

Father-Daughter Bond: Better Than a Commercial

I always planned to be the first guy to ask my daughter out on a date. I wanted to show her how it's supposed to be done. You know, set the bar really high to eliminate some of the losers in her future!

That was the plan. I just didn't know that day would come so soon. You have all these principles, promises and plans in place but you have to stay flexible, adaptable. That's because parenting is a moving target and teaching opportunities pop up when you least expect them.

Our daughter, only three at the time, stood on her tiptoes peeking at a collection of wedding pictures hanging above the chest by our bed. Her eyes grew wide when she recognized her mommy in a wedding dress and her daddy in a tux.

"Mommy, what are *those* pictures?"

My wife could have simply answered "those are our wedding pictures" and left it at that. After all, our daughter was only three. But, she paused for a moment and responded with what I thought was a perfect one-sentence answer.

"That's the day Daddy gave me a ring and promised to love me always."

Our daughter replied, "Oh ... " and was off to the next thing on her agenda. Several days later, there she stood again gazing curiously at our wedding photos.

Same question: "Mommy, what are *those* pictures?"

Same answer: "That's the day Daddy gave me a ring and promised to love me always."

There were a few more exchanges just like that until one day something unexpected happened. She asked the same question but this time my wife responded with a different answer, actually a question to see if she remembered.

"Mommy, what are *those* pictures?"

"What did I tell you they were?"

"That's the day Daddy gave you a ring and promised to love you always."

That was a pretty incredible moment. We hit the target! We succeeded in teaching her the real value behind the pictures. They weren't just images documenting a wedding event. They were reminders of the day *her Daddy* made a promise to *her Mommy*, a promise to love her always. That should be enough, right? But, remember, parenting is a moving target. You've got to be ready to adjust your aim because it can shift at any moment. And so it did ...

"Mommy, do you think Daddy will give *me* a ring one day?"

It was probably a good thing I wasn't there when it happened or I would have broken down and cried like a baby. You see, I've been wrapped around *her* little finger ever since the day she wrapped her tiny hand around *my* little finger. I had to get that girl a ring! But, I wanted it to be more than just a ring because she not only wanted a ring; she wanted a promise, a promise that I would love her always.

So I made trip to James Avery.

I found the perfect little silver ring with a tiny heart on it. Then I asked her out on a date to Johnny Rockets, just the two of us. She gave me a BIG smile and a BIG yes! Her eyes lit up when I told her that she would need to pick out a special dress for the occasion. It was hamburgers, fries and shakes but this was special, our first father-daughter date.

Our waitress pulled out all the stops with balloons, pictures, special attention and special milkshakes. She said it reminded her of some of the dates she experienced with her dad growing up.

After dinner we walked over to the plaza area of Market Street and found a spot next to one of the water fountains. As soon as I revealed the tiny gift bag she knew immediately what it contained. It was a priceless moment. Better than a MasterCard commercial.

As I placed the ring on her finger I explained that this ring means three things ...

"I promise to love you always, no matter what. I promise to always love your Mommy, no matter what. And, God will always love you, no matter what."

I designed a card with photos from that first date and those three promises, plus a few extra thoughts that she will understand later. She has one displayed in her room and I have one in my office. Does that seem like a lot for a three-year-old to process? Well, every time that ring has been on her finger and people ask about it, she tells them exactly what it means ...

"This means that my Daddy will always love me, *and* he will always love my Mommy, *and* God will always love me, no matter what!"

At this writing, our daughter is eight and in second grade. She's really growing up way too fast. Not too long ago she lost her ring when she took it off to wash her hands at a restaurant. We retraced our steps later with no luck.

Well, you know what I did. I made another trip to James Avery. It was really another teaching moment. You see, the ring is just a symbol. She may lose this ring, too. She will definitely outgrow it. But, she will never lose or outgrow

those three promises.

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