



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Dads: Are you a spiritual leader?

God. Family. Work.

I can vividly recall my father sitting our family down and telling us these were his priorities, in that order. We'd just finished a heart-to-heart talk about the importance of family and how blood is thicker than water (Dad pumped us full of that message). I remember being confused and a little hurt that my father didn't name family as his top priority. He loved us with a passion, so how could he love God *more*?

"You have to put God first," he explained. "If you do, everything else works out."

I wasn't satisfied with his answer, but in time it'd make sense. In time I'd witness my dad living his life according to these priorities and envy the peace it brought him. While my father never shoved spiritual messages down our throats, he did pick up on opportunities to teach us about faith.

Whatever I was worried about - a test, a boy, tripping in front of the audience at the beauty walk - Dad advised me to pray. He taught me to pray for everything; guidance, clarity, confidence in my ability. Some people are scared to talk about God outside of church, but not my dad. He talked about God constantly, making Him feel like a member of our family who lived under the same roof.

It's clear now that my father was the spiritual leader of our home. It wasn't a role he strategically mapped out but a natural extension of his character. Dad's faith was sincere; if ever I asked a question about God, his face would light up, and his voice would rise excitedly. He'd spend 30 minutes answering me. Intrigued by his enthusiasm, I often thought, "Wow, that's what I aspire to in my walk."

Today, it seems there's a movement to encourage fathers to step up as the spiritual leaders of their homes, to be the men God designed them to be. There are conferences devoted to this subject, Bible studies, even a movie called "Courageous," which I highly recommend.

"Courageous" is about four cops who learn the painful difference between a "good-enough dad" and a "great dad." At the end, the main character delivers a speech that includes the movie's most powerful lines:

"As a father, you are accountable to

God for the position of influence He has given you. You can't fall asleep at the wheel, only to wake up one day and realize that your job or your hobbies have no eternal value, but the souls of your children do."

Some of you may wonder what a spiritual leader does. Can any father embrace the role, or are some pre-anointed? I believe every father is capable, but it takes work. And while each father brings his unique gifts to the job, there are tangible steps that work across the board, including:

*Getting your family to church on Sunday;

*Loving your wife and making sure the kids respect her;

*Praying as a family;

*Encouraging spiritual dialogue in your home;

*Taking a vested interest in your children's lives to help them find their calling;

*Keeping your priorities in line (God, family, work);

*Being the man you want your daughter to marry, the example your son should follow;

*Glorifying God when you win and lose; and

*Remembering that actions speak louder than words. How you practice your faith, treat others, cope with stress and numb your pain all rub off on your children. Be aware of the behavior patterns you're setting.

I know it sounds like a tall order, dads, but we need you. We want you to be our heroes and wholeheartedly believe you can be. Yes, we love our moms, but our dads are the ones we adore. You are the earthly manifestation of God, and through your honor, wisdom, strength and love, we learn what awaits us in heaven.

Regardless of what society tells you, you're more than a paycheck. You're more than a means to the good life. When the world tries to distract you, remember your priorities: *God. Family. Work.* It really is that simple.

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