

Ideas to Help You Avoid Becoming a Bad Summer Dad

I'll be the first to admit, when it comes to summer plans, I'm the laziest of lazy dads. I hate heat. I hate humidity. I especially hate heat and humidity.

I hate messes and stickiness and sticky messes, which means I hate ice cream and popsicles and picnics and fun. I admit it; I'm a bad summer dad.

And yet, a summer is a sad thing to waste. It's also an easy thing to waste. Take your innate laziness as a parent, the hassle of keeping up with lawns, the drag of heat and humidity, the fear of failure and the ever-encroaching school year, throw them in a blender and boom. Lost summer.

As a dad, this isn't just sad because it means lost fun, although that's sad. It also means lost opportunities—lost opportunities to connect with my kids, to shape their memories, to bond with them emotionally and to form and build biblical character.

So this summer, I've been trying to make the most of it. I've decided 2016 will be the summer that Dad tried. Here are three things I've picked up along the way:

1. Start a tradition. I was talking to a friend of mine about this recently. He and his family have a summer tradition of going weekly to a local ice cream shop. Why ice cream?

As a boy, he rarely had the opportunity to do something special with his dad. But on those rare occasions he did, he took him out for ice cream. It was a very special thing, and that's become something he's wanted to pass on to his kids. So they do it every week.

You might object (if you're an awful cynic) that doing it weekly ruins the "specialness" of it. Nah, I don't think so.

When my dad was a budding teenager, my grandfather, who always worked two and three jobs to help make ends meet, realized he needed to spend more time with his son. So, he quit an evening job and decided to coach his baseball team. Except grandpa didn't know anything about baseball. So he threw himself into it and did his best.

That one season meant the world to my dad. He can't talk about it without tearing up.

So guess what? I grew up in a baseball family. My dad coached nearly every baseball team I ever played for until I reached high school. Recreation ball, all-stars and travel—he was there.

Did that make baseball less special for me? Of course not. This is just the way things work.

Anyhow, here's my point. Family traditions are almost always good, no matter where they come from (okay, I admit there are a few exceptions). They root your family and give it a sense of identity.

So go get ice cream together. Take a weekly trip to the park. Carve a boat every summer. Or have a summer reading challenge. Take an annual trip to a big league baseball game, or to several. Buy a zoo pass. Host a barbecue for the neighbors. Go sailing or white water rafting or hiking. But start one new tradition this summer, and stick to it. You won't regret it.

2. Try something new. I'm not a creature of comfort. I'm more like a comfort monster. I like well-worn paths. But I think it's important for us as dads to instill a sense of adventure and wonder in our kids, to give them new experiences.

I'm not saying you need to go skydiving or something dumb. I'm

just saying every once in awhile it's good to step outside of your comfort zone. As it turns out, fun things can happen out there. And some really fun memories are possible.

Don't know anything about baseball? Go check out a game. City slicker? Try taking the kids horseback riding. Country boy? Try a trip to New York City or Chicago or Washington, D.C.—that sort of thing.

Even if you totally hate it, you'll be able to look back and laugh at the memories. After time gives you enough separation. Which might take some time. But, who knows? You might discover a new love. You might start a new tradition.

3. Work together. Not all summer fun is summer play. One of the best things you can do with your kids is involve them in your work. Do you have a landscaping project? Include them. As your kids get older, teach them to mow and trim and wash cars. Then teach them to wax and detail.

Have space for a garden? Perfect. A garden is a great place to grow your kids, to teach them to love working hard, and to demonstrate what it means when the Bible talks about the fruit of our labors. Because, besides the kids, tomatoes tend to grow, too.

The Most Important Thing

I recently worked as the editor on a book called *Daddy Tried: Overcoming the Failures of Fatherhood* by Tim Bayly (not to put too fine a point on it, but you can improve your own summer, and mine too, by ordering about a dozen copies). In the book, Tim tells the story of how, not long after his brother died, his dad took him out to a lake to carve a boat together. The trip was a fiasco, ending with Tim having poison ivy in all his “most tender places.” They never went back and finished the boat.

Now, you might expect that this story was a bitter example of

a father failing, but that's not how he looks back on it. He looks back and sees a hurting father who was doing his best to love his son—in the midst of great personal difficulty. He loves his dad, not for the boat, but for setting aside his own grief to try and love him.

His dad tried. He didn't have to. It would've been easy to check out emotionally. Remember, he had his own grief to bear, not to mention the grief of his wife and other children. But he didn't. He took his son out and got him covered in poison ivy instead.

Was it a failure? Sure, but it was a glorious one—the right kind of failure. When I first read that, it changed the way I looked back on my own father. I began to see things differently. I began to reinterpret some of his failures as successes.

So, before you finish up an awesome summer with your kids, I want to emphasize that point. Have the courage to fail gloriously this summer. Because—guess what? Sometimes the car won't start, the ice-cream place will be shut down or the game will be rained out. The baby will cry, the kids will nag, your wife won't be able to read a map to save her life and you'll lose your temper. So what? Repent. Try. Be a good daddy, which is to say a miserable failure who is miserably-failing in the right direction.

So just do it. Try something. Go out for ice cream or milkshakes, or take a trip to the pool or a day on the lake. Is the lake too high of an outdoors hurdle? Take the family to an overpriced movie. There are a million ways to be a good dad, and a million ways to mess it up. As long as you keep trying to do the first one, your kids will forgive you the second one.

So how about it, dad? Get out there and make some memories.
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