

As a Dad, Don't Forget to Stop, Look and Listen

Parents teach their children to stop, look and listen from a very young age.

We all know the drill—when you come to a street corner and want to walk across, you stop at the curb. Then you look both ways. And finally, before you cross, you listen carefully to make sure there is no vehicle coming before you step into the roadway on your way to the other side.

It's what you have been trained to do before you cross the road that makes that journey safe and assures you will reach your destination. While this practice obviously has physical applications when it comes to crossing the road, do we often implement this skill in our daily lives or our parenting strategies?

Like many dads today, I feel the pressure of providing for my family more now than ever. When a recent American Heritage Girls Daddy-Daughter Dance was announced, I was excited to go. It had been nine years since I last got to bring my daughters to one.

Though my beautiful eldest had since aged out of American Heritage Girls, I had such fond memories of dancing with all three on a makeshift concrete dance floor, along with 50 other girls and their fathers, to raucous music in the acoustically noisiest space you could ever imagine. This was going to be a wonderful time to reconnect with both girls. But I forgot to stop, look and listen.

In the whirlwind of modern life, I feel the pressure to be busy. As the date of the dance approached, I got more and more focused on how difficult it would be to stop. It just felt like there was too much to do. My schedule kept filling up

with other matters. I started asking myself, "How can I stop? There is so much to do."

Like so many dads who want what is best for their children but are caught up in the business of life, I didn't look to see who was being hurt by my words. Every time I was complaining about how busy I was and how hard it was to stop, there was my youngest daughter. She heard me. She knew I was busy.

She could see that I was upset. And what she saw left her uncertain. Does Daddy really value the Daddy-Daughter Dance? Does he really want to spend time with me on this special thing? And so she started asking, not so much in words but in little actions. But did I really hear her?

We were just about on the way out the door when my wife pulled me away from the girls and encouraged me to make it clear to our daughters that I really wanted to go with them. A light bulb lit up in my head. All those little things that I thought were telling me my girls might not even actually want to go were actually telling me that they weren't sure I wanted to go or that I really valued this time with them. My daughters had listened to my complaints and worries about time and heard that all those other things were more important to me.

Here we were, minutes from leaving for the dance, when I finally listened. We were about to cross the road, and I hadn't been paying attention to where I was walking. I had not looked to see how my reactions were being taken. I had not listened to how my daughters were telling me they needed reassurance.

By God's grace, a little whisper from the Holy Spirit delivered through my wife's lips reminded me to stop, look and listen. I had been letting the enemy distract me. I let the things I was doing "for my girls" pull me away from truly being with my girls. It was time to be fully present, not caught up in my own little world.

Like so many dads who were there that night, I chose to stop worrying about what I looked like or what else was seemingly “more important” and simply had fun being with my beautiful little girls. I chose to look at those young ladies and see that the opportunity to dance with them right then and there was far more valuable than any silly shreds of self-dignity my long-dead worldly self might assert were of value in the moment.

Finally, I chose to listen to the heart of the Father, a heart that was telling me that dancing freely with each of the young women He had placed in my care was the best way I could show them His love and His care.

Sometimes, a Daddy-Daughter Dance is just a Friday event on a concrete dance floor in a loud space with lousy acoustics filled with little girls and their fathers throwing themselves around the room with wild abandon. Sometimes it is the moment in life when you realize that every day is a Daddy-Daughter Dance for every father blessed with raising daughters.

If you have the privilege of being a father, may the Lord whisper in your ear today and every day: Stop, look and listen. {eoa}

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