

Father & Daughter:

Building a legacy of love

Even the most fearless male has his moments of worrying, especially when it comes to his little girl. This letter showed up not long ago at the Christian ministry where I work:

"I ask you to pray for my daughters...that my wife and I, with God's help, can raise them to be godly women, lovely and *chased*."

I wanted to write back and say, "Hey, fella, in today's world if your girls are even half-lovely, don't worry, they'll be *chased!*"

But whether they'll grow up to be *chaste*—now that's a different story.

Girls can steer themselves onto the wrong road as easily as boys. They are equally as capable of rebellion and self-destruction. Guiding them in the ways of the Lord is a critical task—and one not to be left solely to their mothers. Just because you're a man and your daughter is

By Dean Merrill

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a woman does not mean you can't speak the same spiritual language. You may not explain carburetors and fuel filters and transmissions to her, but you'd better be able to explain righteousness.

Here are four steps to making that happen, to producing a true woman of God:

1. Set the example for your daughter.

In the famous Deuteronomy 6 passage where Moses tells the Israelites how to raise godly children, he says, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and

when you walk along the road..." (vs. 6-7).

Notice the sequence: *First*, make sure God's commandments are upon your own heart. *Second*, start trying to convey them to your kids. It does no good to jump into Part Two if you've skipped Part One. If the adult's spiritual life is not growing and thriving, there's not much use trying to make little girls, and boys, love Jesus. You cannot *impress* what you don't *possess*.

When young people see that God is truly real to their dads, that the Bible is worth reading on ordinary Mondays and Tuesdays, that prayer is as natural as breathing, that God's rules are taken seriously and followed consistently, they will believe the declarations that come from parental lips. They will do as they have seen done.

For a long time I've made it my practice to have my devotions out in plain sight, in the living room. When my twin daughters were in grade school, they thought it was cool to get up early and join Dad on the couch to read their Bibles. We didn't do joint devotions; each of us would silently read our own passage of choice. But there were moments of question and answer nonetheless.

I remember one morning when I was engrossed in the depths of Hebrews while Rhonda was off somewhere in Judges. All of a sudden, this quiet little voice said,

"Daddy?"

"Yeah?"

"What's a concubine?"

Uh, well, let's see now, how do I explain Old Testament marriage peculiarities to my naive young daughter? Somehow I muddled through. And beyond the information exchange, it was for us a moment of exploring God's Book together.

2. Affirm her as a valuable creation of God.

Teach your daughter that God loves girls. And therefore, so do you.

In spite of all our progressive, non-sexist education, have you noticed that children still keep turning out traditional? Especially girls. And they still care

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intensely what Dad thinks of them.

If you don't tell them often enough, they'll shamelessly ask you straight out: "Daddy, am I pretty? Am I smart? Do you think I can do this right?" They are literally begging for affirmation.

Maybe you squirm at such questions—your masculine side doesn't go for all that mushy stuff. When your

daughter turns affectionate, wants to sit on your lap or get a horsey-back ride, you feel uneasy. Especially as she approaches puberty, you *sure* don't want to do anything inappropriate.

But the truth is, she is merely needing to hear and sense, for the 147th time, that she is valuable. And the second truth is this: Girls aren't affirmed

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by their fathers will search for that affirmation somewhere else until they find it. The halls at school are full of guys who will fill up those empty emotional tanks if you fathers don't.

Did you know that in the United States, one million unmarried teen girls will get pregnant this year alone?

Maybe one million is too big a number to grasp. Let's break it down:

That's 2,800 girls *a night*.

Of those, the statistics show that 365 will miscarry.

Another 1,100 will have an abortion.

And 1,335 will have the baby.

Tomorrow night, another 2,800 American girls will start down this same dreadful road. The next night, another 2,800...

Make sure your daughter isn't one of them. Take the time to put your arms around her and tell her she's just about the most wonderful young lady God ever created, and you're so proud to be her dad.

Be the kind of dad described in 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, a man who engages in "encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

3. Give her real goals for the future.

Miles McPherson, ex-San Diego Charger who now ministers to youth all across the continent, especially in inner cities, says one reason boys and girls join gangs is that they have no clear idea of any other future for themselves. The notion of striving to make something of themselves is absent. They assume that by the time they reach their early 20s, they'll either be in jail or dead, so why not rumble in the 'hood'?

Your daughter needs goals—and something more than just to be another pretty face and figure. Too many dads focus only on their daughters' physical beauty, never complimenting or cultivating their minds, skills or interests.

If girls find themselves esteemed for what they can *do* and how well they can *think*, they develop a more well-rounded

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self image. If their fathers point out that God needs women who know how to pray, sing, teach, write, solve problems and bear children, their sights will rise to truly worthy goals.

This is not defiant liberationism. This is getting in step with the God who created female as well as male and gave both significant things to do.

4. Pray for her by name.

Don't just say, "Lord, bless the kids and keep them out of trouble." Zero in on each individual child.

So in your prayer time, say, "Lord, let's talk about Brittany for a little while. How do You think she's coming along? What does she need from me that she's not getting? Am I missing anything?"

Take time to pray especially about her relationships (present or future) with boys. Pray for the young man now growing up somewhere whom she will eventually marry. Ask God to bless him and build his character. Ask God to keep him pure for your daughter.

This is important work, and it is a *man's* work. Don't leave all the praying to women. For some reason Americans have this tradition of "the praying mother"—Southern gospel songwriters even write tunes about it. Why is there no tradition of the praying *father*?

Let us take as our model the biblical dad named Jairus. He was a busy man with a career—Luke 8:41 says he was a synagogue leader—but when his 12-year-old daughter turned ill, he got involved in seeking God's help. He didn't leave things for his wife to handle; he went straight to Jesus, fell on his knees and began pleading for help.

Jairus' earnest faith was rewarded when his daughter's very life was restored by the power of God.

If we would do more "knee-ing" and less needling, more pleading and less procrastinating, we would produce more young women of God. **NM**

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