

The Difference in My Life

Life as a U.S. Navy test pilot was an adventure for my dad, Lt. Ed Tandy. Racing through the sky at speeds of over 600 miles per hour in his Fury Three fighter jet, Lt. Tandy determined whether these planes were fit for their designed purpose. But on one fateful day in 1956, he had to determine much more than that — and he only had seconds to do so.

Tandy's mission was to test the often-faulty oxygen system, which he discovered was still defective. While performing high altitude maneuvers, Tandy began to lose consciousness. His plane began an out-of-control descent toward a California beach packed with people enjoying the sun.

As he raced toward the ground, Tandy recovered consciousness and immediately faced the biggest decision

of his life — either bail out and save himself, allowing the plane to crash onto the crowded Monterey Bay beach; or fly the plane into the water to spare those on the beach. With a young bride who was pregnant with their first child, the decision was anything but easy. Yet Tandy had already made his decision the previous evening while reading his Bible.

“Come”

Opening his Bible on the evening prior to his test flight, Tandy began reading the story of Jesus walking on the water in Matthew 14. As he pored over the passage, one word seemed to stand out to him.

Peter said to [Jesus], “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

— *Matthew 14:28-29*

He circled with his red pen the word “come.” Something in that word so gripped Tandy that his countenance suddenly changed. His wife saw the look on his face and asked, “Ed, am I going to lose you?” Tandy replied, “No. Why would you say that?” She asked only because she detected a certain unfamiliar look in his eyes.

That night, God spoke to Lt. Ed Tandy about the importance of following His voice. Less than 24 hours later, Tandy heard God’s voice loud and clear.

To some of the people sunning on Monterey Bay beach, Tandy’s out-of-control airplane must have looked like some special air show. But to a waiting young bride, pregnant with their firstborn son, it was no show at all. It was a day that would change her life — and the life of her son — forever.

In the split second he had to decide, Lt. Tandy made the decision to veer away from the beach and into the water, flying his fighter plane into glory. An eyewitness reported that the plane started to make a recovery from the crash dive, but when the plane ran out of altitude, it suddenly dove straight into the water.

A single word from his Father in heaven gave him the courage to face his destiny. On the eve of Memorial Day in 1956, a hero was welcomed into heaven.

Knowing the kind of man my father was, my mom told me she believed that Ed heard the same word he had circled the night before, answering the call to come.

Where are the fathers?

We can look around and see the devastating aftermath in both families and societies where children are

raised without involved and effective fathers. We are given a tremendous responsibility to help usher our children into the destiny God has for them, although we may struggle with the practicalities of how to accomplish that goal.

My dad's death before I was born could have triggered a cycle in which my young life spiraled out of control. Like me, you may not have even known your dad. Or you may have known him as an alcoholic or an abuser. Maybe you only knew him on weekends as a result of a broken home life. Or perhaps your dad lived in your house your whole life, but wasn't there emotionally.

Regardless of your situation, there is still hope — because you have a heavenly Father who will always and forever outshine your earthly father, no matter how great he might be. It was my heavenly Father who spoke to me and explained that the last word on my father's mind before he died — “come” — was the same word He wanted me to use as an invitation to others to know Him. And it was my heavenly Father who placed His loving arms around my life and helped me find my identity in Him.

You may not yet fully grasp the power you have as a father to influence the lives of your children because you never had it modeled in your own life. However, God

gives you a tremendous responsibility as a man to help guide your children into the destiny that He has for them. And since God is a good and loving Father, He has placed inside of you the tools you need to call your children into their destiny.

How do I know when I've arrived?

I was fortunate to have a stepdad who loved me as if I was his own. Through his guidance and leadership, I knew the point in my life when I became a man. That knowledge gave me both the courage and the trust to go out and seek my dreams. It also enabled me to grow into a generative father in my own right.

When I read the book, *Wild at Heart* by John Eldridge, he framed a question that has stayed with me: “Even if he can't quite put it into words, every man is haunted by the question, ‘Am I really a man? Have I got what it takes ... when it counts?’” That is a big question every young person struggles with. Perhaps even more pressing is this question: How do I know when I have arrived? When does a boy become a man? When does a girl become a woman? And how do they know it?

If you are asking yourself these questions, you're not alone. Most fathers in our culture today have no idea how to call out their children into adulthood because

they've had no role model. Jewish tradition has a rite of passage which marks the day a boy enters into manhood — the bar mitzvah. But most Americans in the 21st century have no such ritual.

When was the moment you knew you no longer had to work for the love and approval of your dad? If you haven't experienced such a moment, when will you feel sufficiently secure that you can spend the rest of your life living out your dreams? When will you be able to stop striving for affection and acceptance from your dad or others around you?

Is that really possible?

It is difficult to know what your father thinks about you if you never see him. We have a growing epidemic in our country of fatherless homes. Dr. Scott Larson, president of a ministry designed at reaching juvenile teenagers, found that 50 percent of the children in America go to bed on any given night without the voice of a father in their home. I have come to understand that the question little boys and little girls — as well as men and women — want answered is this: What does my dad really think about me? If that remains a serious question in our lives, we will spend our lives performing for an audience of one man who either doesn't get it or doesn't realize that it's his voice that matters.

Setting the direction for your kids

So, who is setting the direction for the lives of your children? Who is telling them who they are? Who is helping them find their way? If you aren't, someone will be filling your shoes. Is the television telling them how to live their lives? The culture? Their friends?

In a recent survey, Josh McDowell found that 70 percent of teens in his ministry said the number one value in their lives is a sense of family.

Why do you think there has been a boom in coffee shops like Starbucks around the world?

Because that is the place where kids go to try to find out who they are.

They sit and listen to each other's stories. They place tremendous

value in hanging out and building relationship, partly because that is not happening at home. Dads have spent their lives building their careers, unaware of what kids want today. Kids don't want bigger houses, faster cars, or more money in the bank. What they really want to know is this: What does my dad really think about me?

Following my father's death, my mother moved east in the beginning of July 1956 to be closer to her parents. A pregnancy check-up left everyone concerned that the

Kids don't want bigger houses, faster cars, or more money in the bank.

shock of my father's death would affect my health as a baby in the womb. They told my mother that my fetal heartbeat had stopped. Upon hearing the doctor's words, my mother snapped out of the shock she was in and went on a long walk through the streets of Annapolis. She told me that she prayed, "Lord, if you save my son, I will give him back to you."

I was born later that day on July 11, 1956, a healthy eight pounds, 11 ounces.

Losing my dad but gaining a father

There is a truth in scripture that speaks to what every life is about. When God looked down from heaven, He looked for a champion to change the world. He chose a young man to make a difference. His name was Jeremiah. He wrote these words that God spoke over his life:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak."

— *Jeremiah 1:5-7*

In a moment, a young boy was changed into a man through the words of a Father. Jeremiah went on to live a life that was anchored in those words. What struck me about this passage is that our calling predates our birth. In other words, you have always been on the mind of your Father in heaven. He has a plan and purpose for every life He creates. There has never been a moment when you have not been on His mind. There is a power and a freedom in living out of His love toward you.

Not long after I was born, my mother met another Navy officer named Dan McGlasson. They fell in love and got married. It was Dan who helped set the direction of my life by building structures that enabled me to effectively chase after my dreams. My stepfather was a motivator. He wanted me to excel. From cleaning my room to playing sports, he pushed me to be the best I could be.

Early one morning, he woke me up with an air horn, asking me one question, "Son, what do you want to be when you grow up?" At 5 o'clock in the morning, all I could see was a poster of Bob Hayes, the fastest man in the National Football League. I looked at him and said, "I want to become a professional football player." He said, "Great! It is now time to build a ladder to your dreams — one rung at a time."

Before I knew it, he had strapped a five-pound ankle

weight on each of my skinny 11-year-old legs and put new sneakers on my feet as we jumped into the car. He dropped me four miles from the house and said, “If you are going to do this, son, you have to outwork every other kid in America who is sleeping in right now. I am going to help you do this. I am going home to cook your breakfast. What do you want?” I remember ordering steak and eggs, blueberry pancakes, and orange juice. Then he just drove away!

I ran home that day with those five-pound ankle weights slipping up and down my skinny legs. And when I got home, breakfast was ready. There is nothing like eating a great meal after a good workout. (They don’t call me Big Ed for nothing!) For years, I thought the reason hair didn’t grow on my lower legs was because of the chafing of those five-pound Sears ankle weights.

My stepfather dropped me off five days a week throughout my high school years. That early morning structure in my life gave me a mental advantage over other athletes. I knew that I was gaining a day on every other high school athlete who was not getting up early. And it was because of my stepfather’s willingness to help me reach my dreams that I eventually achieved them. I knew what he thought I was capable of.

My rite of passage

In the early 1970s, my stepfather commanded a diesel submarine called the *Tiranti Fish*. His duty with the Navy often led him away for months at a time. As a Navy family, we understood that the term “Med” meant the Mediterranean Sea, and that dad was leaving for at least three months to serve our country in the waters off the coast of Europe.

One day as his submarine was getting ready to depart for maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea, my mother and I went down to the dock to say good-bye to him. With ceremonial colored smoke blasting out of the engines, the 300-foot *Tiranti Fish* started backing out of its berth. Then, my stepfather realized he had made two grave mistakes: He had driven the Volkswagen Beetle to the dock, and he still had the keys in his pocket!

My stepfather grabbed the bullhorn and shouted over the crowd of well-wishers, “Son, today you are a man. Drive your mother home.” With that, he launched the keys through the air toward the dock and his 14-year-old stepson — and I snagged them before they hit the ground. I remember to this day the feeling of catching those keys with my left hand. Something happened to me that day when my stepfather declared over the whole crowd that I was a man. I remember grabbing the keys

and looking at my mother and saying, “Let’s go home.”

There was just one problem — I had never driven.

My stepfather’s mistake of not handing over the keys was an obvious one; driving the Volkswagen was not a readily apparent mistake. However, my mother’s inexperience at driving a stick shift quickly revealed how much of a mistake it was. But there was no need to worry — I had just been declared a man, and learning to drive a stick shift was going to be easy, or so I thought.

After we got into the car, I turned the key in the ignition, not realizing that the car was in gear, or how to use the clutch. The car lurched forward a few feet through a shrub brush before coming to a sudden stop. My mother quickly began explaining her limited knowledge of clutch usage.

My next challenge was to find “reverse” on the stick. However, my stepfather had upgraded the stick shift knob to one with a walnut finish, only to affix it with the gears listed sideways. I cranked the ignition without stepping on the clutch again and launched the car through the bushes in front of us. Finally, I found reverse. But as I started backing out, I didn’t quite trust the accelerator or the clutch. As I kept toggling those two pedals, it made an unpleasant jerking motion. While I kept trying to find first gear, I pressed the accelerator and rode the clutch. I was

bucking the car — and my mother — back and forth all the way home for two miles with her screaming, “Would you please stop doing that?!” But I made it home because I was a man and my stepfather had said so. I don’t think my mother recovered for months from the whiplash I gave her that day!

I knew something had changed in my 14-year-old heart because of his pronouncement over me. It was an accident, but his public declaration over me changed the way I viewed myself. After that, it was hard for my mother to get me to submit. We had many fights because I misunderstood that being “the king” meant to serve her, not to rule her. (But that’s another story for another day.)

Developmental “handoffs”

In my quest to help my children identify milestones in their lives, I started to look for some models in our culture. I discovered that in the Jewish tradition there are three stages in the life of the child. First, there is a child’s relationship with his or her mother. It is the mom’s responsibility to handle the child’s care until the child is weaned. Next, the child is then given over to the dad until he or she reaches the age of puberty — 12 for girls and 13 for boys. At that point, the child celebrates his or her passage into adulthood: bar mitzvahs for boys and bat

mitzvahs for girls. (*Bar* means “son,” and *mitzvah* means “of the law.” You become a “son of the law.”)

Through this ceremony, there is a definite handoff from the father to God, where a boy becomes a man. After the bar mitzvah, they are treated like men. Their mothers must release them into their new life. They are given more responsibility, including times of teaching and reading scripture.

They have now graduated.

“When I was a child, I acted like a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

— *I Corinthians 13:11*

So many men are missing that kind of experience. Your father may have never proclaimed to the world that you are a man. He may have never passed down to you what it means to be a man — and how you transition into manhood where you follow your heart and chase your destiny. When your manhood is not in doubt, when you know who you are, you have all the confidence in the world to pursue your dreams.

In the following pages, I will share some tools that will help us become fathers who can make a difference in the lives of our kids. I want to answer the question many

of us are asking: *What does my dad really think about me? and Have I arrived yet?* The answers to those questions will help us define our true identity and become all that God has made us capable of becoming. We will also talk about how to define a goal line for our kids, which will allow them to know and understand when they have “scored” in life.

There is a deep wound in many of us because we have never known the love of our fathers. But it doesn’t have to remain a deep wound. God, our loving heavenly Father, can heal those wounds by helping us understand and accept His love for us. His love will call you out and declare over your life that you are a man in His eyes.

Now, there is a tremendous challenge for us as dads to pass that same experience along to our kids. We can create moments that let our kids know they have arrived — when we as dads throw up our hands in honor and say, “Touchdown! You’re here.” There is a similar moment when we become true sons to our heavenly Father — when we never again have to prove that we are sons, because the righteousness of Christ is deposited into our lives. We stop living for less and live for the joy He has set before us.

For Chapter One study guide and questions,
visit: www.thedifferenceafathermakes.com