

## **Dynamic Dads**

### **By David Feddes**

It's a wonderful privilege to be given children from the Lord, and also an awesome responsibility to have the calling to lead them in God's ways. Today I want to reflect with you on dynamic dads and what's involved in that as the Bible guides us.

We want to look first of all at Psalm 128, which will be our basis, as well as some other Scriptures. Psalm 128 says:

Blessed is everyone who fears Yahweh, who walks in his ways. You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears Yahweh. Yahweh bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

We're going to reflect on ten major aspects of what goes into being the kind of father that God calls us to be. I hope that it's an encouragement to those of us who are fathers or may someday be fathers. But I would encourage those who aren't fathers or grandpas—who may be moms or even kids—not to turn off your hearing aid or just tune out, because we're always a body together in the Lord, whether as our individual families and households, and also as a family of faith together.

## **Dynamic Dads**

- Revere God
- Love wife
- Provide
- Show up
- Prioritize
- Train self
- Teach
- Discipline
- Await growth
- Prize kids

A dynamic dad is someone who reveres God, he loves his wife, he provides, he shows up, he has his priorities straight, he trains himself, he is a teacher of wisdom, he provides discipline, he awaits growth in his children toward maturity, and he really values and prizes his children and is just glad to be their dad and enjoys being with them.

## **Revere God**

So let's first of all focus on the fact that a dynamic dad is somebody who reveres God. The most important single thing that you can do for your children is lead them to God. And you can't lead

them to God without walking with God yourself—without loving God and trusting Him and fearing and revering Him and being awestruck at who He is.

Sometimes a father or mother will think, “Well, you know, some religion would be good for the kids, and so when they're young, I'll bring them to church or I'll send them into Sunday school. But once they're older, then it's going to be back to me not being involved in church life at all or worshipping God. I gave them their exposure to religion, and I hope it was good for them.” That's why much of the Western world has fallen away from the faith—parents thinking that a few years of going through the motions and letting their kids get a little taste of religion is sufficient. Maybe they gave their kids just enough to inoculate them against the real thing.

If you want your kids to know God, you need to be one who loves and reveres God yourself. The first thing this particular psalm says—and it's echoed throughout the Bible—is, “Blessed is everyone who fears Yahweh, who walks in His ways.” When you have a sense of awe and amazement at who God is and you're walking in His ways, then you're leading your kids by your life, and it can be contagious so that they will walk with Him.

I don't want to discourage moms or single moms, but it is simply a fact of sociology—never mind the Bible—that in homes where a father worships God and loves God, there is a much higher probability that the children will too than if only the mom does. That doesn't mean that if you're a mom you should be discouraged and not walk with the Lord if you don't have a husband and father to help. But it does mean that the role of the father is extremely important, and kids are almost wired to be affected and shaped by their dad.

God has even given Himself the name of Father in relation to us. I'm a pastor, and I've got all these degrees and education. But a father who loves the Lord and is ready to share something with his kids... those kids are wired to get ten times as much from their dad as they are from me. Of course, I will do my best as a pastor. But when you're a father, God gives you a tremendous opportunity, and your kids are going to be picking up a lot from you—for better or for worse.

I love this verse in Proverbs 14:26: “He who fears Yahweh has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.” Isn't that a wonderful verse? When you come to know God, when you put your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, when you are filled with the Holy Spirit after being born again by the Spirit of God—when you have the Lord in your life—you have a secure fortress. And He's not just your fortress; He becomes the fortress of your children as well. He makes a covenant with you and the generation after you.

In revering God yourself, you bring tremendous blessing to your children. You're loving your children when you love God.

## **Love wife**

The second thing that's extremely important in being a blessing as a dad is loving your children's mother—loving your wife.

Psalm 128:3 says, "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table." Your children are flourishing through the flourishing of your wife. In some ways—though we shouldn't pit these against each other—it's almost more important for your children's benefit to love your wife than to love the children directly. Of course, you need to love your children directly, but when your kids know that you love your wife, that you are crazy about her, that she is the delight of your life and you are always going to be faithful to her, it gives them a sense of living in an atmosphere of love and stability, where they know their parents love each other and that their home is going to stay intact.

It is very difficult for children when mom and dad are at odds, even when they know that mom loves them and dad loves them, but they wonder whether mom and dad love each other anymore. It shakes their world.

So, love your wife. If you want to do what's best for your kids, then make a big priority of cherishing your wife. "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). This is part of the famous passage about wives submitting—but it's within the overall context of the husband taking the lead in loving and laying down his life for his wife. He sets a tone of love and self-sacrifice.

When you love your wife, of course you're doing it for her benefit. But one tremendous side effect of loving your wife a lot is that your kids are going to be so much happier and so much more likely to flourish than when they're not sure of that.

When I was growing up, I never, ever had the thought enter my mind that mom and dad might split up. That was a thought that just never occurred to me. Dad would go out the door to work and kiss Mom on the way out the door and do the work on the farm and come back in. They had their disagreements at times, but I always knew they loved each other and would always be together. That is a very different situation from what too many children endure, not know if Dad loves Mom and whether their marriage will last.

So again, love your wife with everything you've got.

And in all of the points of the message, just remember that there is both God's guidance as well as God's grace. Many times, when we hear God's guidance, we say, "Ouch! I'm falling a long way short of that." Then it's time to remember God's grace, to ask His forgiveness, and then receive His help in doing better as we move forward.

## **Provide**

Another thing that's very important for a father is to provide. "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. (Psalm 128:2) When you're getting the fruit of the labor of your hands, your family is being blessed by that as well.

The flip side is that terrible verse in 1 Timothy 5:8: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. "

That's not encouraging for deadbeats—you've denied the faith and you're worse than an unbeliever if you're not seeking to look out for your family.

When you're a dad and you're trying to provide for your family, that can involve your job and the income that you have. Sometimes you can be in a job that's barely okay, or maybe not even okay—maybe it's just downright boring or miserable. But it is important to realize that when you're working, you're always working for the Lord, and you're always working to provide for your family. Whatever challenge there may be with your work, if you know that this is one way that you are blessing your family, that you're providing for them, then it gives you a lot of encouragement—even if the work itself is a drag.

It's wonderful if your work is exciting and you love it and really see great purpose in the work itself. But even if you're having a hard time seeing a lot of purpose in that work itself, know that one of the purposes always is simply to provide for your family.

The husband and wife are a team in providing. You can be a team where both of you are earning some income, but also you're a team when it comes to provision because provision goes beyond paying the bills. If you're at home and you're helping clean up the table, or you're changing a diaper, you don't have to say, "I don't like to do this." So what if you don't like it--do it! There are many things in life that might not be our favorite thing to do, but you have a whole different vision for it if you say, "You know, I'm doing work for God, and He's given me an opportunity to bless my family." So look at providing as a way to bless.

Those of us who've been provided for by hardworking parents—don't take that for granted. We can sometimes have our long list of what our parents should be and do. If mom or dad falls short at one point on the checklist, we think they're lousy. Well, we parents all do have failings. Even so, remember that it takes hard work to provide for a family. And God has blessed you if you have parents who are willing to work hard and pay your bills and feed you and clothe you.

## **Show up**

Another that I thought I probably shouldn't leave out, even though it's pretty obvious, is: show up. Proverbs 27:8 says, "Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home." So, you need to be there. You need to be there a lot—not just once in a great while, but with your children a lot of the time.

And when you're doing that, your goal is to have their heart: "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways" (Proverbs 23:26). How are they going to observe your ways if they never see you? How are they going to give you their heart if you're never in the same room? I know "never" is an exaggeration, but I've mentioned before some of the research that finds that when a father is having dinner with his family five times a week—that's it, just show up and eat—and the rate of smoking, drug use, alcohol use, and a lot of other negative behaviors is way, way, way lower than where fathers are gone almost all the time. Showing up may not sound like much, but in fact, it's often more than half the ball game—just being there.

Some of us now have the opportunity to work at home, and that gives a great opportunity just to be in the building. Sometimes, just being in the building and having your kids know that you're available can be a great blessing. Not all of us are able to do that. Some of us have jobs and activities that take us away from home, but we have to try to balance that and intentionally make time to be with our family.

The guidance on how to teach your kids? One part of it is: just be with them a lot. "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Oftentimes, love is a four-letter word spelled T-I-M-E. You might say to yourself, "There are a few really important conversations I need to have with my kids, so I'm going to sit down on a chair, put them in a chair, and we're going to have the important conversation." It's good to have important conversations with an agenda in mind. But many important conversations arise out of just being together a lot: "We were riding in the car and got to talking about this or that," or "We happened to be watching a ball game and got to yakking about this or that." If you're with your kids and they just want to talk to you about something—or you just get to chatting about something—that's where a lot of the best conversation actually happens. So showing up and just being around each other a lot gives you occasion for a lot of blessed conversations. That means we need to prioritize.

### **Prioritize**

You don't have to always have the most money to be a great dad. You don't have to drive the nicest car. You don't have to eat steak every day—although I would appreciate it. But there are things you don't have to have.

"A greedy man brings trouble to his family" (Proverbs 15:27). You're always wanting more and more and more, and so your income is your highest priority, not your family. "Better to be poor and fear Yahweh than to be rich and in trouble. Better to eat vegetables with people you love than to eat the finest meat where there is hate" (Proverbs 15:16,17). That one hits me right in the heart because I like T-bone steak and barbecued ribs! I'm not a vegetarian. I am carnivorous. But I'd be better off a vegetarian than in a home where there's hate.

So make it a priority: I'm going to fear God—that matters more than getting rich. And I want to have a home filled with love—that matters more than having the finest stuff that money can buy.

When you prioritize, and your children know that you're putting their well-being ahead of some of the goals and objectives you might really like to pursue, that strengthens them and builds them up.

### **Train self**

Here's what we've seen so far: Revere God. Love your wife. Provide. Show up. Prioritize. Get things straight in what matters most. And then: train yourself.

What do I mean by that? When we're thinking about parenting, we're not just looking at point A, point B, point C, point D of what you need to do to make your kids better. The main thing you need to do is train yourself, so that your life isn't a wreck. When you're walking with God and growing in godliness, a lot of that is very likely to rub off. You cannot take a direction yourself without it affecting your children.

Let's say you're the captain of a ship and you say, "I've only got myself to worry about. I like to take a nice, relaxed attitude. I don't like bothering with maps. I don't like spending my energy figuring out where the icebergs are and where the problem and dangerous areas are. I'm just going to float through life." Well, this is called a shipwreck. And the trouble with a shipwreck is, the captain is not the only one affected by it. The others on board are affected when you make a shipwreck. So, train yourself. Do the things necessary so that your life is being steered by God's wisdom, and you will have a boatload of people along for the ride.

"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasure" (Proverbs 24:3-4). Pray to God for wisdom. Be like Solomon. When God gave him one thing to ask for, Solomon said, "God, give me wisdom, because I can't rule this great kingdom without your help." You or I can say, "Lord, I can't run this little kingdom without a whole lot of help. I need a lot of wisdom just to be a dad in this smaller domain You've given me." By wisdom a house is built.

1 Timothy 4:7 says, "Train yourself for godliness." That means you want to grow in knowledge of God. That means you read your own Bible. That means you spend time in God's Word. You spend time in prayer. You may spend some time in fasting. You spend time in worship together at church—and sometimes in prayer with other men or with other people in a smaller group.

There are various ways that you can be shaped and trained. Don't neglect that. Remember that when you're captaining a ship, a lot of others are affected. With God's help, get your act together, so that you can be a blessing rather than a curse for your children.

## **Teach**

Once you're walking with God and continue to walk with Him, don't neglect the aspect of actually teaching. You lead by example and by the life that you have in your walk with God, but you're also called to teach. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Find ways to teach that are not just going to make your children mad or drive them crazy. You don't want an approach to parenting that is inflexible, that doesn't take account of who those children are.

You need to know the subject material, so to speak—the things of God and the things that a child needs to know growing up. But then you also need to know your kids. You need pray for God's help in sharing the truth with them in a winsome way.

And let me just say here—you can't delegate it completely. Of course, parenting is a shared responsibility. It's partially delegated to your wife, and sometimes to other people in your church family. Sometimes there are blessings of extended family. I know that in our own family, I'm

glad that I'm not the only adult male that cares about them. They've had grandpas. They've got men at church who've been great friends to our boys, and adults who've been great friends to our girls. So, it doesn't all rest on the shoulders of the dad—not by a long shot. On the other hand, when there's a time to answer for how your children were instructed—when someday we all stand before Jesus, and there is that time to answer for how our children were taught and instructed—the person at the front of that line will be those children's father. There will be others as well, but the person at the front of that line will be their father.

So when Ephesians 6 addresses fathers, it's not saying, “And mothers don’t do anything—you sip lemonade and let the father do everything.” Not by a long shot. But it does single out fathers. Why? Maybe fathers, in their own minds, aren’t as wired to bring up children, so they’re tempted to just leave it to their wife. But I think the more likely reason is simply this: the father is called on to set the spiritual tone in the home.

Be the one who gathers the family for Bible time together. Gather the family for prayer together. In family worship, be the one who’s encouraging your wife. When you do delegate some responsibility to her, especially when you're not around the children, ask your wife how it's going and what you can do to encourage her in that.

And as fathers and mothers teach, those of us who are on the learning end of it—boys and girls—need to pay attention. "Hear, my son, and accept my words... I have taught you the way of wisdom" (Proverbs 4:10-11). Part of this is to help us as dads, to encourage us and to get us to be the kind of dads we need to be. And part of it is intended for children. It’s saying, "If you have a dad who does any of these things, appreciate it, and realize that God gave your dad to you for a purpose: so that you can learn God’s ways and grow up to be strong and healthy.

## **Discipline**

Discipline may seem like kind of an unpleasant word, but it is an important part of parenting. "Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death" (Proverbs 19:18).

Permissive parenting—where it’s just whatever the child wants at all times, with no guidance from parents—is going to be a disaster. We need to be firm and have clear boundaries for what children can do and clear consequences when they don’t do it. When children grow up knowing that there are boundaries and knowing there are consequences, it can be a great blessing to them.

By the same token, there can be an approach to discipline that is devastating—an abusive approach to discipline. Sometimes you discipline, or punish, or spank when you’re angry—not because you're trying to help shepherd the child, but because you’re just venting. It might be spanking, it might be verbal abuse, but there are forms of discipline that will just embitter your children. Ephesians 6:4 tells father, "Don't provoke your children to wrath. Colossians 3:21 says: "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

There are ways of discipline that are very rigid, that are very nasty, very harsh. It's also important to know yourself. A spanking is not always wicked. One swat on the rear once in a while when a

child is young and needs it, or a snip on the hand when they're grabbing stuff they were told not to—that's not going to destroy your child, and it's not abuse. A rebuke and a "No, that's wrong" is not abuse. But when you start calling children stupid, or ugly, or other insults—that's verbal abuse. When you are hitting them excessively—that's physical abuse, and that's no longer godly discipline.

We need wisdom from the Lord and a sense of balance in how we pursue healthy discipline. Be careful what sermons or messages that you enjoy the most. If you really love messages about discipline, and the definitions of the rod, and how many times you need to spank in order to get compliance from the child, and how you need to break the child's will, you might think, "That is so helpful!" But maybe you should be saying instead, "I think that stuff about rigid, harsh discipline is appealing to me because I'm a control freak. I need to tune out that kind of advice."

Sometimes you need to listen to the advice that you like the least. I don't know any exact way to define that, but one of the ways to bring balance into your life is to listen. If you're listening to somebody who sounds to you like some mushy, gushy, easy, permissive parenting person—maybe give that a listen for a few minutes, even if you don't like hearing it, because it might be just the medicine you needed to cure you of being too harsh with your kids. Sometimes we need to listen to what we enjoy the least in order to help us bring balance to our life.

It's helpful to do this in community, listening carefully to your spouse, listening carefully to your children. I'm not saying, "My kids said they don't want me to discipline them, so I won't. I've listened to my children." You might need to discipline them when they don't want it. But often discipline can take place before even giving the child a hearing or treating them as a human being. Listen to your child. Get input from your spouse. Talk with wise adult friends. There are times when, if you talk to somebody else about your own child-rearing practices, they might say, "That sounds crazy!"--because it is crazy. Listening to others can help get you on a healthier path.

### **Await growth**

Another important thing is to remember that we are all in process—and certainly our little ones, our children growing up, are in process.

"Your children will be like olive shoots around your table" (Psalm 128:3). In the context, that mainly means they're flourishing, they're doing well. But what else does it mean? Well, when you're an olive shoot, you're not yet a full-grown tree. You're on your way. You're alive, you're healthy, you're growing, and there's a lot of growing still to be done.

An important part of parenting is seeing your children as lives in the process of growing and developing. Some parents get panicky about their children's shortcomings. When you see your children not where you want them to be, you get more and more worried, more and more nervous—"Oh no, what will happen?"—and before you know it, your nervousness is doing damage to you and to them.



So await growth calmly. Don't go into a panic every time things haven't yet turned out the way you're hoping. Your children are going to be like olive shoots still developing. Their immaturity doesn't necessarily mean they won't turn out well.

"His offspring will be mighty in the land" (Psalm 112:2). "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Relax a little. You've got work to do as a dad or as a mom, but as you lead your kids, as you walk with God, as you pray for them, as you give them love, it's pretty likely that they're going to be all right. God's got them.

This means ultimately relying on God's grace. You're going to be in panic mode if you say, "I heard that sermon with ten points about parenting—and if I blow one of them, yikes, everything is ruined." No. There is a great God who forgives our failings and often will even turn those failings to our profit and to the profit of those whom we're trying to bless. So live by grace. Live with confidence in Jesus Christ. Don't be on edge and afraid always of catastrophe at the slightest slip-up in your parenting. More relaxed and grace-filled, delighted parenting is going to be a blessing.

I often say that you could chuck all of your parenting books in the trash—well, I won't go that far—but you could probably chuck most of them, if you just had this one thing going on in your home: the fruit of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). If your life is full of the Holy Spirit and His fruit—if it's growing in you—if your kids are surrounded with love, and your home is a place of joy and peace and patience and all those other virtues—it's going to grow. It's going to develop. It might not be fully mature and ripened yet, but the Holy Spirit's at work.

This is true of your kids, and it's true of you in your own individual heart and walk with God. Don't get down on yourself if you're not yet who you wish you were. God has begun something, and He's going to carry it to completion. "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

That's what it means to live by faith. That's what it means to parent by faith. You have confidence in Jesus. You have confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit. You believe that God is going to complete the work that's underway. You believe that those olive shoots are going to turn into a tree that's productive and producing great olives. Even if it's just a little shoot right now—you believe. So, await the growth.

Some of you may be at a stage where you say, "My kids are already grown, and some of them seem to be on the wrong path." Even then, don't give up. Their story is not done. So keep on praying and awaiting what God may yet do in their lives.

### **Prize kids**

Here's a final suggestion for being dynamic dads: Prize your kids. Treasure them. Value them.

Everything else I've said might turn out to be almost a waste if you say to yourself, as I've heard some people say, "There are times when I just wish we hadn't had any children." Yeah—and I'm afraid your kids can tell.

To prize your kids, you need to see them as blessings. When Psalm 128 speaks of wife and children, it says, "Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears Yahweh" (Psalm 128:4). When you are given a wife and you are given children, you are blessed. Enjoy your blessing! Delight in your blessings! "Children are a heritage from Yahweh" (Psalm 127:3). The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him" (Proverbs 23:24).

I like my kids. I love them—but I also like them. I enjoy being around them. I enjoy doing the things that we do together. I have a lot of fun with them. And that's been true of them at every age. I've enjoyed them when they were babies. I've enjoyed them when they're kids and teens. And I've enjoyed talking to my adult kids and learning a lot from all of them along the way.

I liked the title of the book *How Children Raise Their Parents*. Part of your growth in grace and spiritual maturity, if you're a parent, is the kids that God puts in your life and the way your interaction with them shapes you. You have tremendous opportunity to grow in servanthood, in love, in so many other ways when God gives you kids.

And aside from your own personal growth, you don't prize your kids just because you might get a little bit of growth out of the deal—you prize them because they are prizes. Because they are precious souls. Because each of them is wonderful and amazing and the creation of God.

So I encourage each of you again to clear away the clutter. Sometimes during the daily grind of diaper-changing, or some arguments, or the kids bickering with each other, you might groan and feel down. But overall, what a tremendous blessing it is to have those kids that God gives you. And when they know that you like them, that you like being around them, that you love having them—when you're doing stuff together—they know.

Our family might carry it a little too far. Sometimes when we go on vacation, we don't even get away from the kids and grandkids—they all come along. I'm not saying everybody has to take the whole clan along everywhere you go—but we like to do it, and it's fun. Different families have different approaches, and that's all fine. But prize your children enormously, because they are a tremendous gift from the Lord.

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Those are some of the ways that I want to encourage us, with guidance but also with God's grace. I'm saying, "Here are some areas where I hope that dads can learn and grow." And if there's an area where you say to yourself, "I've blown it," a nicer way to say it is, "I've identified a growth area." Even seeing your failures can be a blessing from God: "I have identified a growth area. And now I can become a better dad and a better child of God because I identified that growth area—with God's help." May God help us in those "growth areas." And may God give us much delight and satisfaction in the wonderful gift of being dads and grandpas.

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He who fears Yahweh has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge. (Proverbs 14:26)

**Love wife**

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Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. (Eph 5:25)

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If anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim 5:8)

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### **Prize kids**

Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears Yahweh. (Psalm 128:4)

Children are a heritage from Yahweh. (Psalm 127:3)

The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. (Proverbs 23:24)

### **Dynamic Dads**

- Revere God
- Love wife
- Provide
- Show up
- Prioritize
- Train self
- Teach
- Discipline
- Await growth
- Prize kids