

Session 2—Establishing a Relationship

Premise: *Engaging a younger man in a meaningful relationship will not only change his life and yours, but will build the Kingdom of God.*

Finding a Son: The first step in spiritual fathering is identifying a younger man to invest in. The guidebook suggests that you don’t need to search far; the men God places in your life—whether at church, work, or even in your family—are potential spiritual sons.

Start with a list: Write down names of young men you already know, and then pray about who God may be leading you to invest in. Common ground or mutual interests can help ease into the relationship. Consider factors like shared activities, age gap, life stages, and faith background.

Begin slowly: Don’t immediately approach a younger man with the “spiritual father” terminology. Instead, initiate with casual get-togethers, like a meal or coffee. The key here is to build rapport, not overwhelm with expectations. Relationships should develop naturally, built on mutual respect and trust over time.

“It is perfectly normal to feel drawn to someone in a specific stage of his faith journey. It may even be how God has wired you.”

“You will see incredible fruit if you take it slow and avoid violating the normal process of relationships.”

The two most important factors in finding a spiritual son will be prayer and boldness.”

Key Points:

- ⇒ *God has already put a spiritual son in your life. You just may not know who it is yet.*
- ⇒ *Don’t get bogged down trying to pick the “perfect” spiritual son. Pray and then go for it.*
- ⇒ *Don’t have a hidden agenda for those first times hanging out. Let the friendship progress naturally*
- ⇒ *Offer to be a listening ear. Share that you wish you’d had someone older to bounce things off when you were younger, and you’d like to be available for that.*

Discussion:

1. Do you have any reservations about approaching a younger man?
 2. Which factor is most important to you, e.g., Age Gap, Life Stage, Shared Activities, etc. Why?
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The 1-2-3 Method of Communication: In today’s world, communication styles vary greatly, especially between generations. Younger men may rely heavily on texting and social media, while older men may prefer face-to-face conversations. This communication gap can lead to misunderstanding or frustration.

The guidebook outlines a simple but effective communication strategy: Initiate contact: Whether through text, email, or a quick phone call, start the conversation and express interest in meeting.

Engage in a relaxed environment: Meet casually and often (e.g., for a meal, coffee, or outdoor activity). These environments reduce pressure and allow conversation to flow naturally.

Follow up consistently: After each meeting, follow up with a simple text or call, expressing appreciation for the time spent together. This regular communication reinforces the growing relationship and shows that you care.

Effective communication is about listening well and being present. As a spiritual father, it's important to prioritize active listening, understanding that younger men may need time to open up.

Key Points:

- ⇒ Initiating communication in between face-to-face meetings is vital to grow a relationship.
- ⇒ Think about doing some "shoulder-to-shoulder" activities as well, centered around a common interest, such as playing golf, fishing, or helping him do a home repair.
- ⇒ Be careful what you write in a text message (e.g., talking about a marriage struggle is unwise via text since his wife is likely to see his phone).

"We have to *go to* young men, not expect them to *come to us*."

Discussion:

1. What forms of communication are you prone to struggle with or find difficult?
2. Would you be willing to commit to one year of proactive, weekly communication with your son?

"Your consistency matters more than his responsiveness."

Vulnerability + Safety + Time: *Vulnerability*—True growth happens when both the spiritual father and son feel safe enough to be vulnerable with each other. Spiritual fathers must be willing to share their own struggles and failures to create a space where younger men feel safe doing the same.

Safety—Establishing a safe space for conversation is crucial. Young men today are often guarded and may fear judgment. It's important for spiritual fathers to avoid coming across as "fixers" and instead focus on offering support, encouragement, and understanding.

Time—Deep relationships take time. Patience is key. Consistency in meeting, communicating, and sharing life experiences will gradually build trust and open doors for deeper conversations about faith and life.

Key Points:

- ⇒ Vulnerability is being real, honest, and open in appropriate ways. One of the biggest obstacles is our cultural tendency to avoid expressing emotion or weakness.
- ⇒ Safety stems from a combination of confidentiality, love, and commitment.
- ⇒ Establishing guideposts through journaling and partnering with other spiritual fathers will help you in your role.

Discussion:

1. Do you find it challenging to listen to others without judgment?
2. How does your identity in Christ help you be vulnerable with your spiritual son?

"Remember, vulnerability is not a tactic for spiritual fathers. Rather, vulnerability is a way of life that we all need to embrace."

"God is pleased to work slowly and deliberately in our lives."

"In a culture that celebrates victimhood, we need men who acknowledge their shortcomings and avoid blaming others."

Resources:

- Chapters 3-5 in *The Spiritual Fathers Guidebook*
- I'm a Millennial—<https://vimeo.com/844986180>
- www.spiritualfathers.com