



Nathan Foster is assistant professor of social work at Spring Arbor University in Spring Arbor, Michigan. He has also been a counselor and served as director of Door of Hope Counseling and Consulting (Arvada, Colorado).

## Finding My Father at 14,000 Feet: An Interview with Nathan Foster

### **What was your experience of your father—the well-known Richard Foster—during your childhood?**

As a child, I was proud of my dad. Hearing him speak to crowds filled me with excitement; perhaps he would mention my name, or tell a story about me, or in some way acknowledge his home life. At first I think I accepted that God was using my dad to help people. Later I felt mildly ambivalent about the fact that God seemed to need my dad. Somewhere along the way, my feelings shifted to embarrassment and anger that Dad had “holier work” to do than spend time with me. By thirteen I was filled with rage, and I shut down. Granted, much of my experience was normal development, but a deep wound was formed. The fruits of my childhood were bitterness and disgust for anything Christian.

### **What were some of the toughest moments you experienced during your hikes together?**

Once I was caught exposed on the mountain during an intense lightning storm. Another time we had to outrun a forest fire. And once we found ourselves freezing in a freak snowstorm. Probably the toughest incident was when I got altitude sickness, which was even more perilous because of a rare heart condition.

Enduring anyone’s company for days on end can also be rough. There were times when I pushed our conversations toward difficult topics; of course that wasn’t very comfortable. We also dealt with some highly vulnerable situations, like my sobriety.

### **What did you learn about your dad that surprised you?**

I learned that I really enjoyed his company—this was a huge surprise.

I learned that I was more like him than I ever thought, and this was okay.

I learned that my dad was one of the good guys.

### **What did you learn about yourself that surprised you?**

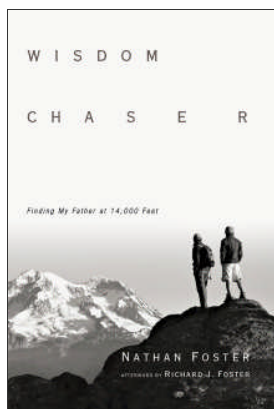
I learned that I needed to slow down and find a good pace, and with that mentality I would be able to accomplish much more than I even thought possible. I was beginning to see how my self-disdain related to pride and self-centeredness. I also started to realize the beauty of reveling in my insignificance.



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# Q&A

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW



*Wisdom Chaser: Finding My Father at 14,000 Feet*

180 pages, paperback,  
978-0-8308-3630-7, \$16.00

Available April 2010

### **How has your relationship with your father changed?**

Significantly. In the beginning I was a little standoffish with him. Mostly I didn't want or trust him to be involved in much of my life. Today, I would consider him to be one of my best friends. My dad is a grounding force for me. Our time together centers me in some weird way. There are few people I would rather be around.

### **How has your understanding of faith changed?**

I seem to understand less and less as the years go by. Mostly I learned that I was loved, and that changed everything. However, I find it difficult to mark changes in my spiritual development. The book chronicles my twenties, which was a huge time of growth for me. It's hard to say what came from the hikes and what didn't. They were certainly a significant part of my journey.

I don't view things as black and white as I used to and I'm much more accepting of others and myself. I'm more relaxed about my walk. I realized that I don't need to try as hard. I gained a deeper understanding of God's grace and what Jesus meant when he said his burden is easy and his yoke is light.

My dad taught me so much. That's basically what the book is about. The original subtitle was something like *Lessons I Learned from My Father on the Trail*. Ironically nothing I really learned was from things he said, at least not directly. Dad's lightness, contentedness, loving ear, joy and laughter taught me kingdom life.

### **What advice might you offer to those who wish they knew their parents better?**

Take risks. Be willing to reach out. Life is extremely short and relationships just might be the most significant thing we will ever do on earth. I think it's common to think that because they are the parents, they should be the ones pursuing relationships with us. I've found that sometimes parents are more confused than their children when it comes to connecting. Most adults have few close friendships and have forgotten how to build relationships with others.

It usually helps if we're willing to realize that we may not know everything there is to know about our parents, that our perceptions may just be skewed. When we're able to see our parents as flawed, and still accept them for who they are, finding the relationship we have always wanted is much easier.

### **What would you suggest to parents who wish they understood their children better?**

Choose your battles. Having a close trusting relationship with your son or daughter is more important than the behaviors or choices you approve of—college, piercings, etc. . . . In fact, instead of disregarding the interests of your child simply because you can't relate, get

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involved. Find out why they like that band that drives you crazy.

No matter how much they seem to want nothing to do with you, deep inside they long for your attention and acceptance.

If you are on the outs with your teenage/adult child, you lose your ability to speak wisdom and insight into their lives. I know so many college-aged kids who hide who they are and the things they do from their parents because they don't think their parents will accept them. I'm not suggesting that you throw out your standards. But if you lose your ability to be heard, what's the point of being right? Help lead them in the right direction. Let them make their own decisions and then be there to celebrate or pick up the pieces.

### **Where did the title of the book come from?**

In the world of hiking, many people take on trail names. Wisdom Chaser is the trail name I gave my father. It was as much a joke as a compliment.

Dad was always getting me to teach him outdoor survival skills. He'd be the first to admit that he worked so hard at learning, but was really never able to grasp much. He was *chasing wisdom*, which really is reflective of how he lives life in so many ways; he's always trying to learn. The title has a few other meanings but I'll leave it to the reader to unpack those.



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