

A DAD  
IS BORN





# A DAD IS BORN

A Week-by-Week Guide  
Preparing Your Heart, Mind,  
& Soul for Fatherhood

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James R. Walters, Ed.D.

**NCP**  
NEW CITY PRESS

To my beloved wife and best friend, Suzie,  
and my girls, Shea and Lily.  
Thank you for transforming my heart and life.

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# Introduction

Congratulations! You are going to be a dad. If this is your first child, or if you are preparing to welcome another child into your fold, you already know that being a father is one of life's greatest gifts and responsibilities. This simple book invites you to pause weekly in prayer and focus your attention on the miraculous unfolding before you. Scripture tells us, "Seek ye first, the Kingdom of God" (Matt 6:13 KJV). These pages prepare your heart and mind to seek and discover God right in your home and heart.

As you likely know by now, this is a busy time, and as the anticipation increases with each week of pregnancy, so do your stress and responsibilities. These pages invite you to soak in this incredible season of transformation. Not only are mom and baby transforming, you too are going through your own metamorphosis. By the time you turn this book's last page, your child will be in your arms. I pray that, as you look back on this season of preparation, you will be overwhelmed with gratitude and a deeper love and appreciation for God, your own holy family, and the small village that lifts you up.

This book is structured in the following way. Each chapter is built upon a specific week of pregnancy, starting with when you find out that you are going to be a dad. The beginning of each chapter starts with a scriptural passage that connects to the week's theme. Then, there is a short description of what is happening inside the womb of the mother of your child. This will capture the precious moments of evolution and growth that prepare your child for entry into this beautiful world.

What follows is a brief reflection on the theme of the week that comes from my own experience and that of my

fellow dads. While we recognize that each of us walks a different path, we also acknowledge much of what unites us in this holy vocation of fatherhood. I will summon spiritual words of wisdom from Catholic leaders who have paved the way before us. A short prayer based on the week's topic then follows for you to reflect on and recite. As the saying attributed to St. Vincent de Paul goes, "A man of prayer is capable of everything."

The chapter concludes with space for you to write a brief love note to your child. My hope is that many years from now, you will revisit these pages and be reminded of these earliest days of fatherhood. You may also choose, later in life, to share these reflections with your child. They will see a side of your love that may have been hidden or may not yet have been possible to comprehend. You are preparing a special gift for your beloved child.

This love letter is inspired by the wise and challenging advice of Mr. Joe Licata, a dear friend, teacher, and mentor, upon the birth of my first daughter, Shea. Here is his wisdom:

At the end of each day, write a short note to your child. Some notes might be longer, recalling touching and inspiring moments from your perspective. On other nights, the note might be shorter, with a simple "I love you." On a special occasion, like their wedding day or milestone birthday, you may present them with a box filled with decades worth of those notes.

It would remind them, he said, "of the preciousness of their life, but most of all, share decades worth of the joy and love of their father."

To his incredible credit (he has seven children), from their very first day, he built a treasure chest of letters capturing the ordinary and extraordinary moments of their lives.



I tried this myself, and to be fully honest, as I strive to be throughout this book, it was a difficult task given the realities of balancing work, fatherhood, and being a husband (among many other vocations). I was more successful in writing “love notes” that I secretly inserted into the lunch boxes of my two children on school-day mornings. Shea, the sentimental type like her old man, has saved every note!

In this same spirit, see this book as a blank canvas, a free space to capture your thoughts and prayers from the very beginning of your child’s life. It is the first chapter of what I pray is a classic, full of many, many more chapters of the love story between father and child.

The book is structured in a way that requires as little or as much time as you can afford. It is a weekly guide, and even if you miss or skip a week, you can easily revisit a chapter when time allows. This is all prayer, and there is no right or wrong way to proceed. It will serve as a gentle guide, reminding you to pause, to pray, and to look. Thank you for allowing me to accompany you on this journey. I hope that I, as a fellow dad on the journey, can offer insights that shift your perspective and ground your soul.

## This Book’s Conception

The origins of this book are a curvy and broken road that led to two other books before this very book was born. Like your own path to fatherhood, I share this here as inspiration and context.

In 2018, I was hard at work developing my first book, *Dreams Come True: Discovering God’s Vision for Your Life* (published in May 2020). On a fateful bus ride in Northern Queens, New York, I felt great frustration with the writing process (as all creatives do) and was unsure if I could ever answer that relentless inner call to write a book that I prayed would make an impact for the better. I am not

sure that anyone truly wants to write a book. It involves a monumental amount of work but also vulnerability and humility—all of which I would go to great lengths to learn and which would help me grow as an author and human being. Yet, somewhere, deep within, I felt a nudge to pursue this task relentlessly and faithfully.

At the time, I was reading a short book of reflections for the season of Advent inspired by the writings of one of my favorite authors, Henri Nouwen. I appreciated the book's structure of Scripture, reflection, and questions to consider during this liturgical season. As a fan of Christmas, I often looked at Advent as a necessary countdown to the big day. But that year, I was determined to delve further into this “purplish” season. As I stared out that Q46 bus window on Union Turnpike, a busy road in the middle of my beloved borough Queens, I wondered if Nouwen's book template could work for an altered message—this time for soon-to-be dads.

As I started to craft a first draft of this book for soon-to-be dads (while still developing *Dreams Come True*), I was also preparing for the arrival of a second child. Shea, my firstborn, took her first breath in 2006. Two years later, another baby was on the way. Having lived through a pregnancy already, I thought I was prepared to create a reflective resource for this miraculous journey from the father's perspective—using the same model as the Nouwen Advent book that rested in my hand.

The creative juices started to flow, and I used the opposite side of Nouwen's book's cover to draft a skeleton of an outline for the fatherhood book you are reading today. My writing stopped as the bus reached its destination, and I wouldn't revisit this idea until a few weeks later, when I was preparing a conference presentation in New Orleans, Louisiana.

A day prior to a presentation to a faith-based higher education community, I went to a local bar to watch the New Orleans Saints football game. With the Saints playing on

the road, this was the next best thing, and as New Orleans scored quickly and often, before I knew it, the game became background noise. With a full belly and time to kill, I pulled out that familiar Nouwen Advent book that made the journey with me from the Big Apple to the Big Easy.

Suddenly, despite some appetizers and a few cold ones, I was stuck, like attempting to drive at 5 p.m. on a New York City highway. As a freshly poured beer arrived at my corner table, I wondered what would happen if there were no happy ending for future readers of this book. What if an expectant dad was stopped right in his tracks because the mother of his child suffered a miscarriage or delivered a stillborn baby? How would I make this work?

I struggled, as this wasn't something that I had experienced, and I felt guilty that I might be causing further harm. I was genuinely stuck, not sure if I wanted to contribute to what I imagined would already be a hell of a gut punch. As I chewed on this idea between the bites of stale nacho chips before me, I stopped writing, giving myself time to process this possibility before moving forward.

I could never have imagined, as I sat in that New Orleans bar on a Sunday afternoon, that only a few weeks later, on January 2, 2019, our first doctor's visit for pregnancy number two would change our lives, and I would soon understand how it felt to have hope turn into tears. When the doctor spoke the words, "This isn't a viable baby," I was devastated. I looked into my wife's eyes, and in an instant, I saw sadness and grief fill her face. I did everything in my power not to cry and vomit.

As many aspiring fathers know, the days and weeks that follow a miscarriage are incredibly tough, and the grieving process is difficult. It took about eight weeks to stop crying, not a coincidence, as this was the age of our baby when we found out her heart wasn't beating. I searched long and hard during those days for answers, and I made

a commitment to write about it so future dads could find solidarity and eventually peace—something I desperately yearned for those days.

When I wrote my second book, *Batter Up: Answering the Call of Faith and Fatherhood* (published June 2022), I gave attention to miscarriages in one of its chapters, and I was moved by the many dads who shared with me their stories of sadness and loss. Words cannot take away the pain, but finding comfort in solidarity helps ease it.

The early drafts of *Batter Up* were developed as my newborn infant slept on my shoulder. I can recall, with mixed emotions, writing its early drafts, wondering what the future posed for our, hopefully, holy family. This infant, Lily, is our pandemic baby, born in May 2020. Living at the time in Queens, New York, we were at the epicenter of the world for the COVID-19 pandemic for several weeks. There were many nights when I wondered what the next day would bring as health never felt as precious as it did fragile. Charles Dickens famously wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Boy, did these words echo true.

The purpose of *Batter Up*, written during this time of uncertainty, was to celebrate fatherhood, combining the three areas of life that I loved the most: faith, fatherhood, and baseball. I smile as I recall those late nights and early mornings as my newborn’s lips rested next to my ear, almost whispering the words I attempted to capture as I tried to craft a simple book about the extraordinary task of being a dad.

Fast forward to the fall of 2023, now with a seven-year-old and a three-year-old and just a few more well-earned wrinkles and grey hairs. I was driving home from a parent-teacher conference for the start of second grade for Shea and was moved by the presence of so many dads who cared about their kid’s school, teachers, and faith. As I pulled over to fill the tank with gas, I remembered the book idea that I had not

thought about since being in that bar in New Orleans almost four years prior—a guide for soon-to-be dads.

I cannot speak of the process for other writers and artists, but when I begin to feel inspiration, I cannot stop. I must put pen to paper, fingers to keys, paint to canvas. If I do not create, my spirit is blocked, and as I get older and, I hope, wiser, I recognize this as God working through me. All I need to do is cooperate and get out of the way. The same goes for fatherhood. Children do not come for us but through us, and it is our responsibility to God and to all of creation to nurture and love them so they can do the same for others.

The original idea for this book, first conceived on a city bus, took time to be born. Much would happen to better inform it. This included publishing two other books; the before-mentioned miscarriage; personal challenges with mental and physical health; job insecurity and new employment; the collective pain of a pandemic; loss of loved ones and changed relationships; increased global wars and suffering; the joys of bringing a second child into the world and raising her and her sister with my wife.

## Your Journey

Like a child being created in a hidden darkness, so was this book. Fed by life's events and nurtured by God's grace, it is now time for this book to be born and to hopefully provide you comfort, guidance, and space to reflect and discern. You are likely reading this several weeks, if not months, into the pregnancy, and just as your baby is transitioning from a microscopic beginning into, soon, a bundle of joy, you are experiencing your own transformation.

I will attempt to capture some of those moments that inevitably occur during a pregnancy. This is informed not only by my own experience, but that of other dads who shared their stories with me. While the script isn't always

the same, there are similar patterns and events that prepare us for fatherhood.

What is true for all of us on this path to fatherhood is the unique vocation we are called to by God. How and when we receive this call varies, but what unites us is that we do it together. Supported by God and loved ones, we enter this new reality. Soon, if not already, you realize that this is one of the most important roles you will ever assume. It is more important than the letters after your name, your job title, salary, bank account, brand of car, or the size of your home. It is why you are here. It is now who you are.

In my professional life, I am an author, human rights advocate, Catholic thought leader on fatherhood, pastoral minister, and organizational leader. These are some of the professional skills I have sharpened over the years. In my personal life, I am a son, brother, uncle, cousin, friend, husband, and yes, father.

To my children, I am a cook, cleaner, cuddle and tickle monster, artist, toy builder, athlete, taxi driver, joker, disk jockey, teacher, as well as many other roles I play throughout the day.

And of course, as a person of faith, I am (like you) God's beloved, a struggling-to-be-faithful servant who tries each day to reflect the divine love and peace that I receive daily. This relationship with God and others is not dependent on my actions, but on who I already am to God. When you hold your child, you will gain insight into how God loves us unconditionally. You will think, there is nothing this child could do that can change my love for them. Just imagine how God feels about us.

When I am operating out of this awareness that I call higher consciousness, I can see that of all my identities, it is first being God's beloved and second being a father that means the most. As much as you will be called to teach your

child about God, they will teach you even more. The divine light that shines from them will not only transform your heart, but it will also deepen your own relationship with God and affect how you see life and your purpose in it.

Twentieth-century mystic Thomas Merton, in writing about the contemplative life, offers this insight that easily applies to the vocation of fatherhood and how you can choose to see yourself and your place in it:

The Christian is then not simply a man of good will, who commits himself to a certain set of beliefs, who has a definite dogmatic conception of the universe, of man, and of man's reason for existing. He is not simply one who follows a moral code of brotherhood and benevolence with strong emphasis on certain rewards and punishments dealt out to the individual. Underlying Christianity is not simply a set of doctrines about God considered as dwelling remotely in heaven, and man struggling on earth, trying to appease a distant God by means of virtuous acts. On the contrary Christians themselves too often fail to realize that the infinite God is dwelling within them, so that He is in them and they are in Him. They remain unaware of the presence of the infinite source of being right in the midst of the world and of men. True Christian wisdom is therefore oriented to the experience of divine Light which is present in the world, the Light in whom all things are, and which is nevertheless unknown to the world because no mind can see or grasp its infinity.<sup>1</sup>

The same God who dwells within you now dwells within your child. They will remind you of this divine light daily

if you recognize the divine amid the busyness, worry, and noise. For now, you find the divine in the mother of your child as she undergoes her own transformation. Her skin, if not already, will soon begin to radiate the divine light that reveals the miraculous.

The time will come when this book comes to an end, as will the pregnancy, and your child will enter the world. It is hard to describe that moment when you see your baby for the first time. My words don't seem to do it justice, but the best explanation I have found comes from Blessed Frederic Ozanam, the nineteenth-century founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, who says the following about the birth of his first child:

My dear friend, one day you will experience the same emotion after several hours of terrible pains you hear the last cry of the mother and the first cry of the newborn child, then suddenly you see a tiny creature appear, that immortal creature of whom one becomes the guardian. At that moment something terrible and yet supremely sweet occurs in the depths of the soul, not in the metaphorical sense but in a real, physical sense. One feels as if the hand of God is remodeling one inwardly and shaping a new heart within.<sup>2</sup>

Yes, the hand of God is remodeling and shaping a new heart within you. Your life will never be the same, and you would never want it to be.

## A Note About Language

I am sensitive to the fact that while many of life's roads lead to fatherhood, they do not all look the same. For this reason, I try to avoid assumptions as much as possible. For example, the mother of your child may not be your wife. She may be



a girlfriend, a fiancé, or have another role. I will refer to her as mom, but I will avoid saying “wife” when not referencing my own beloved. If she is your wife, or whatever she may be to you and for you, feel free to interchange the appropriate word to make this as personal as possible.

Also, when it comes time to describe the baby, this book will differ from some other pregnancy books that refer to the baby by gender, using “he” or “she.” I can recall reading a pregnancy book that used “he” as default. As I was having a daughter, it became a slight annoyance. For that reason, I avoid using “he” or “she” pronouns when referring to your baby. For consistency, I may simply write “your child (or baby)” or use the gender-neutral “them” or “they.”

## Let's Begin

Dad, you have been called to this most extraordinary and important role. Together, with help from above and within, let us prepare you for the transformation that has already begun.

# This is Beautiful

St. Theophane the Recluse, a nineteenth-century Russian mystic, is to have said, “The concentration of attention in the heart—this is the starting point of prayer.”

You likely have said a few prayers already since you heard you were going to be a dad. You may have even prayed years before in hopes of this responsibility and experience. This vocation or calling to fatherhood is a continuous prayer if we allow it to be. If we can live mindful of our God who works within us and within others, we will remain mindful of God’s gentle hand guiding our steps, actions, and words.

At the heart of this vocation is beauty. Beauty is a word that carries deep spiritual meaning; it surpasses our society’s superficial understanding of it, which often uses the term to label what is external and limited. As I write this book, I have a beloved wife of fourteen years and eight- and four-year-old daughters, and the most appropriate word to capture my life as husband and dad is beautiful. When I am operating as my best spiritual self, beauty is visible everywhere. My wide-opened eyes finally see what was always present. When I rest my eyes each night, knowing the ladies of the house are in their deep slumber, I think with a grateful heart, “This is beautiful.”

From the sparkling eyes of the newly born to the wisdom-filled eyes of the dying, from the first flower bloom to the last falling leaf, beauty is always radiating. I am stopped in my tracks as I watch my wife comfort our crying daughter or spin her around the room, as Taylor Swift blasts from the speaker. Even the taste of our dinner, when my family surrounds the table, gains flavor and appreciation when

I stop and recognize what is occurring in that present moment. I invite you to search for beauty. It is here where we find God. It is always right in front of you. It just may require a shift in your perspective.

Our Catholic faith is rich in its exploration of beauty. The Pontifical Council for Culture, in its document *The Via Pulchritudinis: Pathway for Evangelization* (2006), wrote, “The *via pulchritudinis* [way of beauty] can open the pathway for the search for God.”<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI recounts a story from his time as a Cardinal about a personal and profound experience he had with beauty. Along with an ecumenical group of clergy, he attended a Johann Sebastian Bach concert in Munich, which was conducted by the American Leonard Bernstein. The then Cardinal wrote of his impression: “Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus.”

Your life and your family lead to an encounter with Jesus. Take a moment and reflect on this statement. Do you believe this? If you do, doesn’t it change everything? In Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), the Holy Father writes, “Beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence. It is an invitation to savor life and to dream of the future.”<sup>4</sup> These inspiring words echo the teaching from the book of Wisdom: “For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wis 13:5).

What makes beauty frightening is its fragility. I spent the early months of the lives of both of my daughters waking up to confirm they were still breathing. I feared the worst as they now were not only my responsibility but my everything. Nouwen writes this in his book, *With Burning Hearts*:

The beauty and preciousness of life is intimately linked with its fragility and mortality. We can experience that every day—when we take a flower

in our hands, when we see a butterfly dance in the air, when we caress a little baby. Fragility and giftedness are both there, and our joy is connected with both.<sup>5</sup>

This fragility requires trust. Throughout the Bible, we read the words, “Be not afraid.” This leads to a “yes,” as the person on the receiving end of this directive proceeds with confidence and acceptance. We cannot ignore the fact that one day we will all return home to God. While we live this life, instead of fearing what could happen to end this beauty, we would make more of our time by allowing it to bring us closer to our Creator and to live with a joy that is God’s free gift for us all to accept. Richard Rohr puts it this way:

The good, the true, and the beautiful are always their own best argument for themselves, by themselves, and in themselves. Such beauty, or inner coherence, is a deep inner knowing that both evokes the soul and even pulls the soul into All Oneness. Incarnation is beauty, and beauty always needs to be incarnate, that is specific, concrete, particular. We need to experience very particular, soul-evoking goodness in order to be shaken into what many call “realization.” It is often a momentary shock where you know you have been moved to a different plane of awareness. This is precisely how transformation differs from the mere acquiring of facts and information. Whereas information will often inflate the ego, transformation utterly humbles us. In that moment, we know how much *we have not known up to now, and still surely do not know!* This is a good and probably necessary starting place.<sup>6</sup>

Rohr writes of being shaken to experience a realization that moves us into a different place of awareness. If the news of

your child didn't shake you, just wait until you hold that tiny baby in your trembling arms. Rohr is right in that fatherhood humbles you, and you soon learn that you don't even know what you don't know. Yet, there again is God. In your baby, your partner, the team of family and friends, and professionals who guide and support you as you say yes to being this baby's father. You will surely look in the mirror and wonder if you are ready. You will question everything and desire nothing other than your child's peace and joy. God is in your midst. So, remember that this is beautiful. Always.

In Nouwen's above quote, he writes that we can experience beauty and preciousness every day. Throughout these pages, as you look forward to the birth of your child, there is also a reminder to be present. Chiara Lubich, Foundress of the Focolare Movement, says the following:

It is by living in the present that we can fulfill all our duties well.

It is by living in the present that crosses become bearable: with good reason this practice is recommended for those who are nearing death.

It is by living in the present that we can grasp God's inspirations, the impulses of his grace that come to us in the present. [...]

So let's live the present moment! [...] Let us live it to perfection! In the evening of each day and in the evening of life we will find ourselves full of good works that have been accomplished and acts of love offered. ...<sup>7</sup>

# First Trimester

Fathers are not born but made.

A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person.<sup>8</sup>

Pope Francis

## We are Having a Baby

### Scripture

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed” (Ps 139:13–16).

### In the Mother’s Womb

Mom won’t even know she is pregnant until about six to eight weeks. Since fertilization, your baby moves from several

hundred cells in week three to having a beating heart by week six. By week seven, your baby's eyes, nose, mouth, and ears are all beginning to take shape, and by week eight, fingers and toes miraculously begin to form.

## In the Father's Heart

When my wife told me we were having a baby for the first time, shock quickly turned into fear. Suddenly, I worried about the size of our apartment, our bank account, and my inner ability to be a dad. I wonder if you have some of these same concerns.

As my baby was forming inside my wife, my own heart was beginning its own inner transformation. I waited and prayed for this moment, but I was, as my daughter now likes to say, "freaking out." Like others who embark on greatness, we must learn to trust God and know that we are playing a critical part in a much bigger plan. Trusting is never easy but remember that you are simply God's instrument. This saying is attributed to St. Francis de Sales:

Do not fear what may happen tomorrow. The same loving Father who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow and every day. Either he will shield you from suffering, or he will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings.

Find peace in prayer, silence, and joy as you hold this secret with mom, knowing this adventure has only just started.

## Prayer

Creator God, you formed me in my mother's womb and, since that day, prepared me for this moment. May I trust

in you as I begin my own inner transformation as the earthly father of this new child who is beginning their story. Let us remember that you are with us as our new, holy family grows and as we begin this journey of pregnancy together.





Use the space below to write a short note to your child.  
(Recommendation: Reflect on how you felt when you found out that you were going to be a dad.)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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*Enkindling the Spirit of Unity*

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