

THE NEW DAD'S PLAYBOOK

GEARING UP FOR THE
BIGGEST GAME OF YOUR LIFE

BENJAMIN
WATSON



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Benjamin Watson, *The New Dad's Playbook*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2017 by Benjamin Watson

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8010-1897-8

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2011

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

This publication is intended to provide helpful and informative material on the subjects addressed. Readers should consult their personal health professionals before adopting any of the suggestions in this book or drawing inferences from it. The author and publisher expressly disclaim responsibility for any adverse effects arising from the use or application of the information contained in this book.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Benjamin Watson, *The New Dad's Playbook*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To my beautiful wife,
whose selfless devotion to our family
inspires me to be a more loving husband,
a more caring father,
and a more godly man.

Contents

Foreword by Meg Meeker, MD 11

Introduction by Kirsten Watson 15

Part 1 Training Camp

1. Where's the Fatherhood Playbook? 21
2. Pre-practice Warm-Up: *What You Should Expect When She's Expecting* 31
3. What's in a Name and Babymoons 51
4. Sex: *The Good, the Bad, and Everything in Between* 57

Part 2 Regular Season

5. X's and O's: *Your Pregnancy Handbook* 65
6. Bed Check: *Her Body Is Changing and So Are Her Needs* 83
7. Baby Showers: *They're Not Just for Women Anymore* 97
8. Make a Budget: *Babies Are Expensive* 111

Part 3 Super Bowl

- 9. Scrimmaging: *Last-Minute Preparations* 119
- 10. Game Day: *Labor, Delivery, and Your First Moments with Your Child* 131

Part 4 Postgame

- 11. Monday Morning Quarterback: *The Baby's Home, Now What?* 143
- 12. Keeping the Marital Bonds Strong 159

Part 5 Off-Season

- 13. You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Be a Perfect Dad 171
- 14. Team Expansion: *The Second Child and Beyond* 181

Epilogue 193

Acknowledgments 197

Notes 199

Foreword

Several years ago I was chatting with Benjamin on the phone and he mentioned that he was considering writing a manual for fathers in order to help them through the pregnancy and birthing process. I was thrilled. “Of course you should write this book,” I remember telling him. “The world needs to hear from great men and fathers!” Little did I know then what I know now—that Benjamin was not going to write a simple manual of how-tos for fathers, but rather he was going to write a masterpiece. And that is exactly what this book is: a masterpiece that combines clear guidance for fathers on what they need to do, how they need to think, and why they should lean on God during one of the most challenging and precious times in their lives. It is not a simple guidebook on fathering. Benjamin gives the reader a peek into how men experience a process that, for far too long, has been written about only to help mothers. I am so proud that he has cracked the mold and been courageous enough to speak on behalf of the overlooked parents—dads.

As a pediatrician of thirty years, I have listened to literally thousands of fathers. I have heard your stories about how you feel excluded from bonding with your babies, your fear over what pregnancy and child-rearing may do to your relationships with your wives, and also your doubts about whether you have what it takes to be great dads. I know firsthand how critical you are in your children's lives because I have seen the pain your wives and children feel when you leave. And I have been blessed to watch many more of you fathers hang in there through the rough times with your wives and kids. I am thrilled to know that after you read this book, you will have more encouragement, more knowledge, and a clearer sense of your deep value to your children and to their mothers. *We need you good men.*

Benjamin will teach you many things about pregnancy and birthing that you never knew. I learned many things from reading this book, and in fact, I wish that my own physician husband had this book when I was pregnant! Benjamin teaches men in a gentle but firm way how they can help their wives. He shows us women how men think and what you feel while we are pregnant. After reading this, I felt badly for all of the men who have gone through their wives' pregnancies and not had necessary help. The truth is, encouraging, teaching, and supporting fathers on all levels is long overdue in America. It is high time that we women pay attention to the fathers of our children. In that vein, I encourage every pregnant woman to read this book too. But I will issue a warning: you will feel jealous of Benjamin's wife, Kirsten, for a while, because she hit the jackpot when it comes to husbands! Benjamin describes being able to read her moods and figure out what type of help made her feel most loved—gifts,

time, or rest. And you will read that he even sat in a football locker room and ordered her maternity clothes! See what I mean? I honestly have never known another man who has done that. But those character qualities—kindness, empathy, and insight—are what make Benjamin the perfect author of this book. He lives what he teaches. He is the real deal.

There are many parenting books available, but none has been written with such heart as this one. In fact, even if you aren't a parent, you should read it, because you will learn some very important lessons on relationships, love, and how to live a good life. I am especially proud that a man such as Benjamin—an NFL pro—wrote this book, because he is a hero to many men (and women). By playing an elite sport and writing such a heartfelt, information-packed book, he redefines masculinity. He shows us that men can be strong and tough but also kind and compassionate enough to parent really well.

My hope for this book is that the words Benjamin writes and the lives that he changes through it will begin a new revolution for men. Fathers need to regain their rightful place in the family and be encouraged to bond with their children. Studies show that when a baby, child, or teenager has a good father, that child will soar. Specifically, when a child feels connected to his or her dad, he or she is less likely to get into trouble at school, suffer from depression and anxiety, or get involved with sex, drugs, and alcohol, and is more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college. I have written about these phenomena in my parenting books. As a staunch child advocate, I have read the literature about the impact that fathers make on their children, and it is overwhelmingly clear: dads change their kids' lives. The choice

they have is this: Will they change their children's lives for the better or for the worse?

Reading this book will help any father anywhere be a better parent. Period. And it will help fathers enjoy parenting more. As a pediatrician, I will say that all fathers or fathers-to-be need to read it. And they need their wives to read it so that mothers can finally see how fathers feel. We women need to know what to do to help you. And—this is hard for many mothers to swallow—we mothers need to give up some parenting territory and let you dads in. You need to be rocking and feeding babies because those babies need to bond with fathers too. We need to engage you in the pregnancy process and quit being so controlling about parenting. Breast-feeding is wonderful, but many fathers feel excluded from bonding because they can't feed their babies. So we need to encourage fathers to put breast milk in a bottle and feed their children. This is not only fair but is important to the health of the father-child relationship.

If you are a mother or father, I am so happy that you picked up this book. Don't stop reading. Turn the pages and let the great advice contained there soak in. Learning about pregnancy and birth from a whole new perspective will open your eyes. And then, when you have finished, give a copy to the newest expectant father that you know. He will thank you, his wife will thank you, but most importantly, you will do a great service to the wonderful children that he raises.

Meg Meeker, MD

Introduction

You may be familiar with Benjamin Watson, the NFL football player and Super Bowl champion, but you may not know that in addition to giving his best on the gridiron, he's also a dedicated husband and daddy. Benjamin and I have been married since 2005, and together we have been blessed with five children ages seven, six, four, three, and nine months. Our house is busy, noisy (except for when the kids are eating or sleeping), and full of laughter, bike riding, mud-pie making, and tons of pretend play. Although I'm the primary parent at home during the day, when Benjamin is home, our family just "clicks" and we run like a well-oiled machine. I know the hours Benjamin has given during his twelve years in the NFL to be the best football player he can be. Whether spending extra time at the gym, experimenting with different workouts that will make him faster and stronger, or playing with an injury, he gives 100 percent of himself on the field. Benjamin is also committed to us. He loves us, and he pours his heart even more into being a better husband and daddy than a better football player. It may surprise you to learn that Benjamin is

a big part of keeping our family strong. He is as committed to raising our children as he is to winning championships.

You may be wondering, “What makes Benjamin qualified to write a parenting book?” I can assure you that the pages you are about to read are honest and true. Benjamin believes that it is his duty as a father to be a positive role model for our kids. He practices what he preaches, and after our five pregnancies and deliveries, he’s had the opportunity to get it right! He did not do everything perfectly, but he was willing to learn and try doing things differently. He changes diapers, cooks, cleans, gives baths, does “daddy-daughter date nights,” reads books, and becomes the kids’ real-life jungle gym. He also asks for forgiveness from, disciplines, and prays with all of them. Much of what we do is modeled after our amazing parents, but we’ve learned a lot on our own family journey, and we hope that sharing our experiences will encourage, empower, and excite you as you start your own.

Benjamin assisted with all five of our deliveries. Notice that I said “assisted” and not “attended.” There is a *big* difference. All five were different, and what I needed with each one changed. It’s important for fathers to have an understanding of what’s going on with their wives during the nine months of pregnancy, the delivery, and postpartum. Let me just say that it behooves a husband to be able to decipher his wife’s mood swings and bodily changes. If you know why it’s happening in the first place, it may prevent you from saying, “Wow! You’re getting huge!” (which, even if you don’t read past this page, *please don’t ever say*) and instead give her a simple hug or gentle caress of the abdomen to make her feel comforted and loved. Trust me, men, let Benjamin’s mistakes help you get things right the first time!

Benjamin has included checklists throughout the book to help you stay organized and on top of your game. He has a strong parental instinct and drive, similar to what makes him such an excellent athlete. His experiences can be educational for you. As you'll see in the following pages, a great fatherly drive doesn't ensure perfection every day. Your child needs *both* imperfect parents. Your presence and your commitment to your family are more important than checking off all the "best father ever" milestones. Love, support, and guidance through meaningful engagement are what your growing family needs, and you'll discover some of the ways to do that here.

So whether you picked this book up to read on your own or it was given to you with a slight "threat" to finish it before the baby comes (*wink, wink*), be encouraged. You have a cheat sheet that is going to help you not be Benjamin, but be the best father *you* can be, and always be thinking about how you can be better. Regardless of the personal relationship you have with your own father, you have to aim to be better. There are no excuses. Your wife needs you. Your baby needs you. And you can do it.

Benjamin and I are believers in Jesus Christ. I believe that this spiritual strength gives us the ability to be real role models for our children. We see our children as secret weapons for making the world a better place. It's our responsibility to raise them to love Jesus and love others. If we do this, perhaps their love and light will guide others to the kingdom. I am often reminded of the words in Psalm 127:3–5:

Children are a heritage from the LORD,
offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.

Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.

Children are God's blessing, and we do not take that responsibility lightly. We have been entrusted with the important work of molding our children in the image of the Lord.

Women may bring babies into the world, but fathers are critical in raising healthy, happy children. Don't let society tell you that you are only worth as much as you bank. I couldn't imagine doing this by myself, and our children's relationship with Benjamin is one that I could never replace or duplicate. Your physical and emotional presence is crucial, and your children know it even from the womb. Our youngest child would do somersaults in utero whenever Benjamin came into a room and started talking—she could feel his presence, and their bond remains strong. All of our children are better for having a strong, loving father in their lives. And yours will be too.

Kirsten Watson

A hand-drawn diagram of a soccer field. The field is represented by a grid of 'X' marks, likely representing the defense. In the foreground, there are several 'O' marks representing the offense. Arrows indicate the direction of play, showing a ball being passed from the left side towards the center and then towards the right. The diagram is simple and illustrative, typical of a coaching manual.

PART 1

TRAINING CAMP

CHAPTER ONE

Where's the Fatherhood Playbook?

Most men dream of becoming fathers one day. If you are one of those men, or if you have recently learned that you are about to join the ranks, this book will show you how to have a positive, lifelong influence on your growing family, starting as soon as you hear the happy news.

I became a father to my first daughter, Grace, in 2009. She was due on Super Bowl Sunday, of all days. At that time, I was in the National Football League (NFL) playing for the New England Patriots. Since we hadn't made it to the playoffs that year, I planned to spend Super Bowl Sunday at home with my wife, Kirsten, waiting for our lives to change. Grace came a day or two early, so we watched the game in the recovery room. I was twenty-eight years old, and my wife and I had been married for three years. Grace is now seven years old, and since her arrival we have been blessed with four other

children: Naomi, age five; Isaiah, four; Judah, three; and Eden, who is nine months old.

Kirsten and I thought we were prepared for parenthood—we were both fortunate to have excellent role models during our childhoods. My mother and father raised me and my five younger siblings, but being the oldest came with responsibility, which meant changing diapers and feeding my baby brothers and sisters. My wife also grew up in a tight-knit family. But there were still plenty of times after we brought Grace home that it felt like we had forgotten everything we knew about child-raising.

Currently, I am a tight end for the NFL's Baltimore Ravens, and a lot of my teammates are having their first children, so they see me as something of an expert on fatherhood. They come to me with their parenting and pregnancy questions. Many of these guys remind me of how I felt before Grace was born—they think they know what is coming, but they don't.

The Road of Discovery

Preparing for a new baby, especially a first baby, is a long road of discovery. Good luck finding the equivalent of *What to Expect When You're Expecting* for men. One minute your wife tells you that you are having a baby, the next you are running out of the house at midnight to buy her a pint of ice cream. Before you know it, you are in the delivery room squeezing her hand and waiting to hear your baby's first cry. Amid the rush of adrenaline and surging emotions, visitors come and go, and soon enough you are all told to go home. You find yourself standing at the hospital exit hazily thinking

to yourself, *Wait, I know we had almost a year to prepare, but I have no idea what to do now!*

I was nervous with Grace because there seemed to be better directions for assembling a bicycle than there were for taking care of a newborn child. No matter how many of my brothers' and sisters' diapers I had changed, I still felt unprepared. I made a few errors along the way, but I learned from them and eventually developed a solid game plan for facing challenges with my other children. I hope this book will spare you some of my fumbles and provide you with a path to parenting success.

Fear of the Unknown Is Natural

Most men are scared or nervous when they hear they are going to become a father. Then, when they hold their child in their arms for the first time, they feel elation and pride and wonder how they can avoid hurting this fragile creature. What if you cause harm without even knowing you are doing something wrong? I don't care how many Super Bowl rings you wear, what your job title is, or what kind of car you drive, when your wife is pregnant for the first time, many men would rather turn the other way than ask, "How do I do this? How can I help?"

This book is for those guys: You don't have to wing it for the next nine to twelve months—in fact, you shouldn't! I hope I can provide guidance for those of you scratching your heads and wondering where you fit into this whole process.

In the conversations I have with men about to become first-time fathers, I hear it all:

- “Is my wife going to be overreacting, vomiting, and pushing me away in bed until the baby arrives?”
- “My brother-in-law said something about labor lasting twenty-four hours—how can my wife push that long?”
- “I really want a boy to toss the ball around with, but we’re having a girl. I’m disappointed and don’t know what to do.”
- “How do you hold something so small without breaking it?”

These questions are honest and sincere. Contrary to popular belief, many men want to be a part of the pregnancy process. They want to be the best partners possible to the women who are bringing their children into the world.

The first few days after your child’s birth are a blur, and if you don’t prepare beforehand, you will be overwhelmed. When you are exhausted—and you will be—the smallest problem can send you into a panic. For example, if your baby needs to eat every two hours, and she’s not eating well, you will spin all sorts of worst-case scenarios in your mind, when she probably just needs a good burp.

Finding the Answers

As men, we want to have all the answers, and as you read this book, I hope you will be open to the process. Life will not always run smoothly—your wife’s experiences will tax her emotions as well as her body. Her moods, energy level, sex drive, and even taste buds will change with each trimester. Most guys say, “Well, yeah, we know this,” but thinking you understand is no substitute for living alongside a pregnant

woman for nine months. This book will provide the inside scoop on what it takes to be a pro partner and a pro dad from the moment you hear the happy news.

Men want to know we can solve anything, that we can handle all of life's demands. Even when we have successful careers and meet our soul mates, we may still experience self-doubt at times. Perhaps there is never a more poignant moment in a man's life than the day he discovers he is going to become a father. Perhaps, too, there is never a day when he experiences such a sudden flash of fear as when he wonders, *Am I ready to be a father?* This scares many men, but what they don't know is that with a little preparation, they will get through the rough patches and be rewarded with a beautiful, healthy family.

Your wife will go through the pregnancy, and along the way there will be pain, tears, and perhaps a few fights. There will be unforgettable joyous occasions, like when you first hear the baby's heartbeat, when you find out the sex of the baby, or when you feel the baby kick. Then your wife will deliver the baby, and you will all go home. Together. Soon enough the challenges of raising a baby will arise: the baby may cry all night, or stop nursing, and you will fear you are failing or causing irreversible damage. I'm going to let you in on a little secret: parenting isn't rocket science, but employing a little common sense and preparation can go a long way in keeping you and your spouse sane. (Sleep deprivation, however, is unavoidable. Get used to it.)

Children Need Fathers

Fatherhood, and parenting in general, is the most important job on earth, but the job doesn't come with instructions.

You may feel like God let you off easy by making you a man when you see your wife kneeling on the bathroom floor battling morning sickness. You may also wish you could spare your wife all the harsh elements of pregnancy, but you can't.

Do not forget this: you have a very important role in raising this child by laying a solid foundation for your growing family, by being present, and by following some of the suggestions laid out in this book. To quote my former coach Bill Belichick, "Do your job."

When my wife, Kirsten, experienced morning sickness during her first pregnancy, all I could do was sit down next to her on the bathroom floor and hold her. Years later, when I overheard somebody ask her what the sweetest thing I had ever done for her during her first pregnancy was, she answered, "When I had morning sickness, Benjamin held me."

Of course, I wanted to run interference, call the doctor, and get medicine to ease Kirsten's pain, but my presence was exactly what she needed. Your presence speaks volumes about your commitment to your family. It means you are totally invested in the pregnancy and in the health of the mother. Knowing she has your support is paramount to the well-being of everyone involved.

The woman carrying your child is experiencing hormonal changes, and when she knows you are standing by her, when she knows you are willing to do things that make you uncomfortable, she is better equipped to take care of herself and the growing baby. Both of you will feel surges of elation and fatigue as the baby's due date draws nearer, so having a birth plan in place (which we will cover later on) will keep everyone well-balanced.

Prepare for the Blitz

Kirsten told me she was pregnant with Grace in the summer of 2008. Nine months later, in the wee hours of the morning, I timed Kirsten's contractions while she sat up in bed, and we realized it was time. I threw our meticulously packed bags into the car and sped off to the hospital. Movies like to portray deliveries in cars, with fraught husbands catching their newborns like footballs, or men being pulled over by the police while their pregnant wife screams like a woman possessed. In our case, life imitated art: I was pulled over for speeding, even though I was not, and the officer proceeded to shine his bright flashlight at me, my wife, and her pregnant belly. He gave me a rather callous, "Well, get to the hospital then." We were as calm as possible—no screaming, no tantrums, because that wouldn't solve anything—plus time was of the essence!

The point is, unexpected events happen even when you have a plan, but staying calm and acting reasonably can easily tip the balance between a horror story and a cute anecdote. When that baby is ready, all that will register in your mind is: *Game time!*

At the hospital, time seemed to move more slowly than it did before we conceived. My wife labored for hours, and there isn't an NFL workout that compares to the experience. I had been to classes and watched videos on the delivery process, and despite all my preparation, I felt helpless yet awestruck by how strong and in control she was during such a chaotic and agonizing ordeal. I had no idea how hard the labor was going to be on *me*—and I know that sounds bad. I'm six foot three and 250 pounds, and what my tiny wife was doing right then made my head spin. Then I heard Grace's first wail, and fear was replaced by blinding joy.

After Grace was born and we were together in the hospital room, I removed my shirt and pressed my baby girl to my chest. I acted on instinct. It is typical for the baby to be placed on the mother's chest immediately following birth to regulate the heartbeat and to establish an instant bond. Men can do this too, and it is bliss. Later in the day, after Kirsten fed Grace a few times, I had the opportunity to do skin-to-skin bonding again.

Time becomes foggy when you are home bonding with your new family. I hope this book will help prepare you for the major life changes heading your way. Parenting changes you like little else.

Parents joke about how caring for a newborn transforms you into a zombie and that you never sleep again—and in those first few weeks and months, you believe it. Guess what—you adapt. Commitment makes you a better person, and this book will show you how to hold the line, even when the blitz is on.

Being Present

Be sure to pull your load in those weeks following delivery—cook, clean, do laundry. It sounds simple, but remember, you will probably continue working outside of the home, and you are not just there to provide a roof over your family's head—you need to take care of the people inside it too.

Some men aren't prepared to become fathers. I understand that. Some grew up in fatherless households or without a decent role model, and feel unequipped when they find out they're having a baby. I wrote this book for the guy who doesn't think he's ready to become a father and, whether he

admits it or not, fears the challenges and the unknown. That covers a lot of men, whether they planned the pregnancy or not. The point is, once a man knows there's a baby coming and understands what that baby needs, I think he will care about the kind of home life he establishes, and he will take on greater responsibility raising that child. Children need their fathers to be part of their lives, and if men comprehend this, I'm sure they will be spurred on to develop into the men they thought they weren't ready to become.

This book explains the terms men will hear during prenatal visits to the doctor, and how the baby develops in the womb. I will also discuss what to expect when your wife changes and how to handle those changes. This way, you'll understand exactly what's happening at every stage of the pregnancy and delivery process. I think this book will please the woman in your life as well, especially if she has experienced the lack of a male presence in raising a child before. More information means less fear and more confidence in your abilities to be an excellent father. Remember, you are building a legacy, and this book can help.

The day your wife pulls out a Superman onesie to announce you are having a boy, or the day you dress your baby girl in her first Easter dress—these are life's most precious moments and memories. To use the language of the gridiron, this book will take you through training camp, regular season, Super Bowl, postgame, and off-season. You will warm up, try out some of the drills, learn the playbook; you will lift weights and run. You'll do all of it. Dads are smart. You can do this. You *need* to do this. Let's get started.