

“When life doesn’t mirror our dreams, we can respond in anger, denial, depression, and escape. Tez speaks from his experience as a single dad with practical help and no-fuss straight talk. With humor, biblical truth, and disarming frankness, this easy-to-read book shines a light, providing practical steps to embrace God’s mission for single-again dads.”

Bill Hodgson

Former national director of Cru Australia

“*The Single Dad Detour* takes us along a journey that too many have traveled and where too few maps exist. Tez’s narrative resonates and his authenticity is liberating. If I were a single parent on this journey, I’d want Tez’s comforting voice on my GPS. It’s a warm and understanding voice that’s traveled the back roads and knows where it’s going.”

Rick James

Publisher for Cru Press, and author of *Jesus Without Religion* and *A Million Ways to Die*

“For an easily overlooked demographic, Tez Brooks wisely, honestly, and courageously deep-dives into how divorced fathers can survive being single and still be really good dads. From inner work to practical steps, this book serves and ‘skills up’ the man who finds himself parenting outside the significant relationship of marriage.”

Rohan Dredge

Founder and CEO of New Level Leadership, and senior pastor of Discovery Church, Melbourne, Australia

“Honest, vulnerable, and often hilarious, Tez Brooks reveals the raw sorrows and transcendent joys of fatherhood after divorce. *The Single Dad Detour* is a graphic road map drawn from the personal experiences of single dads. Along this byway, in a comfortably conversational way, Brooks reveals unexpected signposts of scriptural wisdom collected from years of both crashed guardrails and triumphant victory laps.”

Dr. Alan Kent Scholes

International speaker, theologian, and seminary professor for Cru’s Institute of Biblical Studies, and author of *Enjoying God*

“Single fathers are busy and often emotionally mangled. They need information like *The Single Dad Detour* that’s easy to read and use. There’s no delusion, only sincere assistance for men on this detour, offering real help to see them through.”

Mike Klumpp

Solo parenting expert for Divorce Care Ministries, and author of *The Single Dad’s Survival Guide*

THE SINGLE DAD
DETOUR

THE SINGLE DAD
DETOUR

*DIRECTIONS FOR FATHERING
AFTER DIVORCE*

TEZ BROOKS

The Single Dad Detour: Directions for Fathering After Divorce
© 2015 by Tez Brooks

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*Dedicated to my amazing children:
Sharaya, Caleb, Jady, and Anicah.
You continue to inspire me.*

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So Why a Book?

“I just want you out of my life!”

It was a Friday night when my wife blurted out that she was leaving me.

I suspected a breakup was imminent, but after almost a decade of marriage, I was hoping we could work it out.

Regardless of the fact that my wife turned from God and left me, I still had to face that I was not a great husband. Sin worked in *my* life as well—perhaps this drove my wife to the arms of another.

Within months it was over. Surveying the carnage open-mouthed, I was suddenly solo. I looked for help on the shelves of many a Christian bookstore and found little out there for single fathers. I learned a lot on my own and never dreamed of being at a place where I could actually turn and help others.

Now decades later—this book.

Because my life journey includes the hardship of an unwanted split, I wrote with the divorced father in mind. How do you raise children on your own, after the split? These pages were not written to help define who sinned and who is the innocent victim in a divorce. We have the Bible for that. What we will learn is how to be a rock for our kids while still healing from the trauma ourselves. Sadly, I have met several guys whose wife walked out on them and the kids to pursue a life unencumbered by the responsibility of having a family in tow.

Matthew Weinshenker, an assistant professor of sociology at Fordham University, said the state trend mirrors what's happening nationally, where the number of single dads has almost doubled from 1.5 million to 2.79 million since 1990.¹

Although the topic of survival applies to widowers, never-married dads, and even mothers—I have written, from a Christian worldview, with the goal of helping divorced fathers in particular.

This book is about making life work for a father on his own. It's my hope the Holy Spirit will use my story, and those of other men, to minister to dads everywhere who desperately want to glorify God as they lead their precious ones through life.

Besides being a former youth pastor and police chaplain, I served in various ministry-related roles most of my adult life. I currently serve as a full-time missionary with Cru, an international ministry whose goal is to win, build, and send disciples. I'm not a licensed counselor, but it's with that ministry background that I'm able (with God's unbelievable grace) to offer some hope and wisdom for dads.

I also don't want to minimize the value of my marital experiences. Being divorced doesn't disqualify a person from giving solid, biblical marriage counsel to men. To the contrary, some of the best counsel I've heard has come from men who've journeyed through the back roads of divorce. Despite my past, I've seen how God-given wisdom has outshined any labels that religious judges have tried to attach.

Lastly, being the father of four brings lessons that are better shared than tucked away. I have two children from my previous marriage. Seven years after my ex-wife left, I married Christine, a lovely woman who daily lives out Proverbs 31. Together, we produced two more girls. God continues to use all four of my kids to develop me into the father he wants me to be.

My favorite Scripture passage says it best: "I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching

out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back" (Phil. 3:12–14 MSG).

P A R T 1

Driver's Education

Where in the World Am I? (Finding Your Way)

“I don’t need a map; I’m just lost.”

Her name was Babette—Babs for short. She talked a lot and was a little bossy, but I could overlook that. Slim and eye-catching, Babs took me places I never dreamed of. I couldn’t keep my hands off her, even when I was driving. She was my first Global Positioning System (GPS), and I loved turning her on.

She told me how far I needed to go, and when I would arrive at my destination. Her British accent captivated me. After all, I was accustomed to a female voice always telling me what to do—but that’s a book of another title.

I became dependent upon Babs. She was amazing—I didn’t have to think about anything. She even knew where all the seedy little places were. Places you don’t want people to know you’re going—like Goodwill and Taco Bell.

After a few years, though, I noticed I couldn’t always trust her. At times she seemed a bit confused and disoriented, recalculating for no reason at all. I updated her maps and kept her from extreme temperatures, but once she made the decision to shut down, I couldn’t stop her. One day, Babs broke beyond repair. Our relationship was over and I felt—lost.

Grabbing an old atlas from under my car seat, I was able to navigate to my destination—old school. This method wasn’t as convenient as Babs,

but it got me there. In a similar manner, my experience as a single parent found me lacking. Sharaya was only six and Caleb was four, when the tragedy of divorce touched their little lives. Despite my best efforts, I couldn't protect my daughter and son from its wounds.

They were forever changed—their journey forever altered.

My Journey

My first wife and I entered our marriage with some major issues from our past, none of which had been properly addressed, diagnosed, treated, or resolved.

Early on, the warning signs in our relationship began to show. Impurity stained our union both before and after the wedding. Forgiving one another, we pressed on. My faith in God ran deep, but I quickly saw we were headed down two different roads to find the restoration we needed.

Attempts to make repairs using date nights, prayer times, marriage retreats, and counseling didn't help. I prayed for a miracle. My desire was to woo my wife back, but when I begged, it only made me look pathetic—it disgusted her.

After months of prayer, counsel, even shameless begging, it dawned on me I couldn't *make* her love me. Like my GPS, the relationship fell apart and I was quickly lost.

This crossroad led to a decision. A few weeks after our separation, I had to stop and regroup. Eating cups of noodles and renting movies every night wasn't good. Wallowing in my self-pity had to stop. It was time to man-up and help my children walk through this.

I found myself in much the same situation as when I'm driving in a new area without a map. The convenience of two people working together to navigate through parenthood was gone.



YOU MATTER

"Whatever you think about and feel as you reflect, remember that you play a pivotal role in your child's life. You do make a difference. You are tremendously important in the life of your child."

—Carey Casey, CEO, National Center for Fathering!

Back then, I had no older men speaking into my life—even my father didn't know how to counsel me. He was a solid Christian who loved the Lord and raised me in church—even leading me to Christ. Yet my dad declined giving fatherly guidance even when I would ask him outright. Perhaps it was fear of giving poor counsel, or maybe because his own parents never guided him. At any rate, by the time I turned sixteen I was on my own when it came to finding wisdom during challenging circumstances. It was a time before accountability partners were in vogue. So when my marriage failed, I was already used to being an island and too naïve to seek out a mentor.

The next few months following the separation were full of complicated decisions about my identity, my fatherhood, my integrity, and more. Did people still consider me a respectable married man? Where did I fit in?

In a gospel tract I helped create with Cru, I share my journey of faith. I felt like I was always God's problem child—as if he felt obligated to make me his own, just because I repented of my sins. Through my childhood and college years, there was an underlying belief that if God had the choice, he would rather have skipped over me.

As an adult, I built my life on the dream that a wife, kids, and a house would make me successful. That dream fell apart when I lost everything that brought me security. I felt worthless, belonging to no one. Rejection paralyzed me. Although I was a Christian, I wasn't fully trusting in Christ. I couldn't see my true identity as his child.

There were more concerns. How was I to handle the slander against my wife? Attitudes, bad choices, and even outright sin both angered and embarrassed me. Lies, accusations, fraud, and even jail time touched our family. Do I ignore it or defend her honor in light of a possible reconciliation? It was only fair to let some know about my own sins, which may or may not have caused my wife to leave. It was all so untidy and somewhat disconcerting. At times I felt like I was watching an episode of Jerry Springer. It seemed daily there were moments when I had to make split-second decisions to take the high road or the low one. Unfortunately, if my kids were not around, the low road won out more than a few times.

Couple all this with the added feat of keeping life normal for Sharaya and Caleb—I was bound to drop the ball from time to time.

Killing Fatalism

Perhaps you're thinking about giving up. Maybe you're so tired you're starting to believe it's best to just leave it all behind—kids and all. You may have bought the lie that your children are better off with just a mother and in time they will resiliently forget about you. On the contrary, according to *The Art of Manliness.com*, kids growing up without a dad present are more likely to:

- Need constant approval to feel validated
- Have difficulty with assertiveness
- Lack confidence and self-esteem, especially in decision making
- Become harsh self-critics
- Value loyalty of friends to the exclusion of common sense
- Have difficulty finishing what they start
- Blame others rather than take responsibility²

The world may try to polish over the ugliness of divorce. These days it's considered derogatory to say "broken home," so we often hear that phrase replaced with a politically correct phrase like "single-parent environment." But let's face it, we're men—let's put on our big-boy pants and call it what it is. Divorce is ugly and depressing. It destroys families and God hates it. Now that we've admitted divorce requires a rebuilding of our lives after the smoke clears, hopefully we can talk openly, at times even humorously, about its effects on us dads.

I often encounter men who are in various places on the single-dad journey, without a map, like I was. They drift from one roadside attraction to another without direction, letting life's highway take them and their children wherever it wants.

Don't get me wrong—at times I too drifted. I still do sometimes. We

don't always have a chance to direct the route life takes us. Despite this, we can still redirect our path with God's help, and if need be, pull into a rest area in order to reestablish a game plan.

It's essential to remember none of this caught God off guard. He is all-knowing. Even as you and I were exchanging vows with our respective wives, he was aware our families would be torn apart by our sins or another's. Before we were conceived he knew this. Yet in his sovereignty, God looked down through history and specifically chose us to be a daddy. The Lord can equip us to lead our children through this wilderness. He's put a lot of faith in us and he's the ultimate strategic planner. That encourages me.

Lead On

Although we can nurture quite well at times, men have been created with special abilities to organize and lead teams, hunt, and compete with courage and stamina. Dads can encourage their children to never quit—to press on, building confidence like no one else. Stepping up to polish those traits is key if we are to fulfill our role as fathers, especially during moments of crisis or prolonged seasons of change.

Circumstances like divorce may try to detour us, but we never want to embrace a fatalistic attitude about parenting the little ones God entrusted to our care. Call yourself a tiger dad, an overachiever, or a control freak—no matter. I believe the Lord calls all fathers to avoid abdicating leadership and to cast off lethargy in order to protect our kids from being devoured by the enemy and the world.

My hope is that this book will offer a little assistance for fathers trying to navigate through some pretty tough roadblocks. Therapist and *Huffington Post* writer, Emily Gordon says:



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

"It was the early 1970s and I was recently divorced. I had three kids and was totally broke. I managed to find work back east on the straw-hat circuit—summer stock—but couldn't afford hotels, so I lived out of the back of my truck, under a hard shell."

—William Shatner³

In my experience as a therapist and as a friend, it seems that the majority of the breakup resources available are for women and not men. Women, who tend to be more vocal about their emotional struggles, are the squeaky wheels that get the grease from friends, from online communities, from books, and from therapeutic approaches. Women are encouraged to go on an emotional journey of self-care after a divorce, while men are expected to need help learning how to cook and parent on their own. When you Google “how men handle divorce,” many of the links advise women on what to do if their husbands become violent during the divorce process. Why is there so little focus on how men can heal after a divorce?⁴

Been There

Remarried years ago, I’ve placed the difficult season of single parenting behind me. I’m glad it is over. Some have suggested I make good use of my experience, but reliving it in order to help other dads seemed painful. Have you ever had a doctor poke around on some scar tissue you developed? Don’t you just want to smack him? That’s what I thought this would feel like. Writing a book to benefit others seemed as if I were digging in nasty cat litter to find someone else’s car keys.

My flesh says, “Why should I have to dig through that for someone else? I found my own keys years ago.”

But when the Holy Spirit works in me, he changes things. He has to come along and ruin everything—softening my heart and giving me supernatural compassion, which doesn’t normally exist in me. It’s the Spirit of God who moves me to gladly sift through the cat litter of life, clean up the car keys, and present them to those who can’t seem to get where they need to go.

During the seven years I was between marriages, I served as custodial parent and other times noncustodial. Sometimes the kids and I lived in the same city, then other periods they resided out of state and we saw each other only once or twice a year.

Through it all, I never lost faith in God. I ran to him and haven't regretted it. Sharaya and Caleb survived, growing up into two fine adults. They share my opinion that none of us could have made it without God's help.

In John 12:32 Jesus says, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." I want to lift him up in this book because I believe none of us can successfully make this journey without help from the Creator of the universe. Therefore, I reference him often. In fact, if you enjoy an interactive experience, I've included questions, scriptural references, and practical ideas at the end of each chapter. Hopefully, whether through prayer, journaling, or Scripture memorization, these will encourage you to develop a deeper relationship with God Almighty.

If you're a single dad, chances are you're trying to squeeze in a chapter here or there. Take time to do the interactive sections in a way that makes this more than just another book to read. Allow it to challenge, encourage, and refresh you. Your life is hard enough without the pressure to perform. Just love your kids well and love God more.

The Lord desires men who will rise to their potential in whatever situation they are facing, so the name of Jesus can be lifted up. Chances are good you're one of those men. So climb in, buckle your seat belt, and take a ride with me as we consider this unpredictable road you're traveling.

CHECKING YOUR GAUGES

Why am I reading this book?

What are some of the ways I drift when parenting?

Finish this sentence: "I lead my child best in the area of . . ."

Do I consider myself a Christ follower? Why or why not?

STUDYING THE MAP

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

REROUTING

Hug your kid(s).

Commit to making time at the end of each chapter to do the exercises provided. A blank journal will come in handy for some of these.

Try to give yourself equal portions of grace and discipline as you navigate through this season of life.

REFUELING

Lord, thank you for trusting me with the child you gave me. Help me lead him or her through this season well. Without you, I am lost. You have created me to be strong, but help me not to depend on my own know-how. Teach me to put my trust in you. I need you to show me the way. Amen.