

Dad, Here's What You Can Do About Sexual Abuse

I once heard it said that “movies suspend reality for a period of time and open up new possibilities.”

This past week I watched something unfold on the small screen that wasn't exactly a made-for-tv movie; instead, it was a real-life drama. And it opened up something in me, namely a drive to speak up and speak out.

Like much of America, I witnessed the live news coverage of female victims speaking out against their sexual abuser, Dr. Larry Nassar, the former Michigan State, Olympic and USA Gymnastics doctor. What I discovered was that my reality wasn't just suspended; it was activated. And yes, it launched in me a desire to be vulnerable and transparent with you today.

A couple of years ago, I had a phone conversation with a dad who had just read my book, and I remember him saying that as he read my words he kept wondering if there was more to my story. Then he got to page 206 where I briefly talk about my wounds from my grandfather, and it was then that he said I made more sense. He had wondered where I got my passion for fathers of daughters, and hearing my backstory gave him a bit more context.

To be honest, I didn't think it was all that important for dads to know much about my sexual abuse history from my maternal grandfather and others. In my mind, it seemed unnecessary to include more than a small section about it in my book, since my focus is on equipping dads to dial in to their daughter's hearts. But today I am rethinking that decision.

Maybe you do want to hear my story.

Maybe you do need to hear my story.

And maybe my honesty will give you a window into what sexual assault does to women. So I am here today, emboldened to ask you as dads to enter into this conversation with me.

Sadly, many of your daughters share in this same reality because they too have been violated. In fact, I just listened to a powerful speech by a singer-songwriter named Halsey who shared these words at the Women's March in NYC two weekends ago: "It's 2018, and I've realized nobody is safe as long as she is alive, and every friend that I know has a story like mine. And the world tells me we should take it as a compliment."

Dads, the truth is that sexual assault is an epidemic. And hard as it may be to hear, your daughters are being exploited and abused, violated and raped, and it's time to make your voices heard to defend them, protect them, support them, believe them. Even more, we need you to challenge the men in your tribe while leading the way in saying, "This has to STOP!"

Last week I was transfixed as Rachael Denhollander, the final woman to testify out of 165 witnesses against Dr. Larry Nasser, boldly raised her voice to confront her abuser, all the while talking about accountability, repentance, forgiveness and living by what the Bible says. I had tears streaming down my cheeks because I could relate to her story and imagined myself standing next to her as she gave her testimony. I was so moved by her words that I was compelled to post the most raw and real version of my story that I've ever shared on Facebook. [You can read the entire post at - [drnichellewatson/](https://www.facebook.com/drmichellewatson/)].

Here is an excerpt:

To hear Rachael stand up and address her abuser head-on made me think about the time in my journey where I wished I could have confronted my grandfather. But he was dead by that point. So I wrote a letter in my journal that I pretended was going to be printed in the Granite Falls (Minnesota) Times. I wanted everyone to know that the man they saw as a positive contributing member of their community (as a Bible teacher, a radio show host, a “man of the cloth,” a school board member, and a farmer) was also indeed a pedophile and sexual offender.

I chose to forgive him then and release my anger to God. That decision has held and I do not hold unforgiveness or bitterness towards him or any of my abusers. As a result, Jesus has met me in my process and I have been released from my attachment to abuse. My abuse no longer defines who I am.

Today when Rachael finished her testimony, Judge Rosemarie Aquilina highlighted that she was the first woman to come forward and lead with courage. She then added that Rachael was “a five-star general in this battle and the strongest person who has even been in my courtroom.”

I pray that today is a turning point day in our nation’s history where those who are victims of sexual assault will no longer be silenced, but will be believed and honored for their strength and courage.

I pray that today is a turning point in our nation’s history to stop sexual predators like my grandfather, no matter what rank they hold in our society.

Like Michigan Assistant Attorney General, Angela Povilaitis, said today, “We have seen how one voice can start a movement.”

Let today be the start of a movement where women's voices are heard and where we no longer hold the secrets of evil that has been done to us. We are more than that.

Let today be the start of women coming together to stand united in supporting each other to embrace the truth of who we are in God's eyes.

Let today be the start of new era where as empowered women we use our voices to stand up for the rights of those who have no voice, where we love well, and love big... which is the best way we can turn the tables on that which has sought to destroy us.

Let today be the start of a movement.

And now I implore you as fathers to join this movement.

- It's time to hear the stories of your daughters when it comes to knowing how they are being treated by men.
- It's time to ask questions in a non-judgmental way about what guys are doing to them and asking or demanding of them while giving your input about their value and worth.
- It's time to open up lines of communication about this topic—even if you're uncomfortable “going there” with your daughters.
- The time is now to stop cowering in fear, afraid that you may say it wrong and instead step up and talk to your daughters about their sexual choices or experiences, assuring them that they deserve to be respected and that you are in their corner no matter what.
- The time is now to tell her that “Dad has no problem stepping in to protect you, and all you have to do is say the word and I'll be there.” [I know a dad who just did this with his adult daughter, so this really is possible and powerful.]
- The time is now to stop doing anything in your own

personal life that objectifies women and contributes to this larger societal problem—from discontinuing pornography use to examining your own treatment of women to refusing to engage in emotional affairs or any sexual activity that dishonors your marital vows or relationship commitments.

I'll close with quoting the words of my friend Armin in response to my Facebook post last week. As a dad to two young daughters, he is a fierce protector of women, and with his permission, I share his words with you. I truly believe that if more men stood in agreement with Armin then sexual assault against women as we know it would end because the honoring of women would be championed by great men like him—and you.

“I wholeheartedly believe that this sorry excuse of an era is coming to an end. A new dawn is on the horizon where survivors will not have to be silent for the fear of shame, rejection, judgment, condemnation and more. People will finally stop turning a blind eye or ear just because it's ‘uncomfortable.’ The actions of brave women like yourself, the many women of Hollywood, and many more are finally seeing the fruit of bold courage after thousands of years of the same thing. I applaud you and all the women like you.

It's sad that it has to be “trendy” for people to get behind those who have been persecuted for this movement to take place. But regardless, it has begun and there is nothing that will stop it at this point, as long as people don't stay silent. Thank you for being the bold, courageous, loving and inspiring leader that you are. Absolutely honored to know you and call you friend, Michelle Watson. Boldly forward!”

The time is now for every daughter to have her father standing alongside her, united in solidarity, as together they powerfully use their voices to tell men everywhere that sexual harassment, exploitation, assault and violence against all

women will no longer be tolerated.

The time is now for every daughter to speak out and tell her story without fear, confidently knowing that her dad will be the first to believe her while supporting her through her healing process.

Dads, it's time to start a movement on behalf of your daughters today. {eoa}

Dr. Michelle Watson has a clinical counseling practice in Portland, Oregon, and has served in that role for the past 17 years. She is founder of The Abba Project, a nine-month group forum designed to equip dads with daughters ages 13 to 30 to help them focus more intentionally on consistently pursuing their daughters' hearts. She released her first book, titled, Dad, Here's What I Really Need from You: A Guide for Connecting with Your Daughter's Heart. She invites you to visit for more information and to sign up for her weekly Dad-Daughter Friday blogs where she provides practical tools so every dad in America can become the action hero he wants to be and his daughter needs him to be. You can also follow or send feedback on Facebook and Twitter.