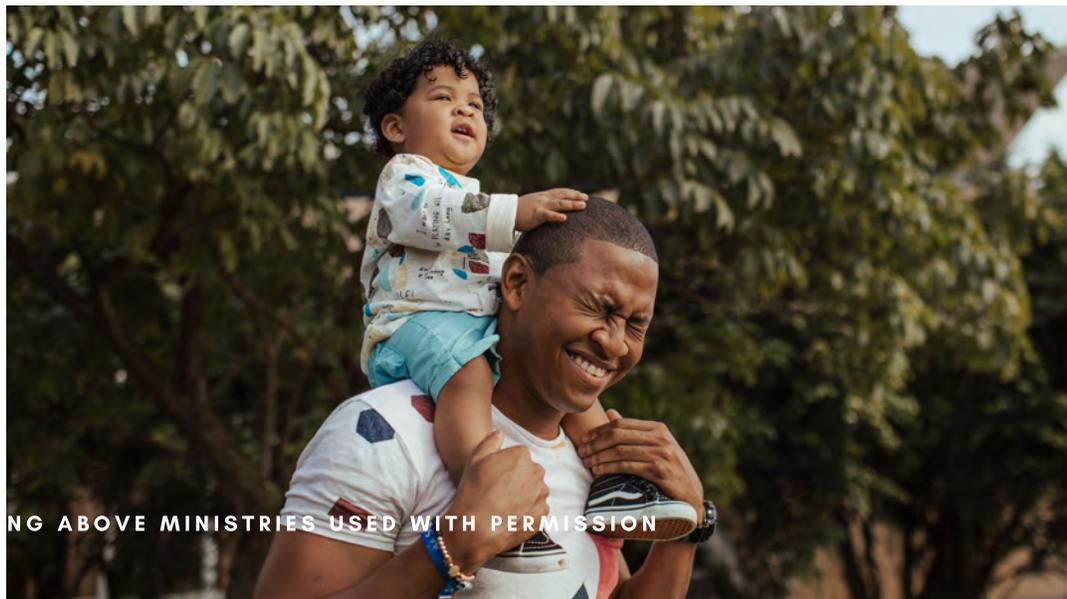


EXTRAORDINARY CALLING

A STUDY FOR SPECIAL-NEEDS DADS

RISING  ABOVE
MINISTRIES



Contact Us

Website:
risingaboveministries.org

Phone & Email:
931.526.7473
info@risingaboveministries.org

Instagram & Facebook:
@risingaboveministries

EXTRAORDINARY CALLING

About the Author



Jeff Davidson
1967 - 2017

In 2010, God gave Jeff Davidson a clear vision and calling to expand Rising Above to a national ministry. He and his wife Becky stepped out in faith to devote themselves full-time to the ministry. Rising Above began producing small group curriculums for parents of children affected by special needs. These curriculums are now being used in churches and groups around the world. It was an earth-shattering loss when, in May of 2017, Jeff passed away unexpectedly. Jeff lived his life in service to the special needs community and even now his message continues to impact families. His legacy lives on in all that Rising Above does.

How to use this resource?

This resource can be used as a small group curriculum or as a personal reflection and study.

If you are utilizing this as small group curriculum, you can download and print a copy for everyone in your group. You can read the devotional content together or individually before you meet.

Then, your small group leader can walk you through each of the discussion questions.

"The Next Step" is meant to be a way for you to go deeper. You can work on the Next Step as "homework" or complete the assignment with your small group.

We would love to hear your feedback. Email us at info@risingaboveministries.org. Thank you and we hope your small groups are filled with a deepening of your relationships with one another and with our Heavenly Father.

EXTRAORDINARY CALLING

For many years, Jeff Davidson shared wisdom and insight from his unique perspective as a special-needs dad on his blog, GoodnightSuperman.com. The writings contained in this study were first published there, and we are excited to make them available in this format for special-needs dads around the world. Jeff's conviction was that each dad of a child with special needs was called to and chosen for their role, and it is our hope that these sessions will inspire men to pursue that extraordinary legacy in their individual families.

Contents

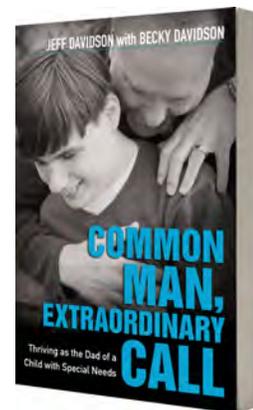
Session 1: Called to Choose: The Fork In The Road

Session 2: Called to Gratitude: The Man In The Mirror

Session 3: Called to Share: Help Wanted

Session 4: Called to Be Present: Sanctuary

If you are interested in reading more encouraging insights from the heart of Jeff Davidson, his book **Common Man, Extraordinary Call** can be found on Amazon and anywhere books are sold. This book will challenge, equip, and inspire fathers of children with special needs embrace the calling God has given them to be the committed men their families need.



SESSION 1

CALLED TO CHOOSE: THE FORK IN THE ROAD

Originally published February 4, 2016

White collar. Blue collar. No collar at all.

Some are just starting down this journey. Others have been on this road for many years.

Some are youthful, energetic, and engaged. Others are tired, weary, and passive.

I look around the room and down the table and I'm struck by the thought that most of us wouldn't even know each other if it weren't for the one thing we have in common: we are special-needs dads.

Here for a meal together and to spend some down time. We've all been chosen and called by God - given a mission for our lives. But we've not all accepted or embraced that mission.

We're all at different places and different spaces in this journey. For some of us, we've embraced the challenges and we are determined to fulfill our God-given mission. But others are mired down in anger, denial, and bitterness - still struggling to find the purpose in any of this.

As I look around at my band of brothers, I take a silent inventory. And as I do, I find myself dividing my fellow dads into three camps...



Those who chose the road marked *How*, those who chose the road marked *Why*, and those who stand at the fork unsure of which road to take.

The path of raising a child with special needs takes many twists, many turns, and covers some tough terrain. The road that a dad chooses makes the difference in life and death. The difference is in accepting God's mission, and choosing to abandon it all together.

How Dads and Why Dads

Why dads spend their lives wondering why everything in their lives happened. Why am I struggling with this? Why did that happen? What did I do to deserve this? Why is my life so hard and so unfair?

They always feel victimized or as if someone is to be blamed. They never find the answers to the questions and so they live forever in anger, denial, frustration, and bitterness. They will spend the rest of their lives circling around the questions, and soon, lose their way out of *Why*.

In this journey raising a child with special needs, the road to understanding *Why* is a dead-end road. You will wander aimlessly in circles instead of climbing out of the emotional pit.

The *Why* man dies emotionally, relationally, and spiritually, well before his time comes. And when his death does come, he will die having never found the answers he was looking for the whole time. He will die the same way he had lived - bitter, angry, and sad. His tombstone might as well be engraved, "Here lies another vacant dad."

The dad who chooses the right path soon finds himself entering into the land of **How**. He makes the great decision to become a *How* person himself.

The pivotal choice is to choose to be a *How* person.

How people respond to their challenges and trials by asking, "How can goodness come out of this situation? How can God redeem this and use it for his purposes? How can God be glorified by my response here? How can I rise above this? How can I fulfill this mission God has placed me on? How can I be the warrior, protector, provider, encourager, and equipper that God has called me to be for my family?"

That shift in perspective changes everything in this life. Now, everything will make sense to him. He will realize God is telling his story through his life and his child's life. This was not to be his story, but rather God's story.

Through the telling of his story, God will teach him about unconditional love, the abundance of grace, the essence of a gift, and the meaning of a selfless life. He will learn that his joy is not dependent upon his circumstances.

God has chosen him for this and called him with a plan and purpose for his life. His joy will be dependent on who he is with Christ. He recognizes that if he tries to place his joy in anything other than his relationship and standing with Christ, he will never find everlasting, unstoppable, unquenching joy.



The *How* dad lives happily ever after with his special-needs family. His life still has challenges, but he can find contentment and joy with his journey. He believes he had been chosen and called, and he remained committed.

I was a *Why* dad for many years until I allowed the Guide to lead me out of the wilderness and back onto the right path to *How*.

And so a choice has to be made. The mission begins when a man stands where the path diverges, and chooses to accept the mission God has for him. *How* or *why*?

Two paths diverge in the woods. Which one will you choose?

DISCUSSION

1. If you asked the people closest to you, do you think they would describe you as a *How* person or a *Why* person?
2. Are there some situations in which it is easier for you to ask *how* rather than *why*? Share with the group if you feel comfortable.
3. Jeff speaks about a "shift in perspective" that happens when we realize that we are part of God's story. Do you view your child's life and his/her special needs as "part of God's story?"
4. Jeff says a *How* dad, "recognizes that if he tries to place his joy in anything other than his relationship and standing with Christ, he will never find everlasting, unstoppable, unquenching joy." Read Colossians 1:13-23. What do you see in this scripture that gives you reason for joy, regardless of circumstances?

THE NEXT STEP

Look back over the last 24 hours and think about the situations, conversations, and interactions you've encountered. What do you remember asking most: *why* or *how*? Over the next 24 hours, pray and ask the Lord to help you ask *how* instead of *why* - even if it's simply, "Lord, **how** will you help me through this?"

SESSION 2

CALLED TO GRATITUDE: THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

Originally published February 27, 2015

I know you.

I recognize your face from when we were shaving this morning.

You're the man in the mirror.

I see things in your reflection that others don't see or grasp.

Everyone sees that you are a special-needs dad. They see your smiles, they hear your words, and they enjoy your sense of humor and quick wit.

But when we shave in the morning, I see you without the mask.

Today was pretty rough wasn't it?

Snowed in with a ravaging case of cabin fever, you sat and endlessly looked at pictures of typical dads with their typical kids playing in the snow. Sledding, building snowmen, throwing snowballs— all the stuff dads do with their kids when it snows in the South and schools are closed.

You died over and over again today didn't you?

Every picture was another reminder that you and your son can't participate in those activities because of his disabilities. Every Facebook post cuts your wounds open again and you bled for the life you once envisioned, and can not have now.

You even shed some silent tears, as you remembered your own father taking you sledding as a boy. You've been doing that a lot lately, haven't you?

Last week, when your son was going to his first dance, a special-needs prom, you got him a tuxedo and tied his fancy tie for him in preparation. For a few minutes, you basked in the moment. A proud moment. Every dad remembers the day his father helps him knot his first tie. You were meticulous in the details. You were so proud.





For one moment, you felt like a typical dad again. You participated in a moment to which all dads can relate. You even got choked up and you leaned over and kissed your son's forehead.

But when no one else could see it, I saw the Black Dog walk into the room.

I told you I see things only the man in the mirror sees. I saw the Black Dog wrap itself around your mind, and your momentary joy was snatched away from you in an instant.

You started thinking about how your son will never wear a tie at his wedding because he will never get married. That thought made you think about how you will never have grandchildren, as he is your only child.

Your thoughts spiraled out of control after that as the Black Dog began to howl. No one else heard it. But it was deafening to you, wasn't it? It reminded you of the question you ask yourself every day.

I hear you ask it to yourself when we shave in the morning. I hear you think about it at night when everyone else is asleep, and you lie there alone with your thoughts, the Black Dog at your feet. ***I know it haunts you.***

"Who will take care of your son after you die and are gone?"

"He needs me, what will he ever do without me?"

The man in the mirror has a choice to make. We all have a choice to make.

Today, the man in the mirror made the right choice.

The Bible is full of stories where God sends someone into the wilderness in order to ultimately have an encounter with God. Time and time again, people experienced periods in the wilderness only to eventually find God's presence, God's peace, and God's protection and provision in the dry deserts of their lives.

There are two responses to times wandering in the desert. You can choose to be grateful, or you can choose to be angry and bitter. One choice leads to life. One leads to death.

The man in the mirror sometimes ventures into the wilderness.

*"O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you.
My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you
in this parched and weary land where there is no water."
- Psalm 63:1-2*

Today the man in the mirror chose life. He chose gratitude as the path out of the wilderness.



He chose to celebrate the experiences he did have with his son, and not lament the experiences he will *not* have. He thought about their time today swinging, smiling, and eating popcorn together. A day that ended with 45 minutes of singing to his son and speaking blessings over him as they prayed.

He found joy, contentment, and happiness in the simple fact that God gifted him to be a father. God chose him and called him to be a special-needs dad. He rejoiced that in the wilderness moments of his thoughts, God always shows up and always provides.

Tonight, the man in the mirror will vanquish the Black Dog outside the house of his thoughts.

Tonight, he will lie down and say to God, "Thank you for waking me up today, and giving me one more day to be my son's dad."

And he will be grateful.

DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of one specific circumstance or situation along your family's special-needs journey when you have felt the tension to "choose between life and death"? Share with the group if you are comfortable.
2. Read Psalm 63:1-8. How can being satisfied by God Himself lead to gratitude in the middle of life's circumstances?
3. Jeff mentions social media as being a catalyst for discontent. When you look at your daily life, are there tangible, practical things that lead you into the "wilderness"? How about things that lead you *out* of the "wilderness" toward gratitude?
4. Read Psalm 9:1, Colossians 3:15-17, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. What stands out to you in these verses related to gratitude/thankfulness?

THE NEXT STEP

This week, set yourself up with road signs to point the way out of the "wilderness". Does a walk outside in nature lead your heart to gratitude? What about listening to worship music or posting an encouraging scripture where you can see it throughout the day? Pray and ask the Lord for creative ideas to use to remind yourself to choose gratitude.

SESSION 3

CALLED TO ENCOURAGE: HELP WANTED

Originally published June 4, 2014



Next week another Father's Day arrives. This will be my 16th as the father of a son with special needs.

I was thinking today about all the new dads of children with special needs who will be celebrating their very first Father's Day this year, and the ones who just received a diagnosis this year.

On a typical day, approximately 159 dads in the United States learn for the first time that their child has autism.

That means that over 58,000 dads are observing their first Father's Day as dads of children with autism this year.

And that's just one of many special needs.

Search engines will be fired up. Appointments will be made with Dr. Google. Questions will profoundly outnumber answers.

Emotions will range from confusion, anger, disappointment, blame, and denial, to just feeling overwhelmed.

The worst part to me is that in about three years, too many of those dads won't even be around at all. ***They're gone. Checked out. Cut and run.***

Many of the ones who will stay are going to hang around in body only. They've checked out mentally and relationally. They aren't really involved or engaged with their kids.

Vacant dads.

I wish the 30-year old dad of the newborn son I once was could have known the 47-year old dad of a sixteen year old son with special needs that I am now.

I would say, "Listen, I've been where you are. Your life didn't just end. In fact, this is only the beginning of the most amazing ride of your life. God is going to teach you and reveal things to you that you can't even imagine."

"Sit down, strap in and buckle up. If you want to soar and fly as a special-needs dad, you've got to survive the takeoff and expect some turbulence along the way."

“You will soar to heights as a dad, a husband, and a man that you can’t imagine. What a gift God has given you! You are one blessed man.”

That’s what the older me would have told myself when I first started down this path. That’s what I wish an older dad would have said to me.

It’s time for those of us dads who do “get it” to step up to the plate. It’s time for us to quit lamenting and just talking about the dads who leave, or who might as well have left. It’s time for us to try to do something about the problem my friends.

It’s time for special-needs dads to step up and mentor new dads. It’s time we quit talking, and instead show them how to be fathers to our children with special needs. Teach them, model for them, and pour into other dad’s lives.

It’s time we taught them, encouraged them, and inspired them. It’s time we take responsibility for a generation of kids with special needs growing up fatherless and we say, **“That’s enough!”**

“In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely. And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching.” - Titus 2:6-7

It’s time we volunteered to mentor single mom’s kids who have no father figure in their lives either.

The gift we have been given is too valuable not to share. My son with special needs has been the most amazing blessing in my life. I have an obligation to share that blessing with other dads.

You don’t hide a Picasso in the garage. You don’t keep Michelangelo’s David sculpture in the basement. You’ve been given a treasure. Share it with everyone else.





DISCUSSION

1. How long has it been since your child received their diagnosis? What is one thing you wish someone had told you the day you first received it?
2. What is the most encouraging thing anyone has ever said to you as a special-needs parent?
3. Read Titus 2:6-7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11. What are some ways you could encourage or "build up" a fellow special-needs dad, either through words or actions?
4. What is one blessing that you have seen come from your journey as a special-needs dad? Have you ever shared about it with others?

THE NEXT STEP

As of this writing, 1 in 54 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to the CDC website. Jeff shared that, "On a typical day, approximately 159 dads in the United States learn for the first time that their child has autism."

Do you know anyone personally who just received a diagnosis for their child? Think of one way that you could encourage or build them up this week.

SESSION 4

CALLED TO BE PRESENT: SANCTUARY

Originally published January 15, 2013

Yesterday seemed exceedingly long and stressful for me. We have so many different projects at different levels going on that require my attention and focus. On top of that our ministry is on the verge of announcing a new project that will more than likely require the rest of my productive life to bring to fruition.

So as I drove home, I could not get my mind to slip out of “work mode.” All these thoughts were jockeying for position in my head.

I just felt overwhelmed, and slightly out-of-control.

You’ve been there haven’t you?
Exhausted and weary, but unable to relax.

Just the toll of being a parent of a child with special needs is by itself grueling, tiring, and frustratingly difficult.

You feel like your whole day is just reactive. I describe it as being the ball inside an old fashioned pinball machine. You just bounce from one post or barrier to the next with little time to plan or think. You just roll through the day bracing for impact.

Our son with cerebral palsy and autism definitely makes our life interesting. In the evenings, to help my wife, I handle feeding Jon Alex his supper, and then we are off to swing in his platform swing in his bedroom.

He loves that swing. We usually swing for around 45 minutes before his nightly bath.

It’s dad’s time. We swing, I sing. Jon Alex is non-verbal. Doesn’t matter what I sing, he just craves that time and listening to me. On a typical night, I’ll sing a few children’s classics, some vintage U2 and other 1980s hits, a couple of church songs, and several made up goofy songs of ours.



It’s not what we do together. It’s that I intentionally set aside a time where I am conveying that nothing else in the world matters right now but giving him my undivided attention, my whole heart, and my sole focus.

Check your smartphone at the door.

My wife can't stand to listen to the singing because I never remember the actual lyrics and more or less make it up as I go.

Last night, Jon Alex didn't want to swing. He hasn't slept this week much at all and it finally had caught up with him. He just wanted to go straight to "night-night" after supper.

For the rest of the evening, I was restless, agitated, and just out-of-sorts.

All of a sudden I realized why. In the beginning that swing time was supposed to be part of Jon Alex's therapy.

But now, I realized it had instead become my therapy. That was *my* sanctuary. This was where my mind slipped out of work mode, I forgot all about my cares and concerns, and focused on what really mattered. This is where I feel closest to God and his purpose for my life.

I have come to crave and need those moments with him and that bedroom swing far more than Jon Alex does. I had missed *my* therapy.



Everyone needs to find their sanctuary.

People find their sanctuary in many different forms. Television, books, comfort food, money, jobs, Facebook or the internet. Then, they wonder why they feel so empty and so far from the presence of God.

I have found my sanctuary, my place where God hangs out and restores my soul, renews my mind, and reminds me of my purpose.

Turns out it's just down the hall.



DISCUSSION

1. Do you and your child with special needs have an activity or routine that you enjoy doing together?
2. Do you find it difficult to be fully present with your child or your family? Why or why not?
3. Do you see your focused attention as a gift you can give your child every day? Is this a gift you give your child often?
4. What are some practical ways to practice "sanctuary" with your child and/or family?
5. Read Psalm 23, Psalm 139:7 & 18, Matthew 28:20, and John 14:16. How does knowing that God is always fully present with you encourage you as you intentionally give your whole heart and attention to your child?

THE NEXT STEP

Consider setting aside time this week to "check your smartphone at the door" when you come home from work or when your family is at home for the evening. See what unexpected blessings may come from the extra interactions, conversations, or quiet moments together that our smartphones can often distract us.



THANK YOU FOR USING RISING ABOVE MINISTRIES' RESOURCES!

There are so many ways to connect with Rising Above!



Find us at risingaboveministries.org for more resources like this one!



Download our Rising Above App from any app store to stay connected and up to date on all events & new resources available! More info at <https://subsplash.com/risingaboveministries/app>



Follow us on Social Media! @RisingAboveMinistries



Listen to the podcast on most podcast platforms! More info at risingaboveministries.org/podcast