

More Father Time

What Quality Time Together Looks Like

by Pastor Cary Schmidt

In our last issue we began talking about the importance of father time—the vital heart connection that our teenagers need with dad. We saw that it was part of John the Baptist's life mission—Luke 1:17, *“And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. . . .”*

Nothing can replace this valuable time and the heart condition that is nurtured through it.

In this article, I'd like to dig a little deeper and ask, “What exactly does this time look like and how much is needed to maintain a healthy relationship?” Here are a few suggestions on how to have quality father time.

It should be one-on-one. I'm not saying you shouldn't have family time with the whole family together, but you must complement it with one-on-one time with each of your children.

It should be frequent. If you have not noticed, relationships cannot be measured and meted out like a cooking recipe. They are dynamic—growing and changing. It is hard to give a formula that works perfectly every time, but one thing is for sure—one-on-one time should be as frequent as you can possibly make it. I suggest that you use a one-week period of time as your measuring stick. Plan your life one week at a time and determine to give each child some one-on-one time every

week. If and when you miss a week, then the next week becomes all that more important.

It should be focused. This is not the time to watch TV, stick in the ear buds, or be on the cell phone. Beware of this pseudo-father time! Riding in a car together with hearts turned away from one another is as much relational neglect as anything else. This is the time to talk, to relate, to laugh, and to interact. It is time to ask questions that stimulate the conscience. It is time to understand your teenager's heart.

It should be Holy Spirit led. This is vital. The Holy Spirit knows exactly what is going on in your teenager's life, and He can lead and guide you in the conversation. If you are on the phone or tied up with talk radio, this conversation will never happen the way the Lord would lead. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and to give your teenager openness as you spend time together.

It should be threat-free. This is not the time for lectures or discipline. To be sure, there is a time for that, but this is not it! The only way to have a heart connection and strong relationship with your teenager is to balance your “discipline time” with a different environment altogether. This should be a time when your teenager can open up and talk without the threat of you

digressing into lecture mode. Pastor Chappell has often said

regarding these situations, “Accusations harden the will but questions stimulate the conscience.”

It should be flexible. Sometimes this weekly appointment could be an hour. Other times it should be two or three. And on occasion, it should be a whole day or more. Your teenager needs a balanced variety of time with you. Have you ever taken your son or daughter away, just the two of you, for a whole day? If not, get it on the calendar—it is time.

It could involve serving the Lord and others. Some of the best times I have ever had with my children involved serving the Lord. Go soulwinning together. Make a visit. Deliver a gift basket. These things and more will help your teenager enjoy you and enjoy serving the Lord with you.

It should be fun and funny. Have you noticed that teenagers like to have fun? At the same time, have you noticed that we as adults often take ourselves, and life, too seriously? One of the great delights of parenting teenagers in my home has been the sense of humor that both of our boys have! They literally keep us laughing constantly! They are flat out funny—and they are good at it! Find some wholesome things you can laugh at together. Do what they enjoy. Make memories that they will cherish. Few things bond two hearts like common laughter!

It should sometimes be resolution oriented. On occasion, you will need to schedule this time simply to restore your relationship and make it right. In every home, the devil brings conflict and contention, but godly parents and wise fathers will not allow that conflict to go unresolved. Sometimes you will take this time just to say, “I’m sorry” or “I just sense there’s something wrong between us . . . how have I hurt you or how have I pushed you away?” You will be surprised at where this conversation might lead. Reconciliation sure is a wonderful thing.

It should be need-driven. How often you do this and how long you spend together will be determined by the Holy Spirit’s leading in your heart and your spouse’s heart. My wife always knows better than me how much time our kids really need with Dad. She has a better reading of the emotional gauges of their hearts. She can always tell when they are running close to empty, which hopefully is rarely, if I am doing this right. When in doubt, do more than you think is required.

It should be consistent. This is key. Spending lots of money on a once a year vacation or getaway is not nearly as beneficial as a few hours each week. I am all for vacations and family getaways, but I am more for consistent, day-by-day relationships that nurture the needs of the heart one week at a time. Without this, our

kids just end up resenting us and resenting whatever takes us away from them.

If you have not noticed, we are losing our kids. They often turn on God and His Word because they resent us. Why would they want our God if their relationship with us is nearly non-existent? Building relationships is not so difficult. It just requires time.

Now look at your week and decide right now when you will give your child some father time.

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