

How Your Relationship With God Can Influence Your Daughter's Spiritual Walk

In 2010, *ABC News* presented the findings of a groundbreaking study by Froese and Bader summarizing the four ways that Americans view God. I was astounded to discover that only 22 percent characterized the Almighty in a positive way, primarily describing Him as benevolent.

The other 78 percent claimed to see God through a negative lens, viewing him as critical (21 percent), distant (24 percent), or authoritative (28 percent).

When I first read this article, my immediate thought was: *I wonder if the 78 percent who view God negatively also have a critical, distant or authoritative father who's shaped the way they responded to this query.*

I've been speaking to male and female audiences for the past few years about the correlation between the way we relate to our earthly father and our subsequent response to God as a father. Almost always, tears are shed by some as tangible pain begins to surface once the connection between the two is made.

Afterwards, it's typical for those with tear-stained cheeks to make their way to the front, courageously trusting me with their stories as their inner vaults are opened. My heart consistently breaks as gut-wrenching backstories of father wounds and father voids are told. Whether male or female, these folks tend to live with significant vertical challenges.

After one such presentation in Colorado I met 31-year old Elaina. She's given me permission to share her story.

I wanted to tell you that it was kind of hard for me to

connect with what you're doing with dads because my bio dad is almost totally absent and my stepdad is, well, my stepdad ... so it seems almost impossible that I could ever use the skills you're teaching.

However, I found it really helpful when you had us free associate words for father.

I came up with absent, jerk and lonely—which really helped me when I was talking to my counselor yesterday, trying to describe my experience of my dads!

Anyway, I'm so grateful that you're doing this work with dads. If there had been someone like you around or a workbook detailing what you do, it might not have had to be this way between me and either of my dads. Maybe then I would have a better image of God and would not hop from father figure to father figure, trying to find someone to affirm me and feed my father hunger.

For the first time in her life, Elaina realized that she had unconsciously projected onto God a skewed negative perception because of two fathers who were poor representations of him. Yet her courageous new awareness started to unravel the knotted cord of confusion that had unwittingly woven its way around her heart and mind.

I believe that the horizontal and vertical are synonymously related. And I also believe that our relationship with our dad significantly influences our view of God as a father.

To explore this theory further, I decided to conduct my own informal research a few years ago by asking girls between the ages of 13 and 30 to share their thoughts with me on this topic. I'll let you draw your own conclusions based on what you read.

Question: What have you learned about relating to God as a father or about connecting (or not connecting) with your

spiritual side from watching your dad? What does he model to you (or not model to you) in terms of spirituality?

That I want to get as far away from it as possible. Not because what he believes is right; on the contrary.

From when I was little my dad took me on dates. He always said he wanted to model the kind of way a man should treat me, but I don't think he realized how much that taught me about the nature of God's love. That has been so huge for me as a maturing woman. God isn't this far off entity, but rather He wants an intimate and caring relationship.

Oye ... my family hasn't been particularly religious for a long time. I can't honestly say that I remember when my parents stopped attending church. For me it was a very definite point in my life, but I don't really know for them. Dad and I have never really talked about spirituality. So, I dunno ...

He has definitely modeled that God the Father is the only true and perfect father, and that only he can satisfy the void in our hearts for that kind of person. I see him relying on God the Father to fill his heart, and it inspires me to do the same.

I have learned that my dad has an entirely separate connection to God than do I. He models to me that it is good to be a good person, no matter what you have to do to get people to like you. For him it is all about receiving, not about giving.

Nothing!!! My "father" is a hypocrite and I would never want to model any of his ideas to my own children or any other person that I come in contact with.

One of my favorite pictures of God as my comforter is an image of my dad holding me when I was little. When I am needing to just cry to the Lord for His peace and comfort, I often get the picture of being a little kid crawling into my Dad's lap and arms on our old lazy boy chair in the living room. My dad

models unconditional love, authenticity, encouragement and comfort to me.

My dad doesn't pray with me. When I was a little girl my Mom prayed with me at night, but I've never prayed with him or talked with him about any spiritual issues.

My dad has always shown unconditional forgiveness. He does not hold grudges, but easily forgives. This is a true blessing! I know that when I come to my dad or my heavenly Father to confess something, I am accepted, forgiven and loved.

I don't know. Honestly, I haven't thought of my step dad as my dad until recently, so I haven't looked at him to model things for me.

I don't believe that my dad models a lot when it comes to spirituality; I think I have drawn my own conclusions from his more subtle modeling in the past. I don't really associate my dad with the Christian Father.

As you can see, some young women are drawn to a heavenly Father because of the foundation set by their dad while others aren't.

*My friend and pediatrician Dr. Meg Meeker, author of *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters*, has a powerful way of highlighting this theme. I resonate with her assertions:*

Your daughter needs God. And she wants you to be the one to show her who He is, what He is like, and what He thinks about her. She wants to believe that there is more to life than what she sees with her eyes and hears with her ears. She wants to know that there exists someone who is smarter, more capable, and more loving than (even) you. If you are a normal, healthy father, you should be glad that she wants to believe in someone larger, because you know all too well that many times you will fail her ...

You are just a normal, good-enough dad doing the best you can. You need to have someone behind you, someone your daughter can turn to when you're not there. You both need a bigger, better father on your side.

You need to tell your daughter what you think and believe. What you believe will have a strong impact on what she believes. And if you feel you need to start your faith journey right alongside her, do it. She'll love it.

Dads, I realize you have a weighty assignment when it comes to being a bridge to help connect your daughter to God as a father. And I imagine you would rather be the reason she turns towards Him rather than the reason she doesn't.

Here are a few ways to help make that happen:

- 1. Know that this isn't about you being a perfect father because only God is a perfect father.**
- 2. Choose to be authentic, honest, real, and humble.** It boils down to your willingness to admit that you too make mistakes and when at fault, ask forgiveness and make amends.
- 3. Seize every opportunity to be honest with yourself (and her at times) about your questions and fears when it comes to God and spiritual things.**
- 4. Seek real answers to your real questions.**
- 5. Model what it looks like to be a learner who takes time to feed your spiritual life.**
- 6. Pursue knowing her heart in loving, consistent, honoring, intentional, gracious, kind and nurturing ways.**

These steps will set a strong and positive foundation where she will be more apt to connect with God as her father because you led the way. {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 9-month group forum that is 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 that 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.

For the original article, visit .