THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles



Spiritual Fatherhood

The Call to Beget Sons in Faith

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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INTRODUCTION

More Than Your Own Children

Every man is made to be a father. This is true even of men who have no children of their own, for fatherhood is not merely a biological fact but a spiritual vocation written into what a man is, a call to beget life, to protect and provide, to guide the young toward maturity, to pour himself out for the sake of those who come after him. A man may exercise this fatherhood over his own natural children, and most do; but the call to fatherhood reaches beyond them, into a spiritual fatherhood by which a man begets and raises sons and daughters in the faith who are not his by blood. Every Christian man is called to this wider fatherhood, and a great many never discover it.

This book is about that discovery: that a man's fatherhood is meant to extend beyond his own household into the lives of other men whom he can father in the faith, guiding, mentoring, and raising them toward Christian maturity as a father raises a son. The world is full of young men and new believers who are, in the deepest sense, fatherless, lacking the older man who would take an interest in them, believe in them, guide them, and help them become what they are meant to be, and the Christian man is called to be that father to them. This spiritual fatherhood is one of the most needed and most neglected forms of the Christian mission, and a man who takes it up discovers both a great work and a deep fulfillment of his own nature.

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For… I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. — 1 Corinthians 4:14-15

We will begin by recovering the vocation of fatherhood as something wider than biological paternity, a call written into every man. We will see the crisis of fatherlessness that makes spiritual fatherhood so urgently needed. We will take up what spiritual fatherhood actually involves, the begetting, forming, and raising of others in the faith. We will consider the particular work of mentoring younger men, and the qualities a spiritual father must have. We will face the demands and difficulties of this fatherhood, its cost and its patience. And we will see that in fathering others a man both fulfills his own nature and multiplies himself, raising up the next generation of apostles.

CHAPTER ONE

Every Man a Father

The Vocation Written Into You

The first thing to recover is the truth that fatherhood is a vocation given to every man, not merely a biological event that happens to some, and that a man who is not a father in some real sense has not yet become fully what he is made to be. Our culture has reduced fatherhood to biology and often to its most minimal form, but the deeper tradition understands fatherhood as a calling woven into masculine nature itself, a capacity and a summons to generativity, protection, and self-giving guidance that every man carries whether or not he has children of his own. To grasp this is to understand that the call to father others is not an optional add-on for a few but a dimension of what it means to be a man.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. — Ephesians 3:14-15

Fatherhood Is More Than Biology

Fatherhood, rightly understood, is far more than the biological act of begetting a child; it is a whole vocation of generativity, of bringing forth and nurturing life, of protecting and providing and guiding, that reaches well beyond mere paternity. A man can beget a child and fail entirely to be a father in any meaningful sense, and a man with no children of his own can be a profound father to many; the essence of fatherhood lies not in the biology but in the self-giving generativity, the pouring out of oneself to bring forth and raise up life in others. This means that fatherhood is a calling available to every man, married or single, with children or without, for every man can exercise the generative, protective, guiding love that is the heart of fatherhood toward someone. To reduce fatherhood to biology is to miss its true nature and to exempt from it the many men who could and should father others spiritually; to recover its fuller meaning is to open to every man the vocation of fatherhood in its deepest sense.

The Longing to Generate

Written into a man's nature is a longing to generate, to produce something that outlasts him, to pour his life into something or someone that will carry it forward, and this longing, often unrecognized, points to the fatherhood he is made for. Men feel this drive in many forms, in the desire to build, to achieve, to leave a mark, to matter beyond their own lifespan, and much of it is a displaced or partial expression of the deeper call to generate life in others through fatherhood. A man who pours this generative drive only into his work or his achievements, while neglecting the fathering of persons, has spent it on lesser things, for the deepest and most lasting generativity is the begetting and raising of people, whether one's own children or others fathered in the faith. The restlessness

many men feel, the sense of wanting to produce something that matters, finds its truest satisfaction not in building things but in building people, in exercising the spiritual fatherhood for which the generative longing was given. To recognize this longing and direct it rightly is to find the vocation a man was made for.

God Is Father

The deepest ground of human fatherhood is that God himself is Father, the source and model of all fatherhood, from whom, as Scripture says, every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, so that human fatherhood is a participation in and reflection of the divine fatherhood. To be a father, in any form, is to image God, to participate in the fatherhood that belongs first and fully to God himself, and this gives human fatherhood an extraordinary dignity and a divine pattern to follow. The spiritual father images the Father who begets, provides, protects, guides, and loves his children into maturity, and he fathers others rightly to the degree that his fatherhood reflects God's own. This also means that a man's fatherhood is never merely his own achievement but a sharing in something divine, a channel through which the fatherhood of God reaches others, so that in fathering others in the faith a man makes God's own fatherly love present to them. To understand fatherhood as a participation in God's fatherhood is to see its full meaning and to receive its pattern: the man called to father others is called to image, in his own fathering, the Father from whom all fatherhood flows.

CHAPTER TWO

A Fatherless Generation

Why the Need Is So Great

The call to spiritual fatherhood is not an abstract ideal but an urgent response to a real and devastating crisis, for we live in a time of widespread fatherlessness, in which vast numbers of young men grow up without fathers, or with fathers absent in all but name, and suffer profoundly for the lack. This crisis of fatherlessness is one of the deepest wounds of our age, and it makes the Christian man's call to spiritual fatherhood not merely a good work but a response to a desperate and pervasive need. To understand why spiritual fatherhood matters so much, a man must grasp the scale and the consequences of the fatherlessness that surrounds him.

He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. — Malachi 4:6

The Wound of the Absent Father

The absence of fathers, whether through physical absence or emotional abdication, leaves a deep wound in those who grow up without them, a wound whose effects ripple through a person's whole life. A young man without a present and engaged father lacks the affirmation, guidance, and model that a father provides, and he often carries into adulthood a deep uncertainty about his own worth and identity, a hunger for the fatherly affirmation he never received, and a lack of the formation that a father is meant to give. This wound is widespread and devastating, manifesting in countless young men who do not know how to be men, who lack direction and confidence, who carry anger or emptiness from the father who was not there, and who are, in a profound sense, lost for want of the fatherhood they needed. The statistics and the human reality alike testify to the catastrophe of fatherlessness, and a man who looks around him will see everywhere the young men marked by this wound, quietly longing for a father they never had. This is the need that spiritual fatherhood exists to meet.

The Hunger for a Father

Beneath the wound of fatherlessness lies a deep hunger, for the young man who grew up without a father does not stop needing one; he carries throughout his life a longing for the fatherly presence, affirmation, and guidance he lacked, and this hunger, though often unrecognized and unspoken, is powerful and real. Many young men are desperate, beneath their surface, for an older man who would take an interest in them, believe in them, guide them, and give them the fatherly affirmation and direction they never received, and they will respond with surprising openness to a man who offers it. This hunger is the open door for spiritual fatherhood, the readiness in countless young men to receive a father if one would come, and it means that a man willing to father the fatherless will find no shortage of sons hungry for what he has to give. The spiritual father meets a real and felt need, filling a hunger that gnaws at a whole generation, and the young men he fathers often receive his fatherhood with a gratitude and a transformation that reveal how deep the hunger was. To recognize this hunger is to see both the need and the opportunity of spiritual fatherhood.

The Church Needs Fathers

The crisis of fatherlessness is felt not only in society at large but within the Church, which equally suffers from a shortage of spiritual fathers, of older men willing to guide, mentor, and form the younger in the faith. The Church is full of young men and new believers who lack spiritual fathers, who have no older man to help them grow in faith, navigate the Christian life, and become mature disciples, and this lack hampers the formation of

the next generation of Christians and apostles. Just as the family needs fathers, so the Church needs spiritual fathers, men who will take responsibility for forming those younger in the faith, and the shortage of such men is one of the quiet crises of the Church's life. This gives the Christian man's call to spiritual fatherhood an ecclesial urgency, for the Church's future depends in large part on whether a generation of spiritual fathers arises to form the generation coming after, and the man who takes up this fatherhood serves not only the individuals he fathers but the whole Church, helping to raise up the mature Christians and apostles on whom its future depends. The need for spiritual fathers, in the world and in the Church alike, could hardly be greater, and it is this need that the Christian man is called to meet.

CHAPTER THREE

Begetting Life in Others

What Spiritual Fatherhood Does

Having seen that every man is called to fatherhood and that the need for spiritual fathers is immense, we turn to what spiritual fatherhood actually involves, the concrete work of begetting, forming, and raising others in the faith. Spiritual fatherhood is not merely a warm feeling of benevolence toward the young but a real work of generation and formation, patterned on the work of a natural father who begets a child and then raises him to maturity. Understanding the shape of this work keeps spiritual fatherhood from remaining a vague ideal and shows a man what he is actually being called to do.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. — 1 Peter 2:2

Fathering Begins With Begetting

Spiritual fatherhood often begins with a kind of begetting, with being the means by which another person comes to new life in Christ or takes a decisive step in faith, so that the father has a real share in the spiritual birth of his son. Saint Paul spoke of having become a father to the Corinthians through the gospel, of having begotten them in Christ, and this generative role is at the heart of spiritual fatherhood: the spiritual father is one through whom others come to faith or are brought to new spiritual life, and in this he participates in their begetting as truly as a natural father participates in the begetting of his child. This begetting may happen through evangelization, through the sharing of faith that brings another to Christ, or through the guidance that brings a nominal believer to real conversion, but in either case the spiritual father has a genuine part in the new birth

of his son, and from this begetting flows the whole subsequent relationship of fathering. The spiritual father is thus not merely a mentor or advisor but one who has, in some real sense, begotten his son in the faith, and this generative beginning gives the relationship its depth and its character.

Then Comes the Raising

Begetting is only the beginning, for a father does not merely bring a child into the world but raises him to maturity, and so the spiritual father, having begotten or helped beget his son in faith, undertakes the long work of raising him toward Christian maturity. This raising involves feeding the new believer with the teaching he needs to grow, as an infant needs milk and then solid food; guiding him through the stages and challenges of the Christian life; forming his character and his faith; correcting him when he errs and encouraging him when he struggles; and accompanying him patiently over the long time it takes to grow from spiritual infancy to maturity. This is the substance of spiritual fatherhood, the patient, long-term work of raising another person in the faith, analogous to the years of labor by which a natural father raises a child, and it requires the same commitment, patience, and self-giving. The spiritual father does not beget a son and abandon him but commits to the long raising, walking with him through the whole process of growth, and it is in this sustained raising, even more than in the initial begetting, that the real work and the real love of spiritual fatherhood are found.

The Goal Is Maturity

The aim of all a spiritual father's labor is the maturity of his son, the growth of the one he fathers into a mature, independent Christian man who no longer needs fathering in the same way and can himself become a father to others. A good father does not seek to keep his son perpetually dependent but to raise him to maturity, to the point where the son stands on his own as a full-grown man, and the spiritual father has the same aim: to raise his spiritual son to a mature faith and character that can stand independently and even reproduce itself in others. This means spiritual fatherhood is oriented from the beginning toward the son's growth into maturity and independence, not toward a permanent dependence that would serve the father's ego more than the son's good, and the spiritual father measures his success not by how needed he remains but by how fully his son has grown. The ultimate mark of successful spiritual fatherhood is a son who has himself become a mature Christian man and a spiritual father in his turn, so that the fathering reproduces itself in a new generation. The goal, then, is maturity and multiplication: a son raised to full stature who becomes, himself, a father to others, carrying forward the fatherhood he received.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mentoring Younger Men

The Practical Work of Fathering

The most common and accessible form of spiritual fatherhood for most men is the mentoring of younger men, the taking of a personal interest in one or a few younger men and investing in their growth as a father invests in a son. This is practical, concrete work, within the reach of any mature Christian man, and it is desperately needed, for the younger men who would flourish under such mentoring are everywhere, and the older men willing to provide it are few. Understanding how this mentoring actually works helps a man move from the ideal of spiritual fatherhood to its practice.

What you have heard from me… entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. — 2 Timothy 2:2

Take a Personal Interest

Mentoring begins simply with taking a genuine personal interest in a younger man, with noticing him, caring about him, and investing time and attention in his life and growth, which is itself something many young men have never received from an older man. A great deal of spiritual fatherhood is simply this: an older man deciding to take an interest in a younger one, to spend time with him, to get to know him, to care about his life and his growth, and to make himself available as a guide and support. This personal interest, this being noticed and valued and invested in by an older man, is often transformative in itself, for the young man who has lacked a father is powerfully affected by an older man who genuinely cares about him. The mentoring relationship grows from this personal interest, from the older man's willingness to invest himself in the younger, and it need not begin with any formal arrangement or grand plan but simply with a man deciding to care about and invest in a particular younger man. To take a personal interest in a younger man, to show up in his life as one who cares and will help, is the beginning of mentoring and often the most important thing a spiritual father does.

Guide by Example and Counsel

The spiritual father mentors chiefly through two means, the example of his own life and the counsel of his words, and both are essential to the work of raising a younger man. The example is primary, for the younger man learns to be a man and a Christian more from watching how the older one actually lives than from anything he is told; the mentor's own life, his character, his way of handling difficulties, his faith in action, is the deepest lesson

he teaches, and he fathers most powerfully simply by being, before the younger man, a model of mature Christian manhood worth imitating. To this example the mentor adds counsel, the wisdom and guidance he offers in conversation, the answering of questions, the sharing of hard-won experience, the direction and correction a younger man needs; this counsel is received precisely because it comes from one whose example has earned trust. A mentor who counsels without a matching example will not be believed, and one who models without ever counseling leaves much unsaid, but the mentor who both lives a life worth imitating and shares his wisdom in word fathers the younger man fully, giving him both the model and the guidance he needs to grow. Example and counsel together are the means by which the spiritual father does his work.

Walk With Him Over Time

Mentoring is not a transaction but a relationship sustained over time, for the raising of a younger man happens not in a single conversation but through a sustained walking-together across months and years, through the seasons of the younger man's growth. The spiritual father commits to walking with his son over the long haul, being present through his struggles and victories, his questions and failures, his gradual growth toward maturity, and this sustained presence is what makes the mentoring real and fruitful. A younger man is not formed by occasional contact but by a relationship he can count on, an older man who is reliably there, invested in his life over the long term, and the spiritual father provides this steady, sustained presence. This requires commitment and patience, for growth is slow and a younger man will test, disappoint, and frustrate his mentor as a son tests a father, but the father who walks with his son faithfully over time, through all the seasons of his growth, gives him the steady fatherly presence he needs. The practical work of mentoring, then, is the patient, sustained investment in a younger man's life over time, the showing up again and again across the years, which is how a spiritual father actually raises a son.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Making of a Father

What the Work Requires of You

Spiritual fatherhood makes real demands on the man who takes it up, requiring him to possess and to develop certain qualities, for a man cannot give what he does not have, and the fathering of others draws on a man's own maturity, character, and spiritual depth. Before and as a man fathers others, he must attend to his own formation, for the

quality of his spiritual fatherhood will reflect the quality of the man he is. Understanding what spiritual fatherhood requires helps a man both prepare for it and grow through it, for the demands of fathering others are themselves a school that forms the father.

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. — 1 Timothy 4:12

You Must Have Something to Give

The first requirement of spiritual fatherhood is that a man have something to give, a maturity, a depth of faith, a wisdom and character that are worth passing on, for a man cannot father others into a maturity he has not himself attained. The spiritual father must be, himself, a mature Christian man, further along the road than those he fathers, possessed of the faith, the virtue, the wisdom, and the experience that his sons need to receive; he cannot lead where he has not gone or give what he does not have. This means the making of a spiritual father begins with a man's own growth, with his becoming the kind of mature Christian man who has something worth passing on, and that a man is not ready to father others until he has himself attained some real maturity in the faith. This is not to say a man must be perfect or fully arrived before he can father anyone, for fathering is itself part of a man's own growth, but it does mean that he must be genuinely ahead of those he fathers, with real substance to give them. The pursuit of one's own maturity, then, is the first and ongoing requirement of spiritual fatherhood, for a man fathers others out of the fullness of what he has himself become.

Patience, Humility, and Self-Gift

Spiritual fatherhood also requires specific virtues that the work demands and develops: patience, humility, and the willingness to give oneself without counting the cost. It requires patience, for the growth of a spiritual son is slow and marked by setbacks, and the father must bear with failures, repetitions, and disappointments over a long time without giving up. It requires humility, for the spiritual father must decrease that his son may increase, must not seek his own glory or feed his ego through the relationship, must point his son to Christ rather than to himself, and must rejoice when his son surpasses him. And it requires self-gift, the pouring out of a man's time, energy, and love for the good of another without demanding return, the laying down of oneself for one's spiritual children as a father lays down his life for his own. These virtues are demanding, and a man may not possess them fully when he begins, but the work of fathering itself develops them, drawing a man into a patience, humility, and self-giving he would not otherwise have reached. The making of a spiritual father is thus also the making of a better man, for

the virtues that spiritual fatherhood requires it also produces, forming the father even as he forms his sons.

Fathered in Order to Father

A man is best prepared to father others when he has himself been fathered, when he has received spiritual fatherhood from someone and so knows from the inside what he is called to give, and a man who has not been fathered may need to seek a spiritual father even as he begins to father others. There is a chain of fatherhood in the spiritual life, in which men are fathered and in turn father others, passing on what they have received, and the man who has experienced being fathered, who has known the guidance and investment of a spiritual father, is both equipped and motivated to father others in turn. A man who lacks this experience, who was never fathered himself, can still become a spiritual father, but he does well to seek out spiritual fathering for himself even as he offers it to others, both to receive what he needs and to learn the art from the inside. The best spiritual fathers are usually men who were themselves well fathered and who pass on what they received, and a man serious about fathering others should attend both to finding fathering for himself and to offering it to those younger, so that he stands within the chain of spiritual fatherhood, receiving and passing on, fathered in order to father.

CHAPTER SIX

The Cost of Fathering

Love That Lays Itself Down

Spiritual fatherhood, like all real love, has a cost, and a man who takes it up must be prepared to pay it, for the fathering of others demands time, energy, emotional investment, and the acceptance of disappointment and sometimes grief. This is not a work for the man who wants an easy benevolence that costs him nothing, but for the man willing to give himself genuinely for the good of others, to love as a father loves, which always involves sacrifice. Understanding and accepting the cost of spiritual fatherhood is essential, for a man who is not prepared for it will abandon the work when it grows hard, as it will.

I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. — 2 Corinthians 12:15

The Investment of Self

Spiritual fatherhood costs, first of all, the substantial investment of a man's time, energy, and attention, which are limited and much demanded, and the fathering of others requires a real expenditure of these scarce resources. To take a genuine interest in a younger man, to walk with him over time, to be available to him, to invest in his growth, all of this costs hours and energy that a man could have spent on himself, and spiritual fatherhood is impossible without this real investment of self. In a busy life, with many demands, the giving of this time and attention to the fathering of others is a genuine sacrifice, a choosing to spend oneself on another's growth rather than on one's own comfort or pursuits, and a man must be willing to make it. The spiritual father, like Saint Paul, gladly spends and is spent for the souls he fathers, pouring out his limited time and energy for their good, and this investment of self is the basic cost of the work, without which no real fathering happens. A man must count this cost and be willing to pay it, for spiritual fatherhood cannot be done on the cheap but requires the genuine giving of oneself.

The Pain of Disappointment

Spiritual fatherhood also costs the pain of disappointment and sometimes of grief, for the men a father invests in do not always respond as he hopes, and some will disappoint him, resist his guidance, fall away, or break his heart as wayward children break a father's heart. A man who fathers others opens himself to this pain, for to invest deeply in another's growth is to become vulnerable to the grief of seeing him fail or fall away, and not every spiritual son will flourish or even persevere. This is part of the cost, and a father must be prepared for it, loving and investing without the guarantee of a good outcome, accepting that some of his labor may seem wasted and some of his sons may break his heart. Yet the father loves anyway, invests anyway, grieves the losses and rejoices in the fruit, as God the Father himself loves and grieves over his wayward children. The pain of disappointment is a real cost of spiritual fatherhood, and a man must accept it as the price of loving as a father loves, continuing to father even knowing that some of it will bring him grief, for this is the nature of fatherly love, which gives itself without guarantee and bears the sorrow along with the joy.

Love Stronger Than Its Cost

Yet for all its cost, spiritual fatherhood is sustained and rewarded by a love and a joy stronger than the cost, for the man who fathers others well receives, in the flourishing of his spiritual sons, a joy and a fulfillment that far outweigh what the work demands of him. The cost is real, but so is the reward, and the spiritual father who sees a son he has invested in grow into mature Christian manhood, flourish in faith, and perhaps become a father to others in turn, knows a joy that few things can equal, the joy of a father in his

children's flourishing. This joy, and the love that produces it, are stronger than the cost, so that the spiritual father does not finally experience his fathering as a burden grudgingly borne but as a labor of love whose fruit is worth every sacrifice. The love that lays itself down for others is rewarded not with ease but with the deeper joy of having given life and seen it flourish, and the spiritual father, counting the cost, finds it a price gladly paid for the joy of his sons. It is this love, stronger than its cost, that sustains a man in spiritual fatherhood through all its demands and disappointments, and that makes the work, for all it requires, one of the most deeply fulfilling a man can undertake.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Multiplying Yourself

Fatherhood and the Future of the Mission

We come finally to the place of spiritual fatherhood in the whole mission of the Church, and to the truth that it is through fatherhood that the mission is multiplied and carried into the future, for a spiritual father does not merely help individuals but reproduces himself, raising up new apostles who will father others in their turn. Spiritual fatherhood is thus not only a work of love toward particular men but the very mechanism by which the mission perpetuates and multiplies itself across generations, and the man who fathers others participates in something far larger than the individual relationships he forms. Seeing this reveals the full significance of the fatherhood to which every man is called.

And what you have heard from me… entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. — 2 Timothy 2:2

Fatherhood Multiplies

The genius of spiritual fatherhood as a strategy of mission is that it multiplies, for a father does not merely add one more mature Christian but raises up a son who will himself become a father, so that the fathering reproduces itself and spreads exponentially across generations. Saint Paul's instruction to Timothy captures this perfectly: entrust what you have received to faithful men who will be able to teach others also, a chain of fathering in which each generation fathers the next, and the mission multiplies through reproduction rather than mere addition. A man who fathers even a few spiritual sons, if they in turn father others, becomes the head of a lineage of faith that extends far beyond the men he directly fathered, multiplying his impact across generations he will never see. This is why spiritual fatherhood is so strategically vital to the mission: it is not merely

addition but multiplication, not merely helping individuals but reproducing apostles who reproduce apostles, and through it the mission is carried forward and multiplied in a way that no amount of individual effort could achieve. The man who fathers others has set in motion a multiplication that may extend for generations, and in this his fatherhood participates in the growth of the whole Church across time.

The Future Depends on Fathers

The future of the faith, in any place and any generation, depends largely on whether spiritual fathers arise to form the generation coming after, for the faith is handed on and the mission continued chiefly through the fathering of the young by the mature. A generation without spiritual fathers is a generation whose faith is poorly formed and whose apostles are few, while a generation blessed with spiritual fathers is raised, formed, and multiplied into the next generation of mature Christians and apostles. This places on the mature Christian man a weighty responsibility, for the future of the faith depends in part on whether he and men like him will take up the fatherhood that forms the young, and a failure of spiritual fatherhood in one generation impoverishes the next. The Christian man who fathers others is therefore not merely doing a kind thing for a few individuals but investing in the very future of the faith, helping to raise up the generation on whom the Church's future depends, and the man who neglects this fatherhood withholds from the future something it needs. The future depends on fathers, and the mature man's willingness to father the young is among the most consequential choices he can make for the future of the mission.

The Fulfillment of a Man's Nature

In the end, spiritual fatherhood is not only a service to others and to the mission but the fulfillment of a man's own nature, the completion of the generativity he was made for, so that in fathering others a man becomes most fully what he is meant to be. A man is made to generate, to pour out his life into others, to father, and the man who exercises this fatherhood, whether over his own children or over spiritual sons, fulfills the deepest purpose of his masculine nature and finds the satisfaction that the generative longing was given to seek. The man who never fathers anyone, who spends his life on himself or pours his generativity only into things rather than persons, remains in some way unfulfilled, having never become the father he was made to be; the man who fathers others, who gives his life to raising up sons in the faith, completes himself and finds his deepest fulfillment. Spiritual fatherhood is thus both a gift a man gives and a gift he receives, both a service to others and the fulfillment of his own nature, and the man who takes it up discovers that in becoming a father to others he has become most fully himself. This is the final truth of spiritual fatherhood: that the man made to be a father finds his

completion in fathering, and that in begetting and raising sons in the faith he fulfills the vocation written into his very being, and multiplies his life into a future that will carry his fatherhood forward long after he is gone.

CONCLUSION

Become a Father

Every man is made to be a father, and this book has been about the discovery that a man's fatherhood reaches beyond his own children into a spiritual fatherhood by which he begets and raises sons in the faith. We have seen that fatherhood is a vocation written into every man, a participation in God's own fatherhood; that a fatherless generation makes the need for spiritual fathers desperately urgent; that spiritual fatherhood involves begetting, raising, and maturing others in the faith; that it is carried out most commonly through the mentoring of younger men; that it requires and develops real maturity and virtue in the father; that it has a genuine cost gladly paid; and that through it the mission is multiplied and a man's own nature fulfilled.

The need could hardly be greater, for a generation of fatherless young men hungers for the fathering that the mature Christian man can give, and the Church's future depends on whether spiritual fathers will arise to form the generation coming after. And the call reaches every man, for every man is made to father, and the man without children of his own is as capable of spiritual fatherhood as any, perhaps more free for it. The question is not whether a man is called to father others, for he is, but whether he will answer, whether he will take up the fatherhood written into his nature and give himself to the raising of sons in the faith.

So become a father. Look around you at the younger men and the newer believers who lack the fathering they need, and take a personal interest in one or a few of them; invest in their growth; guide them by your example and your counsel; walk with them patiently over time; pour yourself out for their good, counting the cost and paying it gladly; and raise them toward a maturity that will itself become fatherhood in its turn. Do this, and you will meet a desperate need, serve the future of the mission, multiply your life into generations you will never see, and fulfill the deepest vocation of your nature, becoming most fully the man you were made to be. You were made to be a father. Become one, and beget sons in the faith who will carry forward, long after you are gone, the life you have given them.

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