not only comes from what he's learned by speaking to men all across this country, it comes from his understanding of the bible's teaching on the importance of godly dads. You can see on every page his heart to help men become better dads, ultimately for God's glory. I benefited so much from reading this book. I'm going to make sure the men in my church read it, too.

– **Peter Yi**, *Lead Pastor of City on a Hill, Toronto*

*The Seasons of Fatherhood* provides practical steps for your most important privilege in life - being a dad. Drawing from the journey of life, Kirk offers a compelling argument in support of dads in every stage of life. His fatherhood tips provide specific "to-do" lists, which challenged me to learn and change. Be inspired as you develop from the transformational power of fatherhood!

– **Rev. Dr. Lennett J. Anderson, CD**, *Overseer, EBC:  
The MEETing Place, Halifax*

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The Seasons of Fatherhood  
Why Dads Matter at Every Stage of Life

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## DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to Carter, Joshua, Sydney, and Samuel and to their mom, Shannon.*

*As my children, you have shown me much grace and patience. Thank you. Shannon, as the mother of our children, you are an inspiration to me.*

*I am so grateful to be part of your lives.*



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# INTRODUCTION

Most men are not ready for it.

I remember the moment like it was yesterday. My wife, Shannon, had been in labour with our firstborn child throughout the night and into the morning. I was already showing signs of the coming stress of fatherhood and made some pretty big—but humorous—mistakes trying to encourage Shannon to breathe properly. I felt exhausted, but I knew it did not compare to everything she was feeling.

Then the big moment came. I remember being in the delivery room. I remember looking at the expressions of agony as the love of my life used every ounce of energy she had left to give birth to our firstborn child. I remember the moment the doctor held the baby up and pronounced, “It’s a boy!”

Then, everything went blank.

All at once I was relieved, in awe, grateful, overwhelmed, and scared out of my mind. This was really happening! I’m a dad. I’m man enough to admit I started to weep—not cry. I was crying so hard that the doctor looked at my wife and said, “Is he going to be OK?”

I was going to be OK, but I also wasn’t.

I did not fully appreciate how much my life was about to change. I did not really grasp the incredible adventure of fatherhood I was about to embark on.

One of the life lessons I wish I understood at that time was how fathers can experience this sense of not knowing what to do or where they fit.

When a baby is born, most men will drop to the bottom of the priority list in the family. You used to have the full attention of the mother of your child. Now, she is (rightfully) putting her attention towards this baby who needs full-time focus. In these moments, many men will wonder if they matter or are needed.

Through the early years of life, many dads tend to go to extremes in raising their children. The fun-loving dad looks for the opportunities to play with them. The serious and responsible dad is focused on training and

teaching their children. Along the way, they may hear criticism at what they are doing wrong. At the same time, dads in this stage have pressures pulling them in multiple directions. You work to help provide for your family, and you have your own hobbies as well. Men can be left to wonder if they are only good for driving children around to activities and providing a paycheck.

As the child grows older and becomes a teenager, they will start to spend more time with their friends. Their life becomes more of their own. You try to understand their language, but you likely have a better chance of learning Latin. You try to ask your son questions, but you get highly engaging answers like “Yep” or “Whatever.” Your daughter may answer your questions with so many words and emotions that you won’t know what hit you. She may also respond with giving you very few details because you are a man and you would never understand. Again, many men are left wondering if their presence even matters to their kids.

Life changes once again when your children become adults. Many men become very excited about the empty nest stage, but this enthusiasm has more to do with your independence than your role as a father. At this stage, the baby you once held in your arms is now moving towards holding their own babies. It is easy to convince ourselves that our adult children have their own lives and no longer really need us.

Without any doubt, you matter as a dad in every season of life. Statistics show the presence and influence of dad has a direct connection to the emotional, physical, and spiritual success of children.

## LIFE COMES IN SEASONS

Fatherhood has different seasons to it. Every season has its benefits and can create lifelong memories. Unfortunately, every season also has its challenges. The wise man will prepare himself for the next season, because in every season, dad matters.

I recognize many who read this book will be coming from a life where they have not had a positive father influence. I want to applaud you for showing a desire to be a great father. You may be assaulted by the fear of

not being capable enough or smart enough to be the dad you want to be. Fight this fear!

You may or may not have a religious faith. I want to be upfront with you in saying the content of this book has been shaped by my own Christian faith. I find much help and hope in seeing God as Father, as He is often described in the Bible. The Bible is rich with important wisdom for parents, including dads.

You have been brought into the life of your child for a purpose. The Bible teaches us children are a gift or heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). You have been entrusted with a precious gift from God. The good news is that God never calls you to something without providing everything you need in the journey.

In this book, we will explore the various seasons of fatherhood. Each season sees a different role for us in which to operate. We will explore some key practices to help us succeed in our role for that season.

Today, the baby boy we waited all night for is now a young man. Carter has been joined by Joshua, Sydney, and Samuel. The lessons in this book are what God has been teaching me about fathering these four, remarkable people.

Fatherhood is one of the greatest blessings, privileges, responsibilities, and adventures you will ever participate in.

Dad, you are important and you are needed. Always remember that. Let's start exploring the seasons of fatherhood.



## CHAPTER 1

# FOUNDATIONS OF BEING A GREAT DAD

Every year, sports teams begin their season with a goal in mind. The decisions they make and the training they go through are designed to help achieve their goals for the year. What is the end goal you have as a dad? Without this vision for fatherhood, you will wander from day to day reacting to every situation with your kids. When you have a clear goal in mind, your actions as a father can be lived out with clarity and purpose.

From God's perspective, fatherhood has a big vision to it.

In Psalm 127:4 we read, "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, are the sons born in one's youth."

Arrows just sitting in the hand of a warrior are useless. The arrow becomes the most useful when it is launched from the bow. However, before this can ever happen, the warrior needs to take good care of the arrow to keep it sharp and to make sure it will still fly straight.

Our goal is to launch our children like arrows into the world. Great dads live with the purpose of seeing their children leave their own mark on the world.

Understanding this metaphor gives us a goal to reach towards, while understanding there are ways we need to care for our "arrows" so they can have the best opportunity to be everything God has designed and created them to be.

## THE ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN

When we first brought Carter home, he was a kid who liked to scream-cry. It felt more like the screeching of an alien in a horror film than a cry for help from an adorable baby. You may have experienced this as well. Usually, he would hit his highest level of volume around 2:00 in the morning. I love my son. But there were moments I did not like him very much.

As time has gone by, I have learned to appreciate that our children are not just intruders who are impacting my life—they are human beings who have the same needs every other human has. As a dad, you have the unique privilege and responsibility to make sure these needs are met. This is your greatest calling.

Every child has emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. You are placed in a specific role to help meet those needs in their life. Our role in meeting these needs is two-fold. First, we need to seek to provide for our children within our own abilities. For example, if you are physically capable of working, then it is important to work as part of your effort to meet the physical needs your children have.

Second, we need to surround our children with others who can support them. For example, you may not be the best at math, but you can make sure your child is in an environment where someone who is good at math can teach them.

Don't just take my word for how important it is for fathers seek to meet the needs of their children. The Father Involvement Research Alliance released a report in 2007 called "The Effects of Father Involvement." The report shows that "school-aged children of involved fathers are better academic achievers. They are more likely to get A's, have better quantitative and verbal skills, have higher grade point averages ..." It goes on to say that children of involved fathers are "more likely to have higher levels of economic and educational achievement, career success, and occupational competency ..."

Emotionally, "Father involvement is positively correlated with children's overall life satisfaction and their experience of less depression ... Children of involved fathers are more likely to demonstrate a greater tolerance for stress and frustration, be more playful, resourceful, skillful, and are better able to manage their emotions and impulses in an appropriate manner."

The report goes on, but you get the idea. Dad, your active involvement in the life of your child is one of the most powerful forces for good that he or she will ever encounter.

With this in mind, let's dive in deeper to these three critical needs your children have.

### **Emotional Needs**

We live in a time where greater attention is being paid to the emotional needs of people, and that is a good thing. Unfortunately, there are a high number of dads who have a more difficult time expressing or understanding emotional issues.

Your children need to know they are loved, wanted, and accepted. They need to feel safe, and they need to know you believe in them. In our case, this has looked very different for each of our children. Our children all have unique personalities and different communication styles. There is a difference between the tone and words you can use with your sons compared to your daughters. There is a difference between how to communicate to an extrovert versus an introvert.

Emotional needs tend to be far more difficult to measure. You may not always know how your children are feeling, which can make this a more difficult part of fatherhood.

The Bible also talks about how a father invests in the emotional needs of his children. In Ephesians 6:4, it says, "Fathers, do not stir up anger in your children." The idea of this Bible verse is the calling for us to avoid a pattern of behaviour that can create children who are angry, hopeless, and emotionally lost.

The reality is we are always investing in the emotional health of our children based on what they experience in us. The only question is whether our investment is bringing them life or death emotionally.

### **Physical Needs**

Physical needs include, but are not limited to, the basics of life. As human beings we all need food, water, clothing, a safe place to live, education, exercise, and more.

Time and money are important elements of meeting the physical needs of our children. Do we carve out the right amount of time to spend

with them? Do we manage our finances well so we can provide for their physical needs?

In Matthew 6:26, Jesus gives a picture of how much God the Father cares for our every need. In this illustration, Jesus gives us a picture of what a loving Father does: if He cares for the birds, then you never have to worry about your physical needs being met.

God the Father inspires us to be great fathers who also seek to meet the physical needs of our own children.

### **Spiritual Needs**

Meeting the physical and emotional needs of our children is something more widely understood in our culture. However, the spiritual needs seem to be even more difficult to wrap our minds around.

There is no clear definition of spirituality in our culture, yet people seem to consistently be seeking the spiritual. It is almost as though we know, deep down inside, that there is something more to this life than what meets the eye. In the Bible, we are taught this is the case because God has placed eternity in the hearts of every person (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Your children need a way to answer some of these deeper questions of life. Having a solid spiritual life helps to give us a compass for morality. Our spiritual life assists us with problem solving, seeking wisdom, and teaches us how to build solid relationships. A solid spiritual life helps us see a bigger story when life does not make sense, and this bigger story gives us meaning and purpose for our own lives.

Statistically, the father is the most important influence in the spiritual life of his children. What they see and learn from you, will be the foundation they build from in their own spiritual decisions. This does not mean they will believe everything you do, but it does mean your influence heavily shapes them. Take this role very seriously.

I personally believe the Christian faith provides the best and most consistent answers to the spiritual needs we have as humans. If you are not a believer and follower of Jesus, then I encourage you to at least check Him out. Read parts of the Bible like the book of John, and see what Jesus says about Himself. Watching a movie like *The Case for Christ* can help you see the true story of how another dad faced some of his own doubts about Christianity.

If you are a believer and follower of Jesus, then you need to understand how important you are as a dad. In Ephesians 6:4, right after addressing the emotional needs of our children, we are taught our role as a father is to bring up our children in the training and instruction of the Lord. This means, dad, that it is your calling and responsibility to make sure your children are learning to know and follow Jesus. This is very clear in the Scriptures. Fathers are to set the tone in meeting the spiritual needs of their children.

Of course, your ability to meet the spiritual needs of your children will be directly connected to your own spiritual health. This is no different than any other area in life. You can only help people grow as far as you are growing yourself. You cannot teach your children to eat healthy if you are not eating healthy. You cannot teach them to read if you do not know how to read. And you can only help your children grow spiritually if you are willing to grow spiritually yourself. As a dad, be intentional about your own spiritual development. Get to know God through the Bible, pray, spend time with other Christian men, be part of a local church community, and strive for your whole life to be an expression of worship to God (Romans 12:1, 2).

Your spiritual development will serve as a living example of what is important in life. As a child and teenager, I woke up every day and came to the breakfast table. As I approached the table, I consistently saw my mom sitting there with her Bible open and a pen to take notes of what God was saying to her through the Bible. Her example left an impression in my life—you're never too old for spiritual development.

Throughout this book, we will come back to these three essential needs: emotional, physical, and spiritual. How we go about meeting them in our children's lives will change in the different seasons of fatherhood.

In every season of your child's life, there are some additional and foundational principles we will need to understand as fathers. These principles will shape the way you go about meeting the needs your children have.

## KNOW YOUR STORY

One of the common traits of fathers is not having a clear understanding of how your own life story has shaped your view of fatherhood.

Several years ago, I was invited to visit with a leader in The Salvation Army who was serving in the Regent Park area of Toronto. This neighbourhood was the centre of a lot of gang activity. It was a community where violence among young people had become very normal. It was surreal to walk down the street and see homes with blown-out windows on one side, and a BMW dealership across the street.

As I talked with this leader, I discovered there were some common threads in the story of that neighbourhood. It was a community with a high percentage of single moms. Parental relationships were difficult to maintain. According to this man, success in his work would be to “keep a couple living together for longer than 3 months.” The story being repeated was of young men getting their girlfriends pregnant and then leaving. Sometimes they would even leave the country altogether.

Part of the reason this was happening is because of what these young men had experienced in their own life. A significant number of these dads have never had a dad themselves. In general, men hate failure. When we think we will fail at something, then it is easier to not even try rather than look like a fool. These new fathers can end up convincing themselves that their child will be better off without them because they do not know what they are doing. I am not excusing their decisions, but I am saying we need to look below the surface to have a better understanding of what is going on in their heart.

Your story may not be as radical as the one I just described, but you do have a story.

There are things you have learned throughout your life—lessons you have learned about what it means to be a man, what it means to love, or succeed, or fail. You have made choices that have brought life, and you have made choices that have had painful consequences. You have experienced hurt, and you have experienced victory. You have had people hurt you, and you have hurt people.

If you have never thought about your story, I want to encourage you to take some time to write it down. Think about the defining moments of your life—the good, the bad, and maybe even the ugly.

Once you have taken the time to write down your own story, I want to encourage you to take another step. Ask yourself some deeper questions about these moments: What happened? What did you learn? What

character traits did you experience in others during those moments? What do you wish could have been different?

Now, there is one final step for you to take: What chains need to be broken in your life?

During my teenage years, I had a very difficult and bitter relationship with my own father. I had little idea how this strain would influence my own thinking and approach to life. My anger would carry over into other relationships. My fear caused me to be too driven and want to make my family perfect. My lack of forgiveness caused me to carry a heavy weight on my shoulders. I am grateful to God for healing and reconciling my relationship with my dad. I am grateful for God's grace to walk with me through my own pain and failure, so I could learn to be a better dad for my own children.

Your story has shaped you, but it does not need to define you. What are the negative and hurtful patterns in your story needing to be broken so you can give real life and joy to your children?

I have met men whose fathers are alcoholics. They were abusive and arrogant, and their addiction caused much pain in the life of the family. These men were tempted towards alcoholism as well, but they were determined to write a different story for their own lives.

Your story is important because it has shaped who you are. As we will see in this book, your story can also help you forge deep bonds with your children. It can help you inspire, warn, and protect them.

If you see patterns needing to be broken, I want to urge you to get professional help. See a counselor or a minister who can help you process these areas of your life. Do this for the sake of your own freedom and for the sake of your children.

The good news about your story is that it is not finished being written. There is much more to come.

## LOVE THEIR MOM

In addition to knowing your story, another essential principle to help you be a great dad is to love the mother of your children.

“Children with two biological married parents experience better educational, social, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes than do other children, on average ... the benefits associated with marriage not only are evident in the short-term but also endure through adulthood.” (Marriage and Child Well Being: Research and Policy Perspectives, 2010)

From a Christian perspective, the marriage relationship is incredibly important. When we have children, the temptation is to make them the centre of our lives. We plan everything around them. However, in the Christian understanding of the family, God never called you to become one with your children. He did say that you are to be one with your wife (Genesis 2:24).

There seems to be a significant benefit for everyone when biological parents are pursuing their love for each other. When you are invested in loving your children’s mom, it will strengthen and encourage her. She will know she is not alone in the journey to raise your children. She will have a partner to rely on who shares the same love and motivation she has.

When there is a strong sense of love between the parents, you will also be more effective in trusting each other as parents. You will be able to build off each other’s strengths. As parents, you have different personalities and take different approaches in raising children. Brett Copeland, a clinical psychologist in Tacoma, Washington, describes it this way: “Fathers and mothers have unique and complementary roles in the home. Fathers encourage competition, independence, and achievement. Mothers encourage equity, security, and collaboration.” (Parenting.com — “Why Kids Need their Dads”)

A strong bond of love between biological parents will also provide an important support and purpose when the inevitable empty nest hits the family. The foundations of love you have built for each other will see you help each other make the important transitions at this stage of life.

I understand there will be times when this focus on loving her is tested. We will look deeper at how to live this out during different seasons of your child’s life.

I also want to acknowledge that some of you who are reading this book may already have a broken relationship with the mother of your children. For whatever reasons, your relationship has not worked out. This principle

still applies to you. You may not be able to love her in a romantic way. You may not be able to love her in a way that allows you to be consistently present with and for each other. But love is much deeper than that.

You can love her simply because she is another human being and the mother of your children. Your love for her will make all the difference in the type of environment your children experience.

For some of you, this may be very painful and very difficult to do. It is possible the mother of your children has done a lot to make life difficult and painful for you. Your ability to forgive and love anyway will filter down to your children. Your inability to forgive and love will also filter down to them. The choice will be yours.

## ENJOY YOUR KIDS

This principle may sound obvious, but if you have been a father for any length of time, then you know that it is not always as simple as it sounds.

It is difficult to enjoy your kids when they wake up with the flu in the early hours of the morning. It is difficult to enjoy them when they drive a car through your garage door (not that I would know anything about that).

How would your children answer these questions: “Does your dad like you? Does he enjoy you?”

I find the reason fathers do not enjoy their kids is because of perspective. We can overreact to a single situation rather than seeing the whole picture. I will come back to this idea later in the book, but you need to see fatherhood as a marathon rather than a sprint.

You will not fix every problem or bad character trait in your children overnight. They will make mistakes — as did you. Enjoy the journey. More importantly, enjoy the people you are taking the journey with.

From a Christian perspective, we learn this lesson about how God views His children. In Zephaniah 3:17 we read, “The Lord your God is among you, a warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in his love. He will delight in you with singing.” God delights in his children. They make Him want to sing. He is filled with gladness when He thinks about them.

One of the ways you will know if your children believe you enjoy them will be if they want to be in your presence. Again, God's desire for His children is for them to see Him as a Father they can boldly and confidently approach with their needs, fears, stories, etc. (Romans 8:15; Hebrews 4:16).

Delight in your children. The expression on your face, the tone in your voice, and the actions of your hands will help to meet their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs.

Fatherhood is more of a privilege than it is a duty. You get the privilege of having a front row seat to the lives of some of the most remarkable people you will ever know. Not only that, but you get to be part of shaping their story. What an amazing adventure to be enjoyed and experienced!





# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirk is the President of Promise Keepers Canada—a national ministry whose vision is to see every man becoming, growing, and living as disciples of Jesus Christ. For over twenty years, he has been on the frontlines of Christian leadership in Canada. He has been investing in men through his work at Promise Keepers Canada since 1996, and has also consistently served in leadership positions within the local church and other mission agencies.

Kirk is husband to Shannon, and father to four remarkable people, and a leader who has been teaching and helping others to follow Jesus since he was 16 years old. He is well aware of many of his own shortcomings, and often teaches from the perspective of how God met him in the painful experiences of his own life.

He has a deep love for the fatherless, a desire to see men, marriages and families who are healthy and strong, and a burden for the local church in Canada to be thriving in honouring God and faithfully participating in His mission to love the world.

Visit Kirk's blog at: [www.kirkgiles.com](http://www.kirkgiles.com)

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In *The Seasons of Fatherhood* we will explore how to thrive as a dad in every season of life. Each season sees a different role for us in which to operate. We will explore some key practices to help us succeed in our role for that season. The lessons in this book are what God has been teaching me about fathering four, remarkable people.

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