



FATHERING h e a r t s

A 7-day Plan

Adapted from chapter sixteen of
Michael Thompson's book *King Me*

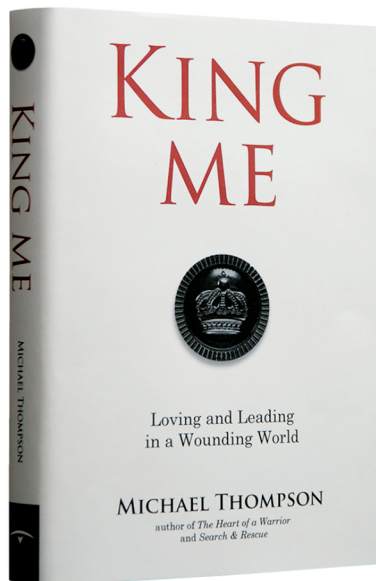


Fathering Hearts

a seven-day plan

Plan Description:

Whether your child is five or fifty-five, don't stop listening. Continue giving them your time and attention. Continue engaging their heart. Continue being Dad. In this seven-day plan, based on Michael Thompson's newest book *King Me*, you will explore how the legacy we leave behind as fathers isn't determined by how we started—though that may very well need to be tended to—but, rather, by how we move forward from here.



**Adapted from chapter sixteen of Michael Thompson's book
King Me: Loving and Leading in a Wounding World.**

Day 1: Daddy, Look at Me!

Scripture:

Malachi 4:6 NIV He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents.

1 Peter 4:8 NIV Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Psalms 31:16 NIV Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

Devotional:

My friend Jay tells the story of taking his then five-year-old daughter to breakfast at McDonald's for a daddy-daughter date. As they sat down with their trays at an intimate table for two, Jay's cell phone went off. He tried to listen to his little girl as she shared her thoughts on which Disney princesses were her favorites and the reasons she prefers sandals over flip-flops, but you know how distracting that little device can be. After he had broken eye contact one too many times and given his daughter the pretending-to-listen "uh-huh," she slid off her seat. He didn't even see her until she was right there, standing directly in front of him.

Reaching up with both little hands, she cupped his face. Now she had his attention. Tilting her head, she said, "Daddy, listen to me, look at me ... ask me anything."

* * *

What do our children want from us? Same thing we wanted from our dads: engagement. *Listen to me, look at me, ask me anything.*

Loving engagement is the most powerful way to impact the heart of a son or daughter. It's how to fight for their hearts—not just in moments of crisis but in the simple day-to-day connections. "Mundane" interactions may not seem like battles, but they're the front lines where our children's hearts are won or lost.

Whether your child is five or fifty-five, never stop listening. Never stop giving them your time and attention. Never stop lovingly engaging. Whether across a McDonald's table for two, riding in the car to the store, or walking a trail, invite them into your world while at the same time doing your best to step into theirs. This is how we fight. What you talk about in those moments, and how you listen, is the difference between merely being with them versus connecting with their hearts.

Looking back, I see many of my messes. It's one of the few things hindsight is good for: seeing what you missed. That "missing them" is what gives the enemy opportunity to speak.

My busyness, distraction, misplaced intensity, unhelpful anger, inappropriate facial expressions ... what is a young person to feel, think, and eventually come to believe from moments when their heart is handled so poorly by their dad? I'm banking on the verse "Love [which includes engagement] covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

This reading plan is not an indictment of us fathers. Rather, it is an invitation for us to love the heirs to our thrones with an engaging love befitting good kings. No matter how old our children are, engaging them and bestowing on them words of blessing—"I love you," "I'm proud of you," "I'm thinking of you," "I want to be with you"—are powerful ways we partner with God to provide for and protect their hearts.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, would you open my heart to receive your deep fathering love for me in my fathering misses that come to mind as I read this devotional today?

Jesus, would you bring to mind the missed moments with my father or a father-figure that have had a lasting impact on my heart and story?

Holy Spirit, would you open my mind to one way I can move more kindly and lovingly toward my children today?

Day 2: A Father's Impact

Scripture:

Psalm 45:16 NIV Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land.

Luke 15:11-24 NIV

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Matthew 7:9-11 NIV Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Devotional:

My grandfathers, Lawrence and Charles, are the two men who impacted my life by fathering my mom and dad. How they handled my parents' hearts, how they loved and how they wounded them, has profoundly shaped me. God designed it that way. One of his great intentions for fathers is to pass down life through blessing. Wounding exists only because our enemy has hijacked the importance and beauty of blessing. How we engage

our kids with our words brings either life or death. If—and, more likely, when—we look back and see we brought death, the good news is there is resurrection.

The word *father* means different things to different people. To some, it speaks of passivity, absence, betrayal, demandingness, control, even abuse. To others, it is a term of endearment, a reminder there was, or still is, someone out there looking after us, someone who makes sure we are all right no matter what the cost or inconvenience is to him.

How your kids see and experience you is vitally connected to how they see and experience God because “Father” is the primary way God chooses to be known. No wonder the role of father is under such assault—God created fatherhood to mirror his own identity. The enemy uses father wounds to give both dads and God a bad rap.

Here's the problem: wounds in one relationship are guaranteed to hinder other relationships. We can't help it; we project our past experiences onto our current realities. Only our heavenly Father has the ability to take the father wounds so many of us have borne for decades and, in their place, give us new names, new messages, new seeds of love and life to be sown for generations to come.

God is inviting every father to a heart-shaping assignment that is his alone as he fathers his children. Yet even as I write these words, I feel the weightiness of my own failures.

It's the enemy's way—accusation and doubt, the doorways to guilt and shame: “Who are you to write about fatherhood?” As Billy Graham reportedly said, “A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed, and yet one of the most valuable assets in our society.”¹ If that's true—and I'm certain it is—then we see why the enemy's whispers and accusations slither frequently into our thoughts.

Here's the truth that gives me, and you, hope: **the legacy we leave behind isn't determined by how we started (though that may very well need to be cleaned up) but, rather, by how we move forward from here.** That's what will make the difference in how you and I will be known to our grandchildren and even our great-grandchildren. To move consistently in the right direction, we need fathering as we father.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, how has my relationship with my own dad (or lack of relationship) impacted me and how I see you?

Jesus, what new name, messages, and seeds of love and life do you want to sow in my heart in this season?

Holy Spirit, would you open my heart and mind to a fatherhood miss that I've created—and how you would like me to move toward gentle repair?

Day 3: Repair

Scripture:

Proverbs 1:5 GW A wise person will listen and continue to learn, and an understanding person will gain direction.

James 1:19 AMP Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient, reflective, forgiving].

Isaiah 40:11 NIV He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Devotional:

The last thing any of us dads want to do is wound our kids. But, sooner or later, we say or do something that hurts our child's heart. When it happens, we need to own our culpability. If your dog bites someone, you are responsible, and ditto for your false self. Your kids don't care for explanations about the false self. **What they do deeply care about is how you respond afterward.** Even though your false self got loose, your true self can still show up and answer their core questions. Even your mistake can become an opportunity to show them you love them.

Most dads have no idea how badly they have wounded their children and, therefore, are still wounding them. But the good thing is, when God shows you how you've hurt your child, that moment of hard revelation becomes an invitation. **God believes you are ready to see what you did so you can own it and attempt to make amends, so your son or daughter can hopefully entrust you with their heart once again.**

Their memory of how a wound happened may be very different from yours. **What matters is the record in their heart: how they perceived the wounding and how it made them feel.** Conversations about wounding moments are no time for excuses or discounting your child's memory of what *really* happened. **Rather, they are a time to step into the invitation to listen, pursue understanding, hear how they feel, and offer care. In doing so, you bring the first wave of healing to your loved one's heart and point your relationship in a good direction.**

Every father falls from his pedestal. My own fall, which happened long before I was even aware of it, allowed God to help me up. When the painful realization finally hit, it was a great mercy. **God was inviting me to be fathered in the midst of my fatherhood.** Despite my past failures, God continues to help me move forward. He's training me to love my kids better by tuning in to their hearts more and **to wound them less by tuning in to my own heart with God.**

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, how do you long to father me in my own fatherhood journey?

Jesus, would you bring to mind any examples in my life of when someone listened to me well? Would you encourage and equip me to be able to do that with my kids?

Holy Spirit, what is your invitation to me as I realize any places I have wounded my children?

Day 4: Fighting for the Hearts of Your Kids

Scripture:

Jeremiah 31:3 NIV The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

Genesis 16:13 NIV She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

Psalms 139:1-3 NIV You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Devotional:

So, what do your kids need from you in the fight for their hearts? **Above all, they need you—the real you, the authentic you.**

That all starts by getting back your own heart. As you do, you'll become increasingly equipped to hear and validate your kids in the questions they're asking. They're the same ones you were asking when you were a boy:

Do you see me?

Do you love what you see?

Do you want to be with me?

Whether your son or daughter is still a child or a grown man or woman, I guarantee that, one way or another, they, too, are asking these core questions. Are the answers settled in your heart as yes, yes, and yes? If not, then it's extremely likely they are not settled that way in your child's heart either.

Becoming a beloved son as you father is the way to learn how to father beloved sons and daughters. Being loved is the way to learn how to love. Being healed is the way to learn how to partner with God for your children's healing when you or someone else wounds them. Being fathered by God is the greatest way to learn how to father the hearts he has entrusted to you.

On the timeline of your children's life experiences, your love comes before God's. You are their first authority figure. How you handle their hearts shapes their ability to love and trust others. Either your love will help them make an intimate connection with God or your wounding will encumber it.

How do you wish your father had loved you? The key to loving your own kids better may well be contained in your answer to that question.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

*Father, where have I taken my questions, do you see me? And do you love what you see?
Would you show me how you see me?*

Jesus, what do I still want and hope for from my father?

(if he has passed on, what would you have liked to have heard from your dad?)

*Holy Spirit, open my eyes to the next steps you have for me in fighting for the hearts of my
kids? What are a few things I can start practicing to answer their questions, Do you see me,
do you love what you see?*

Day 5: Ask Questions and Know Their Story

Scripture:

1 Peter 3:8 NLT Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

Romans 12:15 AMP Rejoice with those who rejoice [sharing others' joy], and weep with those who weep [sharing others' grief].

James 1:19-20 NIV My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Devotional:

You would think, living with your kids, that it would be easy to know their stories. But consider: How much of *your* story did your parents really know? **Living under the same roof isn't the same as knowing what's going on in your children's world.**

- Do you know where each child is in their masculine or feminine journey?
- Are you aware of what the enemy is up to in his or her life? and what God is up to?
- Can you discern what your son's or daughter's heart needs in training, validation, and initiation?
- Why is your child doubting?
- What are they afraid of?
- Who is hurting them?
- Why did they say or do what they said or did?

This is what you want to see, where you want to explore, before addressing their heart.

How? Lovingly engage them with good questions. "How was your day?" isn't a bad question. But if you know what the day held for them—an algebra test, tryouts, choir practice, a doctor's appointment—then you can be specific.

You earn the right to ask your children intimate questions by starting with simpler ones and by listening, not lecturing. For too long, I used to ask my kids questions so I could talk. I was more concerned about giving advice and "being right" than listening for their hearts. That's a bad way to train up your son or daughter in the way they should go. **Asking questions for the sake of listening and understanding is far better. That's how you find out where your child is in their story and how God wants to partner with you to love them in the moment.** If you take that approach, then just because a moment doesn't go well—your kid raises their voice or storms off—that doesn't mean you didn't handle it well. **You're not in charge of their response; you're in charge of yours.**

Listening is one of the most loving things you can do. Listen not only with your ears but also

with your eyes, your body language, your time, and very, very few words on your part. Give your child your undivided attention; it is impossible to listen well and be busy with other things at the same time.

Our most powerful weapon as dads in the battle for our children's hearts, no matter how old they are, is our presence. A close second is our words. Good questions, listening, and kind words are what we ourselves needed from our dads growing up. And they're what we still need from our heavenly Father to recover and grow as men.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, what do you want me to see and understand about my child's heart and story?

Jesus, open my eyes and heart today to how I interact with my children. How can I grow in listening to their voice, see their hearts and draw them into more time with me?

Holy Spirit, what questions can I gently ask so I can practice listening to my child today? I invite you to give me eyes to see their heart.

Day 6: Make a Moment or Seize a Moment

Scripture:

1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Ephesians 4:29 NIV Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Matthew 5:23-24 NIV Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Devotional:

I invite you to ask God one of these questions:

- Where and how have I wounded my kids?
- Where is my child on their masculine or feminine journey, and what do they need from me?
- What is the glory of their life?

When God gives you an answer—a word, image, or memory—ask the Father for instruction on how to father. Then consider taking what God shows you to your child in the form of a question: “Sweetheart, can I ask you something?”

Let's say God has made you aware of a wound you inflicted. You can ask, “Do you remember when I said ...?” Be specific for both your sakes. If the event occurred last night, they are sure to remember; if it was last month or last year, you may need to fill in some details. Even if they don't remember, follow through with the story God brought to your mind. Tell what you remember about what happened, what you said and did, and how you handled your child's heart. Let him or her know you have been talking to God and he brought the matter up.

And then? When you are both on the same page, ask for forgiveness. Even if the event happened decades ago, it is amazing what ground you can take back from the enemy. Partnering with God and your child, you can reclaim what your false self gave away and offer healing to a wound you were used to inflict.

Sometimes, the right time to ask your leading question pops up spontaneously. Don't let the moment pass—seize it. Other times, some planning may be required to make it happen. Either way, curiosity alone makes most kids willing.

The more moments you seize in real time, the fewer you will have to circle back and try to make. However, bear in mind that your child may not remember the event you want to revisit. Or, especially if they're an adult child, they may not be ready to forgive. That's OK. Be brave and let them have the controls. You made the first move; now let them choose theirs. That's the way it should be.

Remember, too, as you invite your children to open their lives to you, to open your own life to them. Sharing and vulnerability are a two-way street. Do your kids know any of your God stories? Do they know your trials and the tales of your overcoming and becoming? Sharing your heart's journey with your kids is a gentle but powerful way to help them know you, trust you, and be ready to turn to you and God to find their own way.

Making a moment is not just about recovering from past wounds. There's a fun and even joyous side to it as well. You can make a golden, life-giving moment happen with every birthday, every anniversary, every holiday, and those special occasions when life or the calendar hands you an easy one—a graduation, an award, an accomplishment, and so on. Moments of healing and repair are always good; even better are moments you make or seize to deliver the powerful, validating package, "I see you, and I love what I see."

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, would you show me where and how I have missed their hearts and wounded my kids?

Jesus, where is my child on their masculine or feminine journey, and what do they need from me?

Holy Spirit, would you open my eyes to see the "glory" of my kids' lives, the unique ways you have made them that wondrously and delightfully reflect you?

Day 7: The Final Four

Scripture:

Ephesians 4:2 NIV Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Psalms 139:16-18 NIV Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

1 Peter 1:22 NIV Love one another deeply, from the heart.

Malachi 4:6 NIV He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents.

Devotional:

I'll conclude this reading plan by sharing four rules of thumb God has shown me for going after my kids' hearts, no matter their age. By now, these precepts may sound familiar—in fact, I hope they do. You've already come across the ideas they express any number of times in this reading plan, and I hope they have stuck in your mind. But they're so crucial that I want to draw them together and give you a quick recap.

1. "You are worth my time." Invite your kids along when you go somewhere. Make one-on-one dates. Attend their stuff whenever you can. In as many ways as you can, invest your presence in their lives.
2. "I want to know your heart." Learn to ask questions that invite them to share how they feel, what they think, and, most importantly, what they believe.
3. Bestow affection both in words and in touch. Write notes, hold hands, put your arm around them, greet them with a gentle hug, give them a pat coming or going. Make a moment or seize a moment to validate, initiate, or heal.
4. Listen. Give your children your eyes and ears. It's one of the most loving and validating things you can give anyone.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, looking back on these days about fathering, what do you most want me to take away from this Bible reading plan?

Jesus, what message do you have for my own heart?

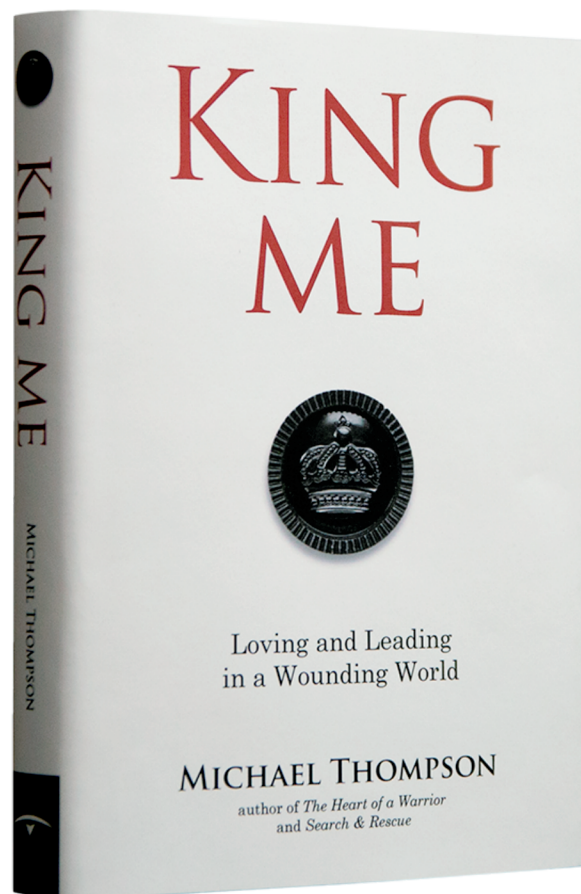
Holy Spirit, what are a few ways you want me to move differently with my children going forward?

If you enjoyed this devotional...

Check out the book it comes from:

Michael Thompson's
King Me: Loving and Leading in a Wounding World

(These seven days were taken from chapter sixteen.)



You can find the book on
Amazon, Audible, and Zoweh.org/kingme





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