

A FREE EXCERPT FROM REVIVING FATHERHOOD

The Relationship *Waterfall*

Who gets your time, in what order, and why it matters more than you think.

STEVEN KOLBERG

Chapter 4 of Reviving Fatherhood: Guiding Every Dad from First Steps to Lasting Legacy

THE REVIVED LIFE

BEFORE YOU READ

“Life becomes a mess when we do not have the right priorities or hold them in the incorrect order.”

STEVEN KOLBERG, REVIVING FATHERHOOD

SEVEN RELATIONSHIPS. ONE ORDER.



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About a 15 minute read

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Stay with it to page 9. The audit is where this chapter becomes your week.

CHAPTER 4

The Relationship Waterfall: Priorities

What does everyone get but also stops for no one? Time. This terrible riddle, if we can even call it that, is what this chapter is all about. In the upcoming chapters, we will look at how time plays perhaps the most important role in our lives. It is something we never get back. Time to take it seriously (pun fully intended).

Ever show up to your friends or family the day after they have a party, event, or get-together that you did not attend? Usually, we are met with “Where were you?” or “Why don’t you make time for your favorite people?” or “How come you didn’t want to see us yesterday?” Hopefully, these comments are all out of love, but sometimes it can also feel like there is a hidden message in these words about how they should have been the priority. This word, *priority*, gets tossed around a lot, so let us define our term for this chapter. What is a priority?

A priority is something that is valued or treated as more important than something else. For example, which would take a higher priority in your life: bingeing the new season of your favorite TV show or taking out the trash that is only half full? Easy: I would pick the show. Most of us probably value entertainment and relaxation over working, especially if that work is something hard and dirty.

All right, let’s think through another scenario. You made plans to hang out with the guys and your car has a flat tire. A little trickier? Knowing the ingenuity of man, you would find a way to hang out with the guys while fixing the flat. So this one could go either way, depending on you and what you value.

Let’s try an even tougher one.

Your family or close friend group has made plans to celebrate a once-in-a-while event for someone in it, like a graduation from college, a going-away party, or special event of some sort. Either way, this is one you do not want to miss. You RSVP’d yes, and the wife and kids are ecstatic for it!

The morning of the event, your wife wakes up dealing with a lot of stress, anxiety, depression, or [fill in the blank]. After talking, you can tell that this get-together will be too much for her, and she even stated that it might be too much. However, being the sweet soul that your wife is, she mentions that she doesn’t want to ruin the fun and the family should still go. What do you do? Whom do you prioritize? Oh, I forgot to mention, your kids are also chirping at you like little birds about how excited they are to go.

How would you even decide this one? Do you prioritize all the people and the event, your spouse, or your kids?

I hope you are beginning to see the importance of priorities. In this American culture, I see mass confusion around what priorities should be. I sense that they do not exist or we have two foundational ones, like family and work. Life becomes a mess when we do not have the right priorities or hold them in the incorrect order.

Time and priorities go hand in hand. We are only given so much time on this earth, and where we spend it and with whom we spend it matters. In this chapter, I want to help you prioritize your time when it comes to the relationships in your life as a father. There are more players on the board, and sometimes it seems too hard to know who should be a priority.

In the world of relationships, I have discovered that there is a strategic order to them, and I call that the relationship waterfall.

THE ORDER

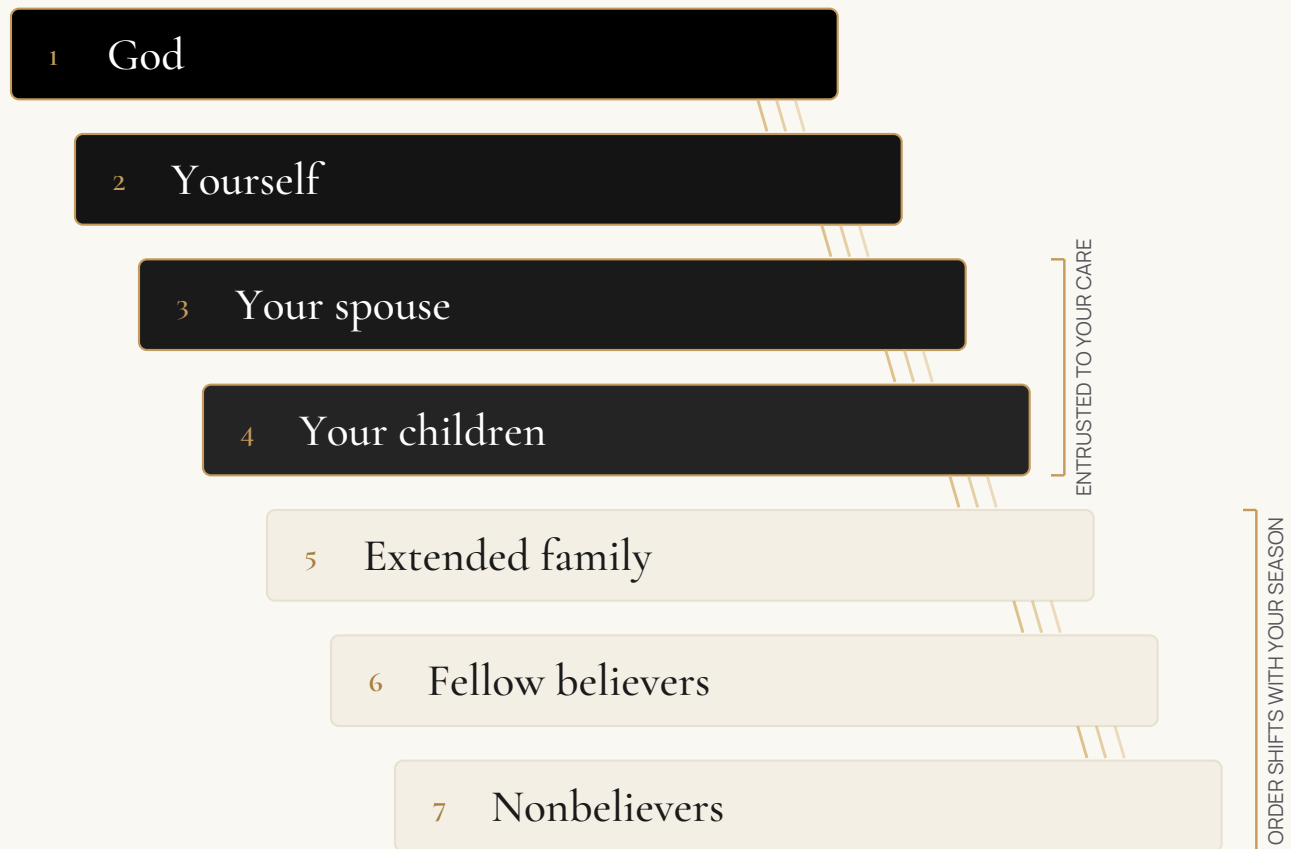
Searching the Bible, I have found there is a waterfall method to the relationships we must prioritize.

The waterfall method is where we start at the top, then move to the next one, then the next, and so forth, all the way to the bottom—just like a waterfall. The relationships we should be prioritizing in order are: our relationship with God, ourselves, our spouse, our kids, our extended family, fellow believers, and the unbelievers in our life.

After our relationship with God, these can be divided up into two categories: relationships with those God entrusted to our care and responsibility, and those who are not.

Let me clarify something that I will expand on a bit later in this chapter. As we will see, our relationships with God, ourselves, our spouse, and our kids are definitely top of the list. *But*. Say you have a crazy uncle (extended family) and your best friend is in town (either a believer or unbeliever) at the same time. Whom do you choose? This waterfall would suggest the crazy uncle, and I want to make sure it is known that these last few relationships and who gets priority are a matter of the season of life. The order in which you prioritize these would be dependent on what you are led by God to pursue most at the time for the season of life you are in.

Ready to start diving over the waterfall? Let's go.



LEVEL 1

God

Deuteronomy 6:5–6 states, “And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today.”

Mark 12:29–30, we read, “Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is this: “Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.”’”

Nothing is more important in life than your relationship with God. He is the Creator of all relationships, so he should be number one. These Scriptures clearly show that our time spent with God needs to come above all else. On the top drop of our relationship waterfall, God resides. We can give God all our heart, soul, mind, and strength when we give him our first. This verse does not say to just give God your heart, soul, mind, and strength. It says give *all*. It is impossible to give all if we have already given away to other relationships.

This is the core of life: that our priorities allow us and those around us to have a flourishing relationship with God. Life is all about him; how do we leverage ourselves to make that a reality for us and those around us? Continue with me down this waterfall.

LEVEL 2

Ourselves

I am not sure if I am late to the game and most men know to prioritize themselves or if this is breaking news. Either way, something very important to schedule in is taking care of ourselves mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. This will look different for all of us, as what fills us up in these ways will vary from guy to guy.

The reason why this is important is because we have people depending on us, and we need to put our best foot forward for them. It's like the old airplane cliché, "Before assisting your children with their air masks if we lose cabin pressure, set yours up first, then you can help." Don't sacrifice yourself and trick yourself into thinking you will be okay if you are depleted. Put your oxygen mask on first. A piece of caution comes with this priority, though. Don't make yourself an idol. Since it feels good to fill up our cup, it can become too easy to give ourselves too much time and let the other relationships in our lives take a hit. Make sure you are not taking too much time away from the other relationships in your life. Find the balance.

LEVEL 3

Your spouse

The next level is your spouse, the first relationship that God entrusted to your care. Ephesians 5 sums it up nicely:

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. (Eph. 5:25–29)

You may be wondering: How does this Scripture point out this should be the second relationship we prioritize? Well, that is a good question. In this Scripture, we see a comparison to how Christ loved the church and how we love our own bodies.

Christ loves his church so much that he gave his life. There are very few people whom I would give my life for. These people would have to be very close to me and people I care deeply about. Also, it would include people I highly prioritize and value. We know Jesus loves his Father and prioritizes him as number one; we can see this in the way Jesus is always talking and doing his Father's will while on earth.

How much do you love your body? Probably a lot. You care if you get it hurt, you care how it looks, you care that it is healthy, and you think about it daily. Essentially, this writing is saying: Next to your relationship with God, prioritize and value your relationship with your spouse. After all, when you get married, you become one. It almost seems obsessive, but we should be thinking about our wives like we do our own bodies. This paints a clear picture that a spouse takes relationship priority number two.

Argue with me for a moment. "Steven, I have babies and toddlers, and they require way more than my spouse does. How can I possibly ignore them to spend time with my wife who is self-sustainable?" My response would be that I agree—almost. What people require and what makes a relationship flourish, I would argue, are different. Flourishing relationships take communication and intentionality. Take care of your kids, do not ignore them, but think about how you will be intentional to create a space to build a blossoming relationship with your spouse. Hint: You will have to say no to a lot of loud voices competing for your time. Remember, your kids will eventually grow up and move out. It will then be you and your spouse. How do you want that relationship to look and feel, come that time of being an empty nester?

LEVEL 4

Your children

This segues nicely to the other relationships within our realm of responsibility: our children. God, your spouse, and your children—the big three. Earlier in this book, we looked at how children are gifts from God that we are to steward wisely. Ephesians backs up this claim: "Fathers, do not be too hard on your children so they will become angry. Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4 NLV/NIV).

Paul is writing to be gentle with our children, raising them with teaching and training; we quickly see that this requires a lot of our time. This is a full-time job, and that is why kids are often the easiest distraction to misalign the relational priorities in our lives. Since we just debunked the common lie that our children are more important than our spouses, we do not have to spend a lot of bandwidth figuring out that they come next. Teaching and training our children will take intentionality to keep them as a priority.

LEVELS 5, 6 AND 7

Those not entrusted to your care

These last three relationships in the waterfall lie in the realm of those God has not placed in your direct care and responsibility. The order in which you prioritize these is dependent on what you are led by God to pursue most at the time and season of life you are in. Spend a lot of time in prayer, and ask for God's guidance on these relationships. These relationships are non-Jesus-follower friendships, extended family, and church/Jesus-follower friendships.

A. Nonbelievers

Matthew 28:18–20 states: “Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

To help discover who we should be prioritizing after the people who are placed into our care and responsibility, we can ask ourselves a question: Whom can we disciple? In case you missed it, Jesus says, “Go and make *disciples*.” He does not say, “Go and tell people about me and baptize them, then move on to someone else.” Our priority is to spend time with the *few* in our lives who are open and able to learn from us about the *commands* he has given us. Simply put, discipleship is helping people follow Jesus.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Steven spent years feeling guilty about the people he was not reaching. Then he realized three things that changed how he thinks about discipleship, time, and the people God has actually placed in front of him.

The chapter goes on to cover:

What the Bible actually says about caring for extended family, and the context most readers miss

Why fellow believers are not optional, and how iron sharpens iron

The questions that reveal who you are actually discipling right now

Read the full chapter, and the other eight, in *Reviving Fatherhood*.

DO THIS BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

Your waterfall audit

Map out your actual priorities. Write down how many hours you spent this past week on each of these. Look at the numbers honestly.

RELATIONSHIP

HOURS THIS PAST WEEK

Time with God (prayer, Bible, worship)

Time with yourself (rest, exercise, hobbies)

Time with your wife (intentional, not just coexisting)

Time with your kids (engaged, not distracted)

Everything else

Then choose one relationship that needs more time this week and schedule it. Put it on your calendar. Protect it.

THREE QUESTIONS TO SIT WITH

1 If someone looked at your calendar and bank account this week, what would they say your top three priorities are? Would they match what you say your priorities are?

2 “You will have to say no to a lot of loud voices competing for your time.” What are the loudest voices in your life right now competing for your attention? (Work? Hobbies? Social media? Friends? Sports?)

3 Take an honest inventory: Who are you discipling right now? Your wife? Your kids? Other men? If the answer is “no one,” what’s holding you back?

WHAT COMES NEXT

This is one chapter of nine

The waterfall tells you the order. The rest of *Reviving Fatherhood* shows you how to live it on an actual Tuesday, with a newborn, a job, a tired wife, and a phone buzzing in your pocket.

PART 1 **The Key Players**

The Greatest Father. We Are Masterpieces. Who Made You a Father?

PART 2 **Priority Management**

The Relationship Waterfall (you just read this). Thrive, Don't Just Survive: Routines. The Very Real Tension of Priorities.

PART 3 **Tools for Success**

Work Your Responsibilities. We Are Not Alone. Spiritual Armory: Tools and Weapons for Battle.

CLOSING **A Tale of Two Trees**

What will your legacy look like in twenty five years?

THE PROMISE

Steven makes four promises to the dad who puts the book into practice:

- 1 You will know what it is to be a dad and have more peace, confidence, rest, and self-worth in yourself and your abilities as a husband and father.
- 2 Your family will gain a leader who is prepared and equipped for the road ahead.
- 3 Those in your circle will be impacted. People are always watching; they will see a transformed man.
- 4 Your impactful legacy will extend in and through your kids and beyond your four walls.

Ready for the full experience?

The next chapter, *Thrive, Don't Just Survive*, takes this exact order and breaks it into your morning, your workday, and your evening. It begins: "Give God the best and first part of your day."

Get your copy at revivingfatherhood.com

THE FULL CHAPTER IS WAITING



Guiding Every Dad from First Steps to Lasting Legacy

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