

This Gift of Words Can Transform Your Atrophied Relationship With Your Kids

Dads, I want to give you a gift from my heart to yours ... a gift of words. (I know that probably isn't exactly your first choice, and you'd much prefer a paddle or a Fitbit but this is the best I can do from afar!). I want to begin with some validation and encouragement (just in case you don't hear it enough!), and then end with a challenge.

As a father, you no doubt have a lot of weight on your shoulders and I'm guessing that you often feel overwhelmed with all that's expected of you, even though at times you try to ignore the intensity and immensity of that reality. (I know this because many of you have trusted me enough to tell me what this is like for you).

And much of the time you find it easier to push away the discomfort of facing your own inadequacy so that you don't have to sit in the space of admitting that it might actually be true that you're not enough.

But if you peel back the layers and allow yourself to be honest, even vulnerable, you'll discover that every other father is feeling the same way—with a sense of being less than competent, at least when it comes to relationships. Perhaps it's most noticeable when the women in your life say they need more from you or point out areas of ineptness. And that's when you find yourself falling into a pattern of slinking back into your shell (or, as author John Gray says, into your cave) to find safety from the perceived attack.

But dad, you weren't made to shrink back and hide. That's not where you thrive. You were created to pursue and conquer, to hunt and gather. The truth is that you're at your best when

you're taking action while proving to yourself and the world around you that you have what it takes to courageously go after the things—and people—you love and believe in.

So here you are, living each day with a wealth of experiential knowledge, some of it amazing, and some of it painfully debilitating. Yet all of it has brought you to where you are today, shaping the way you see everyone around you. And it's out of the overflow of all those experiences that you parent your daughter.

Now here's where I'm going to go a bit deeper by addressing the “painfully debilitating” part.

Those devastating experiences, when left unhealed, lead you to believe that you don't have it in you to live any differently or respond in ways other than the hand you were dealt. Those wounding interactions have left you stuck, which then have you repeating unhealthy relational patterns that really don't work for you—or your daughter, for that matter.

Sadly, I meet too many deflated men who have lost their drive and ambition, especially when it comes to pursuing relationships. Somewhere along the way they've succumbed to the lie that they can't be more than their history or their failures while believing that they're destined to repeat mistakes that were modeled by their fathers.

Truthfully, this whole way of thinking and interpersonal relating breaks my heart because I see men who have shrunk back while using self-protective strategies so as not to be hurt again, usually like they were as kids. But those strategies create distance between them and the ones who call him “dad” while also keeping their offspring from reaping the benefits of being loved by the one man whose opinion matters most.

To make matters worse, instead of rising up to meet the challenges of fighting to maintain close relationships, men

with these defaults too easily resign themselves to a position of impotence rather than being valiant pursuers and initiators, traits that I believe God created all men to embody in their DNA.

You see, when a father steps back, removes his armor, concedes before engaging and walks away (literally or figuratively—such as when he is there physically but not emotionally), not only is he deflated, but so are his kids. Further, something disastrous happens inside him when he believes he doesn't matter and instead defers to their mom. That's when something inside him starts to atrophy.

From observing men these past seven years since founding The Abba Project, I've noticed that something begins to die in a man when he believes he can't rise up, change, make a difference or lead his family. Even this past weekend, I talked with a dad who said he's a terrible father and seemed resigned to that fact. I literally stood in front of him and wept. Yes, it was awkward for a minute or two, but my heart was breaking for his children—and for him—because it seemed like he was believing a lie that his story can't be rewritten at this point in his life.

So what do you do if you didn't get what you needed from your dad? What if that empowering, strengthening, life-giving deposit was never transferred from your father to you? Are you forever destined to a sense of stifling inadequacy in the core of your being? I don't believe so.

Today I stand aligned with your spirit and affirm that you are a son of the best Dad ever.

And He as your Father makes you enough.

Don't let another day go by where you believe the lie that you don't have what it takes to be a great dad. With God pouring His resources of "enoughness" into your depths, you will have enough to pour into your daughter (and son).

Humbly ask for supernatural help while being open to letting your heavenly Father fill you with His wisdom, insight, strength, courage, tenacity, tenderness, compassion and on it goes. God says if we ask for wisdom, He'll give it. No questions asked, no groveling, no earning His favor. It's simply His gift.

As you pray this prayer, I guarantee that if you sit in stillness and listen, God will download ideas that will lead you to connect with the unique needs of your daughter. Spend at least five minutes waiting for the download to come, and then immediately act upon the things God tells you in order to reach the heart of your girl. You might think you're fabricating things as you listen, but it will get much easier to trust God's voice when you put into action the ideas He gives you and see that they work.

So even if you don't hear it enough: You matter. And every day that you give of yourself to your daughter is a day that changes her life—and yours.

Dad, I CELEBRATE YOU as you continue to embrace the most important job you'll ever have: being a dad. {eo}

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 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.