



# Recommended Reading

## Finding Our Fathers

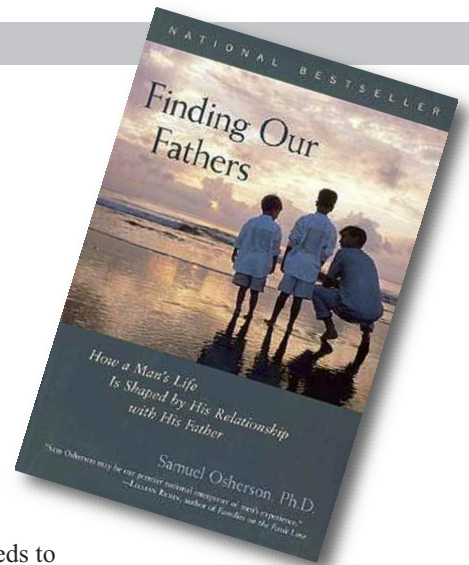
By Todd Peterson

In the 1990's, I worked as a counselor focusing on men's issues and men's relationships with women, children, and one another. At the time, a "men's movement" was growing in America and around the world. Men were meeting in support groups and weekend gatherings to explore what it means to be a man and redefine their masculine identity.

While the media and others made fun of men "drumming in the woods," the reality for men I worked with individually and in groups was a heartfelt experience of emotional healing and personal growth. The single most troubling relationship of these men, who ranged in age from their late 20's to early 70's, was with their father. Fathers who didn't have a clue about being a father and being emotionally vulnerable with their loved ones.

Samuel Osherson's book, *Finding Our Fathers*, was a groundbreaking book on the subject and continues to be as relevant for men today as when it was first published. While many fathers now have closer ties to their children and greater emotional awareness, the demands of their work lives are often even greater than in previous generations of fathers. In our high-speed world, dads are distracted from day-to-day human contact with their children (who are busier themselves!). Being fully present with one another is a difficult challenge.

Osherson explores how men's early experiences (and ongoing relationship) with their fathers affects their male identity and subsequent relationships with their wives, children, friends, and bosses. In his research and in-depth interviews, the author shows that "if a man is to be a good father to his son, or a good husband to his wife,



he needs to know what he got, or wanted and didn't get, from his own father; how he was both strengthened and wounded by that relationship; how it has influenced his own fathering style and his own identity as a man."

The book describes how men tend to recreate their father-son relationship with bosses or mentors, hide their emotional dependence on their wives, avoid deepening relationships with male friends, and struggle with being a father themselves.

In my experience personally and with thousands of men, the most important outcome of completing "unfinished business" with our fathers is an opening of our hearts, allowing us to be emotionally vulnerable in relationships with women, children, and our fellow men.

The best measure I found of a man's trustworthy masculinity is his valuing of relationships with other men, demonstrated by his willingness to devote time and energy to male friendships throughout his life. Trusted friendships with men who he feels safe and secure enough with to speak his feelings - his sadness, fears, anger, and joy. And to listen with caring and compassion to the emotions of other men (without advice-giving).

When a man can be a trusted friend, he is able to be a fully-engaged father, an intimate relationship partner, and ultimately, his own man.

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