



being fathered
BY GOD

A 14-Day Plan



Being Fathered by God

14-Day Devotional

Featuring excerpts from

The Heart of a Warrior

by Michael Thompson

Originally written for the YouVersion Bible app

***“Train up a child in the way he should go:
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”***

Proverbs 22:6

***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in
me.”***

John 14:1

***“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my
love.”***

John 15:9

“I and the Father are one.”

John 10:30

Every man has had authority figures in his life, and much of what a man perceives about God and projects onto God was shaped by those authority figures. At the top of every man's authority list is his earthly father. How your dad handled your heart has shaped you and contributed significantly to how you perceive God. Join us for this journey towards experiencing the heart of the Father and getting everything out of the way that is in the way of being a Beloved Son.

1. Being Fathered

“Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent] and when he is old he will not depart from it.” - Proverbios 22:6

“Abba (Daddy), Father.”
- Jesus

Every man has had authority figures in his life, and much of what a man perceives about God and projects onto God was shaped by those authority figures. At the top of every man's authority list is his earthly father. How your dad handled your heart has shaped you and contributed significantly to how you perceive God.

The odds of an unsettled heart falling and then arriving at a disoriented man's view of God and life are 100 percent. You can have all the theology right and still have the Father wrong. Like memorizing facts for a history exam, you can pass the test but still not love the characters, enjoy the story, and engage in the drama. It is the difference between the head versus the heart. Starting from varying degrees of inaccuracy, men must journey individually with God to discover both who they are and who they aren't—and just as importantly, a man must discover both who the Father is and who he isn't.

For one thing, he isn't our earthly father. Like us, our fathers were wounded men with wounded hearts. They lived in the same story we live in. Our fathers and their fathers before them also had it rough, far worse than most of us sons and grandsons will ever know.

I often hear men say, *“Dad did the best he could.”* That can be either an excuse or compassion. It all depends on how well the son knows his father's story. Most thirty to fifty-year-old men don't know their father's story and therefore haven't earned the right to say their dad did his best. What a man discovers from learning his father's story will change his heart toward his father. Misinterpretation and excuses are replaced with understanding and compassion.

Besides our dads, many other authority figures have had access to our hearts along the journey. Some had a positive impact, but there were others who should have provided for us and protected us—but didn't. Tough coaches who punished us with extra wind sprints, challenging teachers who enjoyed pointing out when we answered wrong, preachers yelling at us, older siblings embarrassing us, mothers controlling us, so-called “friends” lost in their own small stories betraying us: all of these reflect a reality I continually stress with a maxim I hope you'll memorize: *wounded hearts wound hearts.*

Time Alone with God ...

Ask God to help you make a list of the authority figures in your life and what they taught, bestowed, offered your heart about you, the world, God, and life.

What is your earthly father's story?

How do you see the Father's love for you?

2. The Way We See Him

When my oldest daughter was about eight, she asked me if I thought she looked pretty. “*Absolutely,*” I said ...“*Beautiful. Gorgeous. Sooo pretty.*” With a hint of dissatisfaction, she replied, “*Dad, you’re supposed to say that.*”

My daughter’s statement expressed the way that I frequently felt about my heavenly Father when I was growing up—that He sent his Son to die for me, but that was his duty—that it was a large inconvenience to him—that He loves me—but then, he has to. In other words, my Father didn’t love me just because he loved me. He loved me because he was supposed to love me. It was a matter of obligation, not delight. And on my part, I needed to be thankful and obedient and not rock the boat. Let a sleeping God lie. Try not to do anything stupid. But if I did, when I sinned, I was to wake God up to the fact, ask him for forgiveness, and then check myself into the penalty box to suffer for a time until he calmed down.

Some days, the suffering started even before I hit the penalty box. That was usually my cue: *You have done something wrong; now go to your room!* Most Sunday mornings at church reinforced this underachieving and grim life cycle: “*Thank you for coming; you don’t deserve his love; come back next week for more reminders of the abundant life.*” If I could just pull it together, maybe he would bless me or at least not punish me. That probably wouldn’t happen, but I had to at least keep trying.

That is how I saw God for much of my life. And I’m not the only one. Many believe God is mostly mad at us, on the verge of getting even, and setting some record straight. Others see God as distant and disinterested, unconcerned about our daily affairs. Then again, maybe he’s behind the inconveniences and hardships of our lives. I wish I had a nickel for every time I’ve heard a man talk about God “whacking” him upside the head with a two-by-four.

Which of that is true of God? Is any of it true? If there is more to God than that, then how does it all work? Who is he really? What is he truly like?

Time Alone with God ...

Why may our greatest obstacles to becoming the Beloved Sons involve the lies we believe about the Father and what He is like?

3. Is He Good?

If a man lives with an undercurrent of mistrust in the Father, in his deep masculine heart, then becoming the Beloved Son will be unattainable. Walking with the Father will be impossible, and fighting for the kingdom will not go well. This is where many “men’s ministries” fall woefully short of their mark. Their default is to start with training men what to do (or not to do) and how to live. In other words, they focus on men’s behavior rather than on reworking the foundation of who men are and who God is.

If they do address the “who we are,” it is usually with a list of biblical truths to memorize or paragraphs of character traits to which we should aspire. Not all of this is wrong, but it is ill-timed. It puts the proverbial cart before the horse.

We’ve got to set the horse back out in front, beginning with what the heart of God is really like. Our greatest obstacle to becoming Beloved Sons may well be the lies we’ve bought about our heavenly Father and the belief that he is anything other than good. As I’ve shared, for much of my life, I believed that God was mostly just a little ticked off. Not so mad that another flood was coming (he did promise not to do that again), but mad enough that I didn’t want to cross him or draw more attention to myself than necessary. Opening my heart to examine how I really saw the Father, and why, and inviting him to show me, was both a challenge and a milestone in upgrading my beliefs. My “after” is still in the making, but I can tell you, it is far better than my before—and my Father is far better than I used to believe.

It is impossible for us to love what we don’t trust.

The nineteenth century Scottish pastor and author George MacDonald once wrote: “To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved.” We are loved to the degree that we are known and in human relationships we are known to the degree that we trust. God, of course, knows us completely and loves us unconditionally whether we trust him or not. The question then becomes, will we let him love us? Choosing to trust him is the key. In the words of Jesus: ***“Trust in me . . . let me love you.” (John 14:1; 15:9).***

The Father is trustworthy! He knows what each and every man can become and he is all in. Satan also knows what a man might become—and fears it! There are more forces at work in our story than just God and us. There is an evil that is out to steal, kill, and destroy. Evil is lurking, working far deeper behind a man’s front lines than most men realize. More on this in days to come, but suffice it to say, we live in a perilous fight, a dangerous environment, a place of high stakes. A man must discern the propaganda he has been fed about God and himself and find his way to the true heart of the Father, trusting that the Father can show him who he truly isn’t, who he truly is, and then set him free!

Time Alone with God ...

How do you see the Father?

What is your experience growing up that has shaped your belief?

What if you you've been wrong?

Ask the Father to show you how, where, when and then turn any of that in to Him through confessing you believed a lie and asking Him to reveal the truth.

4. The One from Whom Love Is Coming

Is God good? All the other significant moments of redemption, recovery, training, and initiating a man in becoming a Beloved Son depend on the answer to this foundational question. The answer is always yes—but the enemy of our heart will always attempt to tell us no. It makes sense: how can a man be the Beloved if he doesn't trust the One from whom the love is coming and the form and fashion in which it comes?

If the source of love is believed to be imperfect, then the message of love from the Father of love will fall on deaf ears and a hard heart. A distrustful man will believe God isn't there or that God doesn't really care, or worse, that his life is a great disappointment to God.

Most men deal with at least one, if not all, of these haunting messages daily and their responses vary. One man will try to hide so the messages he is a disappointment won't come true. Another man will attempt some form of effort or control in order to dispel the messages he needs help. Neither man is living from a settled heart. The opinions and criticisms of others rule both of their lives. Neither man is ready to love; each is living afraid.

The fourth chapter of 1 John, verse 18 tells us that "perfect love casts out fear." If you could experience perfect love—*complete, lavish, unconditional, sacrificial, intimate, deep, consistent, and continuing*—would you allow it? Would you accept it? Would you enjoy it and its effects on your heart? Such love settles the issue of hiding and controlling. In the face of it, there is no need to hide, strive, or manipulate. You and I are loved in just that way. We have nothing to prove, hide, or fear. Tragically, the enemy of our hearts planted the first seeds of doubt in Eden with the message: "You cannot trust the heart of God; he is holding out on you. Surely you won't die."

That lie continues to this day, perpetuating Satan's scheme to make our hearts distrust God's heart. Today, as on that day, the image-bearers take the bait and suffer the consequences. We have been unsettled and unsure of the heart of the Father. And today the Father asks the same question that he asked of Adam in the garden, Son, where are you? Do you know where you are?

Time Alone with God ..

What is a particular thing or way God says or shows your heart, "I see you and I love you, here is something I got just for you."

Which is your false self's preferred method to get along without God... hide or strive?

5. The Prodigal Father

A huge part of Christ's mission was to set the record straight about the Father's heart. Most of the teachings and parables of Jesus included significant "intel" about the Father. After all, you can't talk about the kingdom and not talk about the Father heart of God. Almost every parable Jesus tells is an invitation to see the Father. For example, take the parable known as "The Prodigal Son." Maybe it should be retitled. The word prodigal means "spending resources freely and recklessly; being wasteful . . . extravagant . . . having or giving something in a lavish way." Who's the one being prodigal here?

When [the son] was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech... "Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again." But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, "Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!" And they began to have a wonderful time! -Luke 15:20–24 MSG

Is this story really about the son who ran away? What if Jesus was sharing the story to spotlight the Father? And what if, in telling it, Jesus was forecasting what he himself would one day do for Peter, reinstating the one who denied him three times (John 21:15- 19)?

The Father's extravagant, lavish—dare we say *reckless*—and redeeming love is ready to cure our greatest ache. The Father's reaction was so over the top that the older son, who had never gone astray, responded, "Really? Really, Dad? You are going to do that for this wasteful, betraying, dishonoring son of yours?" Simply put, the Father answered, "Yes, yes, and yes!" And the Father doesn't stop with just his sons (and daughters). No! All creation gets in on the deal of his love and care.

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father keeps feeding them. Are you not worth much more than they? -Matthew 6:26

It is more than comforting. It is necessary to know that *Someone* is watching out for us, caring for us, making the wrongs in our life right, and giving good and meaningful gifts.

If your little boy asks for a serving of fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? If your little girl asks for an egg, do you trick her with a spider? As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing—you're at least decent to your own children. And don't you think the Father who conceived you in love will give the Holy Spirit when you ask him? -Luke 11:11–13 MSG

What kind of gifts from the Father are you getting? Can't you just hear Jesus telling how great his Dad is? In the passage above, it is still the "preseason" before the gift of the Holy Spirit was fully delivered on the day of Pentecost. Now that we have the Holy Spirit, the gifts are to continue way beyond a single moment. They are to flow and be continually dropped off on the doorsteps of our heart. Beloved Sons with eyes to see and ears to hear know of what I write. The Father deeply wants his gifts to get through to us so we can see and hear and experience that he is good and has good in store for us as he grows us into men.

Time Alone with God ...

Have you understood that much of Christ's mission was to set the record straight about the Father's heart and therefore His love?

Why is it important to know "Someone" is watching out for you?

What are a couple of recent gifts the Father has given you? Ways He has shown his love and affection just to you, his Beloved?

6. It's a Setup

Because we are meant for such a glorious and weighty love, we are all set up for a fall: *disappointment, heartache, and rejection*. It's a setup because there is an adversary, a great villain in our story, who is hell-bent on making sure we do not know and experience unconditional love. Our stories are full of people, other image-bearers who love imperfectly and conditionally.

There are dark forces in every man's story that make sure he feels, hears, and experiences: "You are alone. Trust no one. Arrange for life and love (validation, acceptance, worth) for yourself." The conditional-love moments in a man's life result in his believing: "If I could do more of this or less of that, *be this or be that*, then people would love me."

Strategies form and harden in our inmost being and become the "system" a man both runs and is subject to. Repeatedly, that system attempts to create or manipulate ways in which a man can provide love for himself. The old "If it is to be, it is up to me" way of life lodges deep in the heart and clouds over every opportunity to arrange for love, tipping the vote of acceptance and worth his way arrange.

As a boy I learned to perform in order to obtain love; validation, acceptance, and worth and to create distance in order to protect myself from the pain of not experiencing the love I was made for (we all were made for). This elaborate and pervasive "system" grows with the boy and takes its full, wretched effect years later when the boy becomes a man. Dark forces use this internal, *conditional* system, along with the opinions and words of others, to reinforce their lies- *Life IS up to me*. Conditional love and the enemy align, setting the man up for a fall.

It is not if we are disappointed or become a disappointment but when. Someone doesn't make us happy or we find it impossible to keep another happy—what then? Taking matters of love and life into his own hands is guaranteed to promote and perpetuate a man's false self, which is *self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-protecting, and self-promoting*. The false-self life will always obstruct the true man and real Life: Life that is abundant and full is uninhibited by expectations, opinions, and circumstances. Our Father promises another Life to us. He guarantees another Love. When we seek him, he finds us. Then, and only then, does the fall become a setup of a different kind: the setup for redemption ... a man's great and glorious comeback.

I am not talking about salvation, which is the first move, or the installation of the needed new equipment—*the new heart*—which is what a man desperately needs in order to start learning how to Live. I am talking about sanctification... the healing from the inside out; the ability to now see what was in the way of truly seeing and experiencing *Life*.

When a man turns away from the old false-self construct and its system (of wounds, coping mechanisms, and conditions) and moves intentionally toward the Author of Life for the new Life Jesus has custom-made for him, everything changes again. And again and again and again.

It takes time, a lifetime, but it happens choice by choice. The man makes his comeback and becomes who he truly is, the Beloved Son by rejecting the old system beliefs and receiving the new unconditional love of the Father. Love changes us. When we experience our true Father loving us, it heals us, restores us, and then sets us loose. But only if we come to him. And the primary reason we don't is that we don't trust him. Loving is trusting and trusting is loving.

Each time I turn to the Father in trust, he responds with more training in the new ways of Love and Life, and I am another step closer to becoming the real me and another step further from who I am not.

Time Alone with God ...

How does the set-up for disappointment become a set-up for redemption?

What is the "weapon of choice" used most significantly by our adversary in the lives and hearts of men?

How specifically have you felt, experienced, been trained up to know conditional love? When, where...what is the story?

What are the details of your conditional love system? If you can't see them, hear their influence operating on the inside, then it will be impossible to get free.

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7. If You Have Seen Me

After all they had been through together, all the miracles, teachings, campfires, long walks, times amid the multitudes, and quiet, private moments, the disciples still didn't quite get it. Right up until the end of Jesus' life, there were more than a few misunderstandings flying around among his closest friends about just exactly who he was and how it all was going to work. Three years they had accompanied Jesus. His great expedition became theirs. They were there; they witnessed the lion's share of the work of Jesus, more moments of healing and teaching than could possibly be recorded (John 21:25).

Yet in the late hours of Jesus' life, one of his closest friends requested of him, "Show us the Father." Jesus basically replied, "I did," likely with one of those classic Jesus smiles... "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:8-14 NKJV)

If they can miss him, what chance do we have of seeing him for who he truly is? "The Father and I are one," Jesus said in John 10:30. We have all misjudged Jesus. In discovering that I also had him wrong, I have found out that he cares a lot more about setting the record straight than I do about getting it straight. Lovingly setting me straight is high on his list, and doing it with love, kindness, mercy, and grace seems to be his favorite method. John Eldredge wrote in *The Way of the Wild Heart (Fathered by God)*:

Wherever you are in your ability to believe it at this moment in your life, at least you can see what Jesus is driving at. You have a good Father. He is better than you thought. He cares. He really does. He's kind and generous. He's out for your best. This is absolutely central to the teaching of Jesus, though I have to admit, it never really struck a chord in me until I began to think through the need for masculine initiation, and came straight up against the question, "But who will do the initiating?"

Time Alone with God ...

What is your perception of Jesus? What image of him do you carry in your heart?

Is your image of Jesus and your image of the Father the same? Why or why not?

8. Notorious Love

If there was one thing for which Jesus was notorious, it was *Love*. Everywhere he went he loved on people, providing more and more and more evidence of what love really looks like. Jesus is love personified. Jesus initiates me over and over. It starts with his moving toward me. And in return, he wants me to move toward him. The more he heals me, the more he wants me to walk with him. At a few stops along Jesus' ministry, he declared, in effect,

“No more healing. You don't want me—you want the miracle. But there is no miracle without me” -Matthew 12:38–42.

When we get him, we get the healing. Remember the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17? After they were healed, one came back. Only one. Just one wanted the One who did the healing, not just the healing.

At a critical point in Jesus' ministry, the disciples were faced with the choice to follow the rest of the crowds who were turning their backs on Jesus. Peter piped up on behalf of the twelve: “Where would we go? You have the life” (John 6:67–68). The fisher of men had the right idea. Years later, an aged and matured Peter wrote to the churches of the first century:

May grace (God's favor) and peace (which is perfect well-being, all necessary good, all spiritual prosperity, and freedom from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts) be multiplied to you in [the full, personal, precise, and correct] knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. For His divine power has bestowed upon us all things that [are requisite and suited] to life and godliness, through the [full, personal] knowledge of Him Who called us by and to His own glory and excellence (virtue). By means of these He has bestowed on us His precious and exceedingly great promises, so that through them you may escape [by flight] from the moral decay (rottenness and corruption) that is in the world because of covetousness (lust and greed), and become sharers (partakers) of the divine nature. -2 Peter 1:2-4

How right Peter was the first time. “Where would we go? You are life.” Sounds to me like the Peter of many years later is offering a taste of something he has stocked up on over his time as Jesus' friend. Peter feels compelled to *share*. (Don't we all when we find something glorious and good?) The old apostle knows, not just in theory but also through life-altering encounters and Life-giving experiences, that the Father is good. Jesus made sure of it and makes sure of it still.

Time Alone with God ...

When was the last time you experienced the goodness of the Father, him loving on you?

What in the passage in I Peter do you long to experience the most? What are you NOT experiencing?

What might you be so bold as to ask the Father for? What is a deep desire unfulfilled and do you believe he is good?

9. Abba, Father

It all gets a bit messy when our life experiences tell us, *That kind of love—perfect love—it doesn't exist.* It does exist, and it's not just words on a page or theology in a book. It's far more and far greater than that. Those who experienced it wrote about it to provide a scriptural reference point so we could know that when God's love overtakes us, it is real and true. Our hearts are thus reassured that such love exists. Paul says in Romans 15:13:

May the God of your hope so fill you with all joy and peace in believing [through the experience of your faith] that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound and be overflowing (bubbling over) with hope.

Oh, to hope again! It is very far from “irrelevant” or “uneventful.” The Father's love has a tangible effect. If you haven't been hit by it lately, overrun with his love, then it's time. If you haven't felt the goose bumps, been warm all over, experienced a cool chill, or felt a flood of joy filling you up, warming you, taking you to a place—if you haven't felt giddy—then it's time!

The question is, do you see it? In Romans 8, Paul says we can be certain that “every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good” (verse 28 MSG). A few verses later Paul concludes the chapter with: ***I am persuaded beyond doubt (am sure) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things impending and threatening nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (verses. 38–39).***

My friend Scott experiences the love of the Father when God speaks to him in music, license plates, and ads in the newspaper (to mention just a few of the ways). Scott and I have a couple of worship songs we really like, and you wouldn't believe how often Pandora or Sirius or XM radio play them when we are together. Call it coincidence, but Scott and I know better. These are love notes from our Father right to our hearts.

Ashley believes God made butterflies for her. Kelly sees God in baseball. Travis encounters God's love in every hunt he goes on. David sees the Father in the houses he restores. My wife, Robin, feels his love when the clock turns to 11:11. She will say to me, “Look, Jesus loves me”; it's something special just between him and her. **Shouldn't every love affair have something that's just between two hearts?**

It starts and ends with the Father's love. He loved us first and he loves us most; he is the author and perfecter of our faith, and that faith is based on love.

Walking along the beach a few weeks ago, Robin and I strolled past hundreds of thousands of seashells, most of them broken. One shell among the masses caught my eye. There it was, looking up at me, the size of a quarter and the perfect shape of a heart! What are the odds? You can't tell me the Father wasn't saying to the Son, "Watch this, watch our boy Michael! Wait for it, wait for it . . . there! I knew he would find it."

There is a Life the Father is imparting and bestowing to all his sons and daughters. It is a life of love and of training in love. Through ceremonies of validation and initiation, trials and errors, redoes and redeems, playgrounds and battlefields ALL invite us to engage. The Father's love delivers Life to our hearts and then gives us the packages we can deliver to the hearts of others. Nothing can separate us from the Father's love. Nothing. And yet, there are things that can and do get in the way.

Time Alone with God ...

How do you experience His love?

What is a particular thing or way God says or shows your heart, "I see you and I love you, here is something I got just for you!"

Is life happening to you or is Life happening for you?

Ask God, "What is in the way of my receiving your Love and Life?" then be still, quiet and listen.

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10. The Sword of Aragorn

The air is chilly, but the sun is warming me as I sit nervously, hopeful yet also bracing for disappointment. I've never done this before. What if God doesn't answer? What if I'm not ready or I'm not good enough? What if he does speak and it isn't good? Sitting there on the side of a mountain overlooking miles of valley below, I am experiencing uncertainty, apprehension, and the feeling that I am not qualified.

Yet here I am anyway, optimistic that if this works it will change everything. What do you think of me, Father? Who am I to you? I sit, still and listening, waiting for a reply. I have never done this before. It is my first time asking the Creator of all that is good such a personal question. All my previous conversations with God over the past thirty-some years of my life haven't really been conversations. They've been more monologues than dialogues. I did all the talking and he did all the listening. I would give him my list and hope we would have time to get to it.

Not this time. This time I have asked a question and I await an answer. It doesn't take long—the distractions, I mean. Oh, look at that bird! I wonder what kind of rock this is. Wow, the clouds sure are fluffy. Re-engaging, I close my eyes and drop back to my question, God, what do you think of me? Who am I to you? My thoughts go to the epic story *The Lord of the Rings* and the character Aragorn. I love that story, and I love who Aragorn is in his journey of becoming. He is brave, courageous, strong, and cunning ... Again drifting. I suck at this! God, what do you think of me and who am I to you? The character of Aragorn invades my thoughts and my time with God again. I love how he fights for a cause larger than himself, all the while wrestling with a deep secret. I love his friends and the fellowship he is a part of. Dang it! Come on, Thompson. Back to prayer. This is serious! Stop messing around! Too late. Time is up. I have to rejoin the ranks of the men at the retreat. Pushing up from the ground I conclude, "either God must be busy or I'm not doing it right." Neither answer feels good.

Fast-forward eight weeks. It is my fortieth birthday. Family is in town and we have had a great day. Cake, cards and presents! There among the little pile of gifts and cards is a long box—a really long box and thin. I have been dropping hints for a shotgun, and by the looks of things today might be the day. Then again, it also could be golf clubs. My dad and brother are pretty good golfers and they are always trying to buy me a better game. It hasn't worked yet, but I always appreciate their efforts.

All the gifts are unwrapped except for this one. Obviously, it's the BIG ONE! I truly feel a bit giddy unwrapping it. I remove the lid . . . my eyes take in what's inside . . . And I am stunned. Suddenly I'm both in the family room of my house and back on the side of the mountain at the men's retreat. Because gleaming up at me from the box is the Sword of Aragorn. Tears begin to swell. Warmth pours into my body. Seconds pass. No one says a word. Then my wife, Robin, breaks in. "Do you like it? I wasn't sure which sword to get you. There were dozens to pick from. I just knew God wanted me to get you a sword. Several weeks ago he laid it on my heart. I had another one picked out but it didn't feel right—then this one came to me on the website as an option. Is it all right? Do you like it? It's the sword of ..."

I already know. God has partnered with my wife to give me a sword and not just any sword. This particular sword. The Sword of Aragorn. My wife and my Father have done this: affirmed me, validated me, and invited me to see who I am. This—this—is Belovedness.

The Father has given me many, many other good gifts since he gave me the sword. But I know I'm not the only one for whom he does this. What have you gotten? How is the Father showing you who you are? The Father is at work authoring, perfecting, and rebuilding something. That something is actually a someone—you and me. The Father is building his sons into men, strong and good men who bear his image. It starts with a foundation of receiving love and advances through healing our hearts through all the means necessary for our becoming his Beloved Sons. For you see, it is Beloved Sons to whom he desires to entrust his power and authority.

Some of the lessons are hard. But that is what makes the “ceremony” of becoming so good. It is the process we, his image-bearers, must go through in order for Life to be redeemed and restored to us. And as I have shared . . . it doesn't end there. We are then called to be his intimate allies, the peacekeepers, the courageous and compassionate, the fearless and caring—the Warriors of his kingdom, the men who know how to fight and know how to dance.

Time Alone with God ...

Does the Aragorn Sword story invite you to look back at any packages you might have missed?

Is God taking you back to see, hear and engage in a moment of your past in which He didn't get the credit for or the thank-you expression that comes after?

Also... this was a gift to show me who I was, a very important component to orientation. One of the 3 central questions we bring to God for answers...

**Who Am I?
Where Am I?
What is the Good You are up to in my life, God?**

How is God answering these 3 questions in your life?

The Heart of a Warrior Fathered By God devotional is comprised of excerpts and quotes from The Heart of a Warrior book. To purchase your copy and other resources visit heartofawarriorbook.com.

11. Made for Love

What do I, the oldest of three boys, know about raising three girls? Answer: Nothing! Nada, zilch. But I am learning! They make sure of that. It has been on-the-job training from the first moment they were placed in my arms. I vowed early in the game, “These little girls will know my arms in hope of preventing them from running to the arms of another.”

All three have had their *boyfriends*. I don't like writing about it and even less talking about it, but my ignoring the subject doesn't stop them from having hopes and dreams of one day meeting their knight in shining armor. My hope is that in each case he will be a young Warrior, a settled beloved son who pursues my daughter's deep heart and invites her on an adventure rather than trying to make her the adventure.

Teenage girls aren't the only ones who've gotten in trouble through their longing to be part of a larger story. Boys, too, long desperately to matter to someone—to be significant. For better or worse, it's a condition we will not outgrow. To understand this longing and how it lures men to things other than the Father's love, we must return to the baseline of our story, the environment into which we were born: war.

We live in a fallen world where war is the reality. And in war, people get wounded. The enemy's ruthless and constant assault on our hearts is accomplished solely because of what we were created for, what our hearts are meant for, what little girls and boys never stop hoping and longing for as they become grown women and men. It is summed up in the phrase:

***“I want someone to see me, want me, and love me.”
Our hearts were meant to experience and enjoy love.***

Love is the greatest thing in the whole universe and love is capital-L Life. It is the conditional kind that is the source of our greatest woundings and the unconditional kind that is the source of our greatest healings. We are most alive when we are receiving or offering love. That explains why we so often try to make love and life happen on our own rather than let our Creator fill and sustain us. But our own efforts to fill our love tank don't work. It's as C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*:

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion (faith). God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.

“God is love,” wrote the apostle John. So I propose that love is the fuel our hearts are meant to run on, because love is what we so desperately long for and need. But there is no love without God and without God there is no love. Anywhere, anytime, anyway in which love is expressed or experienced, God is there. Whether or not the Father is

acknowledged or credited or honored in that moment, if it is loving, he is there in the middle of it.

It doesn't have to be between Christians by the way; God is much bigger than that. His fondness for us from afar often makes God the great *Secret Admirer*. Oh, I believe He would rather be seen, acknowledged, and known; yet patiently he waits. God fondly looks on, waiting and wanting to be noticed, looking forward to the day when introductions are made and a romance for the ages begins. He watches over many of us as we take our hearts to sources other than him, including other image-bearers, in a vain attempt to fuel ourselves and meet our deepest need.

Much relational bankruptcy boils down to the manner in which we make withdrawals from one another rather than deposits into one another. The Father's love is continually, lavishly, and even fiercely in play. It waits, and will continue to wait, for us to grasp its reality and experience its joy more and more fully. God waits, all the while loving us, wooing us, wanting us—all of us who bear his image.

Time Alone with God ...

Who has he put in your life to teach you how to love?

How's it going? (Look back at 1 Corinthians 13 for a full resume of what He is attempting to partner with you and others to produce in your life).

Who or what are you turning to for Love (validation, acceptance and worth)? And if you are experiencing any love at all, what if that is God?

12. Show and Tell

If God is in all the moments of our lives, and if he is good and up to good in all those moments, then it more than stands to reason that each man should be able to show and tell what good gifts the Father has been giving. Trusting that the heart of the Father is good is foundational to seeing and experiencing his ways, because not all the gifts he gives are shiny or pretty or opened at a party. Most of them come to us on our climb and along our journey of seeking after him. In the midst of the battle for Life and love, he leaves good gifts all along the way. But if a man misinterprets the Father's heart and the Father's ways, then, guaranteed, he will misinterpret the Father's gifts and training.

When I was thirteen, we moved from the West Coast back to Oklahoma. Eighth grade is a tough time to move. That spring I was one of about forty boys who tried out for a select baseball team needing a couple of kids to fill their roster. Every kid got to bat once, take a few grounders, and try to catch whatever ball got hit to him in the outfield. I never knew if I made that team, because a few days later my dad announced that another team was being formed and he was coaching. The first day we got together, most of the boys looked familiar. They had been at the tryout the weekend before! I remember playing the other team and wishing I was on it.

Not until twenty years later, when I was in my thirties, did I learn the truth: we all had been cut, and my dad had gone to the league organizers and talked them into letting him start a new team. Someone was watching over me and that someone was better than I thought.

Time Alone with God ...

How do you see the Father at work in your life, counseling you, guiding your steps, and teaching you how to do and not to do things?

When was the last time you made a major discovery about who you are and who he is, about how to love others and how to let him love you?

What do you have to show and tell?

What good gifts has your Father given you? Or are they piled up, sitting there and just waiting to be seen and unwrapped?

13. The Man I Am Becoming

The *NEW* man we are becoming is expertly formed one surgery at a time through the removal (via confession and repentance) of lies and the installation of truth. Truth gets internalized as we experience it and understand that it is indeed true. In my own life, I exchanged the message that “the Father isn’t good” for the heart-renewing truth that “he is in charge of my life, and I get to participate.” This has come to me one surgery at a time—one training, one validation ceremony, one initiating moment after another. How radically can the Father’s surgeries refashion a man? Let’s go back to Peter. Compare the Peter of the Gospels with the Peter who wrote these words:

Be content with who you are, and don’t put on airs. God’s strong hand is on you; he’ll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you. Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up. You’re not the only ones plunged into these hard times. It’s the same with Christians all over the world. So keep a firm grip on the faith.

The suffering won’t last forever. It won’t be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ—eternal and glorious plans they are— will have you put together and on your feet for good. -1 Peter 5:6–10 MSG

That doesn’t sound like the Peter who was quick to spout off whatever was on his mind. The Peter who, if he didn’t have a sword, would grab someone else’s. The Peter who, instead of simply listening, always felt compelled to tell the Son of God, “Jesus, I have a better idea.” What happened to that Peter as he moved from his late twenties to his late fifties? He encountered Jesus.

He followed him. And after Jesus left he continued to walk with God and got Fathered, and he lived to tell about it in his two letters to the churches.

What does it look like for a man to come out of his woundedness, turn, and be healed? Look at Peter. Peter’s healing and growth came at a price. It was surgery on top of surgery, healing after healing, training and more training. It was the old man giving way to more and more of the *NEW* man. The Truth? We *ARE* becoming. But exactly what is it we are becoming?

Increasingly we are growing into more and more: we are becoming the Beloved Sons of a true Father. He loves us unconditionally. If we’ll be open to it, we can experience his love. And when we experience it, everything changes.

Time Alone with God ...

What would it look like to take God up on the offer of remaking, remodeling and restoring you?

Where would he start?

Would you be excited at the proposition? If Peter, why not you?

14. Building a Son

General Douglas MacArthur was an outstanding man both during World War II and in the times that followed. The leader of the United States forces in the Philippines regularly prayed this prayer for his son, Arthur, during his morning devotions:

Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a son whose wishbone will not be where his backbone should be; a son who will know Thee and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge. Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here let him learn to stand up in the storm; here let him learn compassion for those who fail.

Build me a son whose heart will be clean, whose goal will be high; a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men; one who will learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past.

And after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself too seriously. Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength.

Time Alone with God ...

What are you favorite lines of this memoir?

Why? Are they aspirations or affirmations?

What characteristics would you like to ask and trust God to bring into your life? Are you willing to let him? What if that path was hard or challenging?

You are the Beloved Son or daughter of a good, good Father! Play your part and invite Him to play His. Watch, listen and learn the Rhythms of Grace and the ways of the Kingdom. He wants to entrust you with more. This fallen war-torn place needs men and women who have experienced more and are living to tell about it! I pray this for and over you, His transforming Love and the Life in which you have always dreamed.

- Michael Thompson

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THE HE Art OF A WARRIOR



BEFORE YOU CAN BECOME THE
WARRIOR

YOU MUST BECOME THE

Beloved Son

MICHAEL THOMPSON

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