

"I devoured Larry's book in one reading."—FLOYD McCLUNG
Bestselling Author and Speaker

THE **CRY** FOR **SPIRITUAL** **MOTHERS &** **FATHERS**



The Next Generation
Needs You to Be a
Spiritual Mentor

LARRY KREIDER

Author of *The 3 Loves* and *Starting a House Church*

YOU ARE MEANT TO BE A MENTOR

You probably have more “friends” than ever—once you tally up all your social networking connections. But virtual relationships alone can’t meet the Church’s desperate need for spiritually mature women and men to mentor younger believers to be faithful servants of Christ.

If you are like many believers, you may not feel prepared to be a trusted influencer because you haven’t had a spiritual mother or father yourself. *The Cry for Spiritual Mothers and Fathers*, written by seasoned disciple and Christian leadership trainer Larry Kreider, will give you the proven biblical keys you need to become a godly mentor. Discover why spiritual mother- and fatherhood is every believer’s calling, and find out how to nurture a spiritual family that expands the kingdom of God.

This is the essential handbook for answering God’s call to become the spiritual father or mother He has called you to be.

Because Larry’s understanding of the role of spiritual parents in the family of God is so profound, I enthusiastically recommend this book to you.

DR. DAVID CANNISTRACI

Senior Pastor, GateWay City Church, San Jose, California
Author, *God’s Vision for Your Church*

Larry Kreider is a true servant to the Church . . . I trust this man because his heart is pure and his mind is clear.

JACK W. HAYFORD

Founder and Chancellor, The King’s University, Los Angeles and Dallas



LARRY KREIDER is the founder and international director of DOVE Christian Fellowship International (DCFI), a worldwide network of churches and ministries dedicated to advancing God’s kingdom on six continents. He has written more than 30 books, including *House to House*, *The Biblical Foundation Series*, *Building Your Personal*

House of Prayer, *Starting a House Church* and *Speak Lord, I’m Listening*. Larry and his wife, LaVerne, have been married for 42 years, have four children and three grandchildren, and live in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



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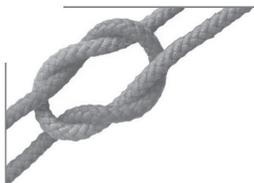
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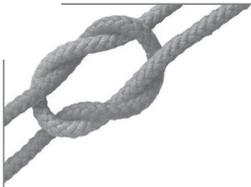


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FOREWORD

I have waited a long time for this book. There is not another one like it anywhere. *The Cry for Spiritual Mothers and Fathers* blends sound teaching on how to develop each member of the church for ministry, with spiritual fathering and mothering at every level of the Church, all the while honoring the role of the senior pastor. Larry Kreider does this in the context of “every member” ministry in small groups. What pastor wouldn’t want every member of his or her church engaged in using his or her spiritual gifts for effective ministry? Because *The Cry for Spiritual Mothers and Fathers* addresses such an important subject, it should be required reading for the staff and small-group leaders of every local church.

The Cry for Spiritual Mothers and Fathers addresses many of the leadership issues pastors face in discipling church members and raising up emerging leaders, and it does so from a firm foundation of biblical truth. What we don’t need is another book on spiritual leadership filled with anecdotes but void of scriptural principle. This book avoids that temptation. Larry combines encouraging, down-to-earth, helpful illustrations in every chapter, and he does this with plenty of scriptural references. This book allows us to know what Larry believes and why he believes it.

Larry reminds us that churches are only as effective as the relational ties the church members have with each other. And then

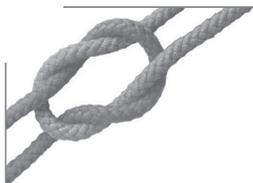
he goes on to demonstrate how to build that kind of church. “Becoming a Spiritual Family” will set the standard for leadership in your church or ministry. By taking staff members and small-group leaders through an in-depth study of this book, a leader will save him- or herself many heartaches. It helps build a common framework for what people can expect from their leaders, what leaders should expect from one another, and how to raise up father-leaders. This book will help define how leadership works and what to do when leaders fail in a church or ministry.

While affirming the need for spiritual fathers and mothers, Larry avoids the excesses of spiritual control and from top-down church life. He believes—and demonstrates repeatedly—that when the believer-priests are mobilized to use their gifts, a struggling local church is transformed into a New Testament local church.

As a pastor with a vision for those leaders I train to be involved in effective, small-group ministry, I want my trainees to catch Larry Kreider’s vision for spiritual fathering and mothering. As Larry has so effectively communicated in this book, spiritual parenting is something every person can do. When the saints believe this and when we as leaders are focused with single-minded determination to see it become a reality, it will happen. Then God will have a people for Himself that reflects His glory.

A book that helps us know how to go about raising up spiritual fathers and mothers, while warning us of the pitfalls and dangers along the way, is invaluable. I devoured Larry’s book in one reading, and now I want to go back and digest it, so I can pass on to others what I have learned. I hope you will do the same.

Floyd McClung
Founder, All Nations
Cape Town, South Africa



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I am excited about the release of this book. My wife, LaVerne, and I have more than 40 years experience serving as spiritual parents to spiritual sons and daughters scattered around the world. As we have attempted to follow Jesus and His model of making disciples, we have learned—through the help of the Holy Spirit and through the school of experience—so much about this incredible privilege.

In the year 2000, I wrote my first book on this subject, *The Cry for Spiritual Fathers and Mothers: Compelling Vision for Authentic, Nurturing Relationships Within Today's Church*. Eight years later, Regal Books asked me to consider writing on the subject of spiritual mentoring. In response, I took much of what I had written about spiritual fathering and mothering in my first book and added more of what I had learned in the intervening years about spiritual mentoring. The book *Authentic Spiritual Mentoring: Nurturing Young Believers Toward Spiritual Maturity* was released in 2008.

Through conversations I had with my friends at Gospel Light during the past year, it became clear that I should combine/revise what I had written in the previous two books and add important practical truths and the lessons I have been learning about being an effective spiritual parent—all in order to help others know how to empower the next generation. The result is the book you hold

in your hands: *The Cry for Spiritual Mothers and Fathers: The Next Generation Needs You to Be a Spiritual Mentor.*

Jesus became a spiritual parent to His disciples, and Paul the apostle told the believers in the early church:

We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy (1 Thess. 2:7-8,11-12,19-20).

Jesus and Paul set the example for us by becoming spiritual parents to the next generation, and they call us to follow in their steps.

As you apply the biblical truths presented in this book and follow the pattern modeled by Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago, the Lord will use you to change our world.

Of particular importance to this book is the addition of questions meant to enhance studying the book in a small-group setting or in your personal study. Located at the end of each chapter, the questions are intended to help you apply what you have read and allow you to develop into the spiritual mother or father God has destined you to become.

May the Lord bless you abundantly as you fulfill His destiny for your life and as you experience the joy and the blessing of becoming a spiritual father or mother.

Larry Kreider

Part I

UNDERSTANDING
THE IMPORTANCE
OF SPIRITUAL
MOTHERING AND
FATHERING



Calling All Believers

Key: Everyone is called to be a spiritual mother or father.

Recently I spoke to a group of young people at one of America's dynamic megachurches, and a young man approached me after the session. "I'm on staff here, but I'm leaving next month," he confided.

I was puzzled. "Why?"

He looked deeply into my eyes and said, "Larry, if just one person in leadership in this church sat down with me for an hour once a month for a cup of coffee and asked me how I was doing, I would stay." The young man was looking for a spiritual father—someone to spend some time with him, someone who could offer support and guidance and feedback as he learned to use his gifts and talents within the church. But everyone was too busy: More attention was paid to the church's many programs than to individual people.

A few years ago, I was traveling with a well-known evangelist in New Zealand; and in a tired, almost wistful voice he said something to me that I will never forget: "Larry, you know what I really need? I need a father." Here was a powerfully anointed leader, highly successful as an evangelist, whose greatest need was for someone who cared deeply enough to interact with him. He needed someone to act as a sounding board and to help him turn problems into opportunities. He was longing for a spiritual

father—a seasoned Christian man to encourage him and give him advice and support.

Another time, LaVerne and I were visited by a new Christian who was depressed and discouraged. “LaVerne and Larry,” she said to my wife and me, “I know the Lord has changed my life, but there is so much I don’t understand. I’m not sure if I’ll make it. I just can’t decipher half of what I hear in church.” Then she admitted the true cry of her heart: “I really need someone to help me understand the things I’m taught. I need someone to help me grow up spiritually.”

An elderly pastor I once knew was ready to retire and hand over the baton to the younger leadership, but he had not trained anyone to take his place. He nearly wept as he admitted that he had somehow missed the mark when it came to training and nurturing his spiritual sons. They did not honor him or look to him as a father.

I hear stories like these again and again. As I travel throughout the world, training leaders and potential leaders week after week, I see a consistent and desperate need for believers who are willing to serve as spiritual fathers and mothers. Whether the Christians are new to the faith, have been practicing the faith for many years or even are pastors, the need is still the same: Deep down inside, there is a longing to be mothered or fathered. God has created us with a need to feel connected in relationships, but a painful lack of nurturing, support and interaction in the Church has created a void.

More and more believers are awakening to the need. A few years ago in our county in Pennsylvania, there was a powerful move of God among young people. It started when a few youth got serious about reaching their peers for Christ. The Bible study they started with a handful of kids grew to more than 1,000 young people coming together every Tuesday night. One of the young leaders told me why he felt the Lord chose our area for a move of God: “We had spiritual fathers here who were ready and willing to serve and encourage us.”

Because spiritual fathers and mothers poured into these young people what the Lord had given them—because they had

mentored the young men and women—young leaders were produced who were prepared to become spiritual parents themselves. The next generation felt that they were loved and trained well enough to pass on a lasting legacy of their own.

The Uncommon Individual Foundation, an organization devoted to mentoring research and training, . . . reports that mentoring is the third most powerful relationship for influencing human behavior, after marriage and the extended family.

Randy MacFarland, who helps train mentors as Vice President of Training and Mentoring at Denver Seminary, says, “When we consider the fragmentation of the family, the speed of change demanding the constant learning of new skills, and our mobile society separating extended family members, the need for mentoring increases. . . . We often forget how powerful it is when someone believes in us.”¹

That’s what spiritual mentors, or spiritual parents, do: They believe in the younger generation. They help shape lives while passing on a legacy.

But what happens when a generation is left to its own resources and is not provided with mentoring, or parenting, care?

One Way to Preserve Life

A few years ago I visited Pilanesberg Park, a South African game preserve, and learned that not too many years earlier, the survival of the white rhinoceros in this game park was in question. Several of these endangered rhinos had been found slaughtered. The game wardens decided to electronically tag and track the remaining rhinos, placing video cameras in strategic locations to record any evidence of foul play.

After tracking the rhinos and reviewing the video footage, park officials were astounded to discover that young bull elephants were harassing the rhinos without provocation. Although

the behavior was unnatural for them, these teenaged elephants were chasing the white rhinos for long distances, throwing sticks at them until they were exhausted and then stomping them to death. Why were these young elephants acting so violently? The answer was found in a decision made 20 years earlier.

At that time, park officials decided to transport some elephants from another national park into the Pilanesberg preserve, because the other location was unable to support the increasing elephant population. The elephants too large to transport were killed, including a number of mature bulls. Only younger elephants were sent to Pilanesberg, where they matured without the presence and influence of mature males. By investigating the rhinos' mysterious deaths, park rangers and scientists discovered that without the presence of mature bulls, the young male elephants were suffering from excessive aggression and becoming violent.

To remedy the situation and preserve the white rhino population, park officials killed five of the most aggressive young bull elephants and then imported older bulls in order to provide an influence for the remaining young males. The older bulls began to assume their place among the herd as fathers and disciplinarians, and the young bulls learned quickly that they were no match for the more mature elephants.

Some park officials were surprised when it became apparent that the young bulls actually enjoyed their relationship with the older, more mature males. The former lawbreakers returned to normal patterns of elephant behavior, and after the arrival of the mature elephants, there were no more reports of dead rhinos.

The Need to Equip the Young for Growth

The elephant story illustrates what younger Christians can gain if they have spiritual mentors to help them by supporting, counseling and teaching them. Of course, the story also demonstrates what happens when seasoned Christians fail to act as spiritual parents. When mature Christians neglect to assume their responsibility to share their wisdom and love with younger Christians,

the younger ones are not fully equipped for the task that lies ahead. They may be energetic and gifted, but without direction and loving oversight, they have a tendency to get off track—or even to trample those in their path.

There is a desperate need for spiritually mature men and women to mentor younger Christians, helping them to clarify what really matters in life and work. Spiritual parents who act as mature coaches can help younger believers achieve their dreams and visions and feel connected as they integrate life and work and grow to maturity.

Instead of developing deep and nurturing relationships with spiritual parents, today's believers are encouraged to participate in church services, Bible studies, para-church organizations or evangelistic ministries in order to bolster his or her faith and "grow strong in the Lord." The theory is that more teaching from God's Word plus more ministry participation equals more spiritual maturity. As important as these involvements may be, such a faulty supposition leads to believers inhaling message after message, book after book, CD after CD, seminar after seminar—all in order to fill a void for real relationships.

The results are Christians who become fat spiritually and fail to interpret what they are learning so that they can pass it on to others. These Christians do not know how to meaningfully and sacrificially impart their lives to others because they have never been properly parented. Without role models, they remain spiritual infants, needing to be spoon-fed by the pastor or some other Christian worker.

But as God's people, believers need to grow up and out of the spoon-fed stage. This growth is very difficult to do alone, just as natural infants cannot thrive if left on their own. Babies need the care and nurture of parents, just as believers need practical input from loving spiritual parents who delight when their children reach their full potential in Christ.

Countless examples of spiritual parenting appear in the Scriptures. Jesus modeled spiritual fatherhood to the 12 disciples. Paul disciplined young Timothy. Elizabeth became a spiritual mother to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Elijah became a spiritual parent to Elisha. Moses trained Joshua to take his place to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. In many of these examples, the one being guided was nurtured and prepared to stand in the place of

his mentor to eventually fulfill God's greater purpose. In the case of Elijah and Elisha, the spiritual son even received an impartation of double anointing from his spiritual father (see 2 Kings 2:9-10). Throughout Scripture, we read about these one-on-one spiritual parenting relationships and how they produce a rich legacy of impartation to future generations. We need this kind of connection and impartation today.

In the book *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*, the authors begin their book with a surprising statement: "Research on biblical leaders led to a startling conclusion—few leaders finish well."² They go on to say that in cases when leaders in the Bible did finish well, "their relationship to another person significantly enhanced their development."³

The apostle Paul knew that imparting a spiritual legacy should be his highest aim, and he was determined to finish well with strong relationships. He was a role model and spiritual father to many in the Early Church. He very clearly spelled out spiritual fathering as his leadership model: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1); "whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice" (Phil. 4:9). In other words, "Let me be a spiritual father to you. Let me be your role model. Then go and do the same."

After a long absence from his spiritual children in the church at Thessalonica, Paul wrote a letter to them out of his concern that they might interpret his physical absence as proof he didn't care about them. He ended his letter by praying, not only that God would direct his way back to them, but also that they would love others in the same way that he had loved them (see 1 Thess. 3:11-12). He expected them to take up the loving responsibility of being spiritual parents for others. The New Testament Church was to model a growing and developing family. Every Christian was to become a spiritual father or spiritual mother!

The Call to All Believers

Apparently the church at Corinth needed some extra encouragement from Paul to take up the loving responsibility of becoming

spiritual parents. Paul challenged the Corinthian church not to overlook this need: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers” (1 Cor. 4:15, *NKJV*). The Corinthian church had many teachers in their spiritual lives but few spiritual mothers or fathers. Since the time Paul had brought the Corinthians to faith in Christ, many instructors had taught God’s Word to them. They had heard these teachers and faithfully attended church services, but they then had become arrogant in their knowledge of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 4:18). They were proud of what they knew, but they were immature as believers. They lacked true spiritual parents, or spiritual mentors, to give them proper training and nurturing, to help them put their knowledge into life practice.

Paul knew that in order for the Corinthian church to grow spiritually, all of the believers had to be in vital relationships with others who had gone down the same spiritual road before; otherwise, the believers would be content to do what the instructors told them to do rather than learning how to hear from God themselves. This was wisdom that could only be learned as they received mentoring from a loving spiritual father. To jumpstart the process, Paul told the Corinthians that he was sending Timothy to “remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 4:17). Paul had trained Timothy, his beloved and trustworthy spiritual son, and now Timothy would come to train them. Paul trusted Timothy to help the wayward Corinthian church because Paul had trained him like a son. Timothy was ready to impart *his* spiritual fatherhood to the Corinthian church. With Paul and Timothy’s example, the Corinthian church would soon be producing their own spiritual sons and daughters. Paul was confident that when believers saw spiritual mothering and fathering modeled, they would be equipped to pass on that legacy to the next generation.

It was a lack of mature leadership in the Corinthian church that stunted the believers’ spiritual growth. Unequipped to grow up spiritually, they struggled to find their identity in Christ. They did not know who they were in the Lord. Deficient of true spiritual mothers and fathers to model parenthood, the Corinthian

church had become a system that produced programs and teachers, not a family producing sons and daughters.

Because they did not have their identity grounded in Christ, the Corinthians sought it through their favorite leader: “I follow Paul, . . . I follow Apollos” (1 Cor. 3:4). Paul chided the Corinthian church for its lack of maturity, making it plain that while people have roles to play, only God is clearly the source of any good thing, and they should ultimately follow only Him. What they really needed were spiritual mothers and fathers to pay close attention to them so that they could be nudged toward maturity. They needed spiritual parents to sow into their lives, who expected them eventually to become spiritual parents themselves, creating a spiritual harvest of believers with Christ-grounded identities who would continue to multiply down through the generations.

God’s intention is to produce spiritual parents who are willing to nurture spiritual children and help them grow into spiritual parents. This is a fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:6). The Lord is restoring harmony between mothers and fathers—both natural and spiritual—and their children, so that parents can freely impart their inheritance to the next generation. Children need parents who nurture strong character and assure them that they are valuable—that they are gifts from God. As such children mature, they in turn must nurture the next generation.

Everyone is called to be a spiritual mother or spiritual father: Each of us is nurtured as a child to become a parent.

Key Questions for Practical Application

1. Who needs spiritual mothers and fathers, and why?
2. Who are some real-life models of spiritual parenting that you have seen?
3. When and how should the groundwork to become spiritual parents be laid?