

2 Crucial Actions for Dads to Chase After Their Children's Hearts

When I was a boy in the late 1960s, we lived in Southern California. Most of my parents' extended family members were in the Southwest, where we moved from, so we hosted many family visits to the Golden State.

The beauty of it all was we got to play host to all the attractions. This meant several trips a year to Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm and Sea World!

As a boy, these were some of the best days of my life, stepping into these large worlds, environments where adventure, exploration, excitement and danger. Yes, even in these places of wonder, danger existed. From time to time, we would hear of "accidents" that happened in these parks. It only took a second for a wonderful vacation to somehow turn into an awful and regrettable tragedy.

One doesn't have to step into a theme park to step into a large adventure or dangerous world. Step out your front door each and every day, and you are there—it is the larger story we live in these days.

We all live in a very large story where walking with God is the invitation to adventure and the evil that opposes us is both dangerous and prevalent. Like the ocean, we had best not turn our back on this larger story lest we be swept away by the powerful waves and prevailing currents. It seems most accidents happen when we aren't paying attention or when somehow we are distracted, or in some way we underestimate or minimize what is really going on.

Learning how the larger story of the kingdom of God works is

critical and essential to teaching boys and girls orientation; who they are, where they are and what the good God is up to in their story and in the larger story. It is part of our job, as fathers and boys and girls *need* oriented dads if they are going to become oriented. It was Frederick Douglass who once wrote: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

Most men aren't oriented to the larger story, so most fathers live naively not knowing how the larger story all works, who they are in it and the good God is up to in their lives. As the famous seminary professor, Howard Hendricks, used to say, "It is impossible to impart what you do not own." Solomon wrote,

"Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6, AMPC).

Being a father automatically signs you up for a battle against a ruthless evil. We live outside the garden, in a fallen place. Therefore, the world is the battlefield and there is an enemy hell bent on bringing division and woundedness, diminishment and fear to the hearts of you and your kids.

The kingdom of darkness is ancient, experienced and is the enemy of the image bearers of God, and that means you and your child. Just as Jesus was being hunted by evil after he was born, an awful force was working through Herod to attempt to kill the baby King.

A dark and awful force is coming after your family. Darkness will try to use others to help them steal, kill and destroy. This is where learning to *walk with God* is our only true hope, and our best chance to defend against evil and see our loved ones protected. The enemy knows how significant your role in this world has now become. You're a Dad, and the forces of darkness want to do all they can to see the father/child

relationship go badly. Stay close to your King. We are in for a fight!

Two things the heavenly Father wants to do to you and partner with you to do to and with our kids: love you and grow you. By loving you and growing you, God is equipping you to love and grow your child into who they are in the kingdom. You get your heart back, dad, then you can better go after theirs.

How? Through *validation and initiation*.

Validation: To substantiate; confirm. To give official sanction, confirmation or approval to someone for what they have achieved, accomplished, endured or recovered.

Initiation: Formal admission or acceptance into a status in one's community or society (or family). The ceremonies or rites of passage calling someone up to more to mark a passage from one stage of life to another.

Proverbs 22:6 is often misused to justify and reinforce a Christianity with a direction of conformity; rules and expectations that, if presented appropriately and often enough to your kid, assure they will turn out right and make you proud. It doesn't work that way.

Interestingly enough, it seems to be the preacher's' kids who are targeted the most by the enemy, struggle the most to "not depart from it." Dads, there is a better way. Go after their hearts, not just their behavior. This one idea has been the most life-saving and life-giving parenting principle in all my fathering days (27 years and counting).

Unfortunately, it wasn't given to me until my girls were tweens, and much damage had already been done. But God has shown me many things since inviting me to see "in the way they should go—in keeping with their individual gifting. Here are three things to do to restore and forge ahead when going after their hearts, no matter how old your children are:

–You are worth my time. Invite them along, make dates and attend their activities whenever possible.

–I want to know your heart. Learn to ask questions.

–Affection in both words and touch. Write notes, hold hands, put your arm around them and greet them with a gentle hug; give them a pat, coming or going.

Join us on the *Exploring More* podcast (episode 113) for more of the conversation, encouragement and equipping in the fight for our kids' hearts. More than a how-to—an exploration of why, when and where to fight for their hearts. Fatherhood is hard work, and we desperately need more fathers who are oriented to who they are, where they are and the good God is up to in their lives.

It is the oriented dad who can bring orientation to his children. You got this, Dad. You and Jesus have got this.
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