

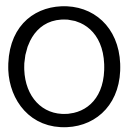
That's My Girl

How a **Father's** Love
Protects and Empowers
His **Daughter**

Rick Johnson

That's My Girl

How a Father's Love
Protects and Empowers
His Daughter
Rick Johnson



(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2012 by Rick Johnson

Published by Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group

P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287

www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Johnson, Rick, 1956–

That's my girl : how a father's love protects and empowers his daughter /
Rick Johnson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 978-0-8007-3383-4 (pbk.)

1. Fathers and daughters—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Daughters—Religious life. I. Title.
BV4529.17.J645 2012

248.8421—dc23 2011030661

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Published in association with the literary agency of WordServe Literary Group, Ltd., 10152 S. Knoll Circle, Highlands Ranch, CO 80130

The internet addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers in this book are accurate at the time of publication. They are provided as a resource. Baker Publishing Group does not endorse them or vouch for their content or permanence.

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To Kelsey—my sweet baby girl.

And my “favorite” daughter.

Thanks, Hook.
May God heal
all the little “Hooks”
of the world.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

7

Contents

Introduction 9

1. What Are Little Girls Made Of? 13
2. Her Father’s Influence 32
3. Communicating with the Female Species 46
4. Bonding with Girls 59
5. What a Girl Needs from Her Father 72
6. “Danger, Will Robinson!” 90
7. Protecting Her 110
8. The Truth about Boys 127
9. Uh-Oh! She’s Becoming a Woman! 144
10. Character Training 162
11. The Father Blessing 177

Notes 193

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

9

Introduction

Fathers have incredible influence (positive or negative) on

nearly every aspect of their daughter’s life. A father sets a huge role model for his daughter regarding the qualities she looks for in a man and the standards she maintains in her relationships. He is the first man in her life and models how a man should treat a woman, how a man should act, and how a man shows healthy love and affection to a woman. He also sets the standard for how a daughter feels she deserves to be treated by men. He even determines how a girl feels about herself. If a father shows his daughter love, respect, and appreciation for who she is, she will believe that about herself as a woman, no matter what anyone else thinks. Girls deprived of this father love and affection make poor choices in an effort to fill that void.

One of the challenges about writing parenting books, at least for me, is I never really feel adequate to the task. Not having sterling role models while growing up, I never felt all that competent as a father or a parent. But both our children are young adults now, for the most part living on their own. While they have not chosen to necessarily be the people I envisioned them to be, I have to confess

that they turned out to be pretty good people. They both have
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

10

Introduction

good morals, a good work ethic, and a strong value system (albeit slightly different from their parents’).

Consequently, I did not enter into writing this book lightly. I admit, despite numerous requests from readers of my other books, I have been a bit reluctant and even apprehensive about writing a book for dads and daughters. My publisher suggested I write one several years ago, but I declined because frankly I didn’t know if I was up to the task—especially while I was in the midst of raising a “slightly” rebellious teenage daughter. I guess I wanted to see how she turned out before I passed myself off as some sort of expert on the subject. Now, after guiding a very strong-willed daughter through the dangerous wilderness of adolescence into young adulthood, I feel a bit more competent to proceed. Understand, however, that raising daughters is as complicated as they are. Probably like most of you fathers out there, having been a boy and a son, I felt much more comfortable raising sons than I did daughters. Frankly, boys have a much easier lot in life than girls. Girls are biologically much more complicated than boys. Indeed, females are more psychologically and physiologically complicated than their male counterparts as well. Females are much more holistic in the way they see and process the world around them. And females tend to be more emotionally driven than males, causing a plethora of challenges that males generally do not face.

In many ways I think raising daughters is much more complicated and difficult than raising sons. Certainly there are exceptions, but generally most people I speak to believe that girls present greater challenges than boys, possibly because the stakes are higher (or at least seem to be). Females appear to suffer most from poor decisions that are made by either sex. Women and girls suffer the consequences of poor decision making in nearly every circumstance. For instance, the vast majority of single parents are females, often raising their children without any support from the male sperm donor. Clearly a male was involved in the actions that contributed

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Introduction

11

to producing a child, yet he does not suffer the consequences of his choices to nearly the degree that the female does.

What is it about a father-daughter relationship that is so powerful yet so frightening to a man? The entire time my daughter was growing up, I loved her like crazy—still do. I would have gladly thrown myself in front of a raging grizzly bear for her. But she scared the living daylights out of me, especially after she became a teenager. Her potential for self-destruction was in direct proportion to her inability to control herself. During adolescence she seemed unable or at least unwilling to view life from any kind of logical perspective. Her actions and decisions rarely made sense to me and often frustrated me beyond endurance. (Note: Throughout this book I share candidly about the ups and downs of our relationship. I do so with her full permission and knowledge.)

After numerous challenges over the years, my daughter appears to have settled down into adulthood as a competent, confident, and responsible young woman. We have what I think is a very good relationship. We see each other frequently, talk about issues in her life, and have genuine affection and love toward one another. We even speak together at a variety of father-daughter events around the country.

I am going to admit right up front that I believe in the old-fashioned notion that a dad should protect his daughter. Our ministry works on a daily basis with too many women, both young and old, who carry the deep wounds from a father who either abandoned them, did not protect them from other males, or did not protect them from life's other cruel intentions. A father should be involved in his daughter's life and the decisions she makes as she approaches adulthood.

Many components of our society would tell you that is a chauvinistic and overbearingly paternalistic way of thinking. They would say that our young women are more liberated and free to disregard this kind of paternal and parental interference—that

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

12

Introduction

they are adults and have the right to make their own choices in life. But I say, "Not true." The bane of young women today is that too many fathers have backed away into the shadows and have been "shamed" into being uninvolved in their daughters' lives. This has been destructive to young women on many levels.

A daughter is a gift from God and needs to be treasured, nurtured, and even protected by a father until another man comes along who is qualified to take over that role or until she is mature enough to take over that role herself. That's not to say that women are not equal in every and any way with males; it is merely to say that the powerful influence of a father's love and guidance can make the difference between living a healthy, fulfilling life versus one that is full of hopelessness and despair. Some might argue that women today do not need a man's protection and provision. That may be true, but I would argue just as strongly that daughters do need a father's protection until they reach a stage of maturity when they can fend for themselves.

This book will help fathers understand their daughters on a deep level. It will help them develop the close relationship with their daughters that they each need and crave. Finally, it will help a man understand what his daughter needs from him as a father. I've tried to do this with plainspoken common sense, wisdom, and humor. I've also included some touching stories that will resonate with every father. Many women contributed their stories and experiences to help me explain to you how important a father is to a daughter. Please don't take their input lightly. If you get a chance, read this book with your daughter. I think both men and women will appreciate what they will learn about themselves and their fathers in this book.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

13

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

It's your turn to try to quiet the baby. . . . Gently lift the baby to your shoulders. If you're holding baby correctly there should now be vomit on your shoulder. If there is poop on your shoulder, you are holding the baby upside down.

—Dave Barry, advice to new fathers

There's an old nursery rhyme that talks about little girls

being made of “sugar and spice and everything nice.” Our firstborn, Frank, was a very compliant, easy-to-raise child. Like many families, our second child, Kelsey, was just the opposite. Some might say she was made of “vinegar and vodka and all sorts of drama.” It's a common joke around our home that if Kelsey had been born first, Frank might never have been conceived. We would have been scared of having other children. Kelsey is what we call in polite company a “strong-willed” child. She has always had her own mind and her own way of doing things. She frequently did

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

14

things she knew she shouldn't, despite the consequences involved. In fact, consequences of any kind didn't seem to make a difference once she decided she wanted to do something.

Because of her temperament, Kelsey was a high-maintenance child and took a lot of our attention and resources. For instance, when she was about six years old, she pushed a babysitter down the stairs, and she treed another sitter, who wouldn't come down until we got home. At age two she managed to escape from her crib during naptime, climb up on the stove, and turn all the burners on high. My wife found her sitting and screaming in the middle of the stove between four redhot burners, her puffy acrylic dress inches from going up in flames. Once while my wife and I were away, Kelsey “stole” my wife's brand-new sports car and went for a joyride—at age fifteen! Luckily, sibling rivalry was stronger than loyalty, and our son ratted her out with a quick phone call—prompting us to leave for home early. Another time she loaded up our minivan with her “posse” and was involved in an auto accident in a seriously bad part of town. Still another time she was chased down by a baseball-bat-wielding lunatic who smashed out the windshield of our car. Again at age fifteen, she snuck out at 2:30 in the morning once and walked across town to a friend's house—she was gone when we woke up in the morning! I think you get the picture.

One day during Kelsey's tempestuous teenage years, I was talking with a friend. Roger had raised three daughters, and all had been “good” girls who never caused a lick of trouble. They all seemed

perfect. Frankly, I was envious of his daughters and not a little concerned about the apparent lack of my own fathering abilities. When I told him about my envy, Roger said something that surprised me. He said, “I know I have been blessed with *good* girls. I think God gave me *good* daughters because he knew I couldn’t handle ones who acted out.” Perhaps he was only being gracious and was really just a better father than I was, but I like to think perhaps there was some truth in what he said.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)
What Are Little Girls Made Of?

15

Sometimes fathers struggle with feeling inadequate to the task of raising their children. But God chose you to be the father of your daughter despite whatever challenges you think you might have. You are the perfect man to raise your daughter. She has *your* genes in her DNA and *your* blood coursing through her veins. Frankly, God chose you to be your daughter’s father despite your inadequacies. Since information is power, the fact you are reading this book is a good sign that you are a better-than-average father. Be encouraged by the truth that most men feel inadequate at some point during their fatherhood journey. One way to make our job as fathers easier is to understand how and why our girls are the way they are. To do that, let’s first look at how they are created. Then we will look at some of the biological differences that make females and males unique. While I doubt many fathers are comfortable thinking about their daughters’ reproductive systems or their hormonal stages, I think it is important to set a foundation to build an information base upon. With that in mind, let’s look at how she is created and what to expect as she progresses toward womanhood.

Biological and Psychological Makeup

During sexual intercourse, several hundred million sperm are released by the male into the vagina. Sperm travel through the cervix and into the fallopian tubes. If conception takes place, the sperm penetrates an egg and creates a single set of forty-six chromosomes called a zygote, which is the basis for a new human being. The fertilized egg then spends a couple days traveling through the fallopian tube toward the uterus, dividing into cells.¹ It then attaches itself to the lining of the uterus and begins the gestation process. By eight weeks most of the baby’s features are visible. During the first few weeks it is neither male nor female. However, a small group of cells, called the indifferent gonads—which are capable of becoming ovaries or testicles—begin to form. At the same time,

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That’s My Girl

16

other internal features of both sexes develop: the Müllerian ducts (female) and the Wolffian ducts (male). In a female embryo, from about the sixth week, the Wolffian ducts degenerate and the Müllerian ducts develop toward the fallopian tubes, uterus, and vagina. Meanwhile, by the twelfth week, the indifferent gonads begin to develop into ovaries.²

Shortly after birth, subtle behavioral differences between boy and girl babies begin to appear. These differences are likely caused by a combination of natural (biological) and nurture (socialization)

factors. In general, boys tend to be more active, while girls are more verbal. A Canadian study shows that boys tend to be more aggressive on the outside, while girls practice mental and emotional aggression instead.

Girls and women also tend to be more empathetic, more ready to share their emotions, and they have a better awareness about their environment. The differences in empathy grow with age as girls develop stronger communication skills and develop stronger intimate friendships that often last for years. . . .

Females score higher in skills related to speaking, reading, writing, and spelling, while boys have a better spatial imagination. In studies, boys were able to mentally rotate objects better than 80% of the girls.³

Not surprisingly, because of this aptitude, more boys than girls tend to be attracted to subjects like engineering and architecture.⁴

Until about the age of eight, girls are not significantly different in their physiological makeup than boys. That all changes with the onset of puberty, which is discussed in detail below. One area, though, that we should be aware of is how our perception of our daughters changes once they enter puberty.

By puberty, many parents (with the encouragement of our culture) think that teenagers are just young adults, capable of making informed and intelligent decisions on their own. While late adolescence is a time to help them develop these skills, the truth is that

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

17

the decision-making part of the brain—the prefrontal cortex—is not fully developed until about the midtwenties. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain responsible for reasoning, critical thinking skills, impulse control, and sound judgment. So when we send our young people off to college at age eighteen and expect them to make good decisions, we may have unrealistic expectations.

Truthfully, even if they want to make good choices, they may not have the capability. That doesn't excuse them for making bad choices; it only provides a possible explanation.

Additionally, teens are developing critical thinking skills and understanding concepts they previously did not comprehend. They grow cognitively with the ability to grasp abstract thoughts, think into the future, and develop moral reasoning. Both my son and daughter went through legalistic, argumentative stages while they were developing their abstract intelligence. Sometimes—no, most of the time—it drove me crazy!

Puberty

Adolescence (beginning with puberty) may be the most challenging time in a girl's life. She experiences a roller coaster of physical and emotional changes, and she begins placing a high importance on being accepted by others and achieving society's illusive standard of beauty.

From the moment she is born, your little baby girl is striving toward adulthood. Your little girl *will* become a woman, and it *will* seem like it happened sooner than you expected when it becomes a reality. Even as you read this book, her body is creeping (and sometimes rushing) toward that goal. One day her body will explode into womanhood, and you will be faced with challenges

you never thought possible. If you're like most fathers, this change will catch you off guard. It will be confusing, frustrating, and even a little frightening.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

18

Puberty often starts at about age nine in girls. Puberty marks the beginning of adolescence and is a time when hormones increase and cause changes to her body. Her breasts develop and her hips widen. She gains height and weight, develops pubic hair, and starts menstruating (having her period). Her female reproductive organs mature and her body becomes ready for reproduction. As her reproductive organs mature, she can now become pregnant. The pituitary gland controls all of these changes, causing the ovaries to produce the female sex hormones that launch her into womanhood.⁵ As her body develops, she may look like a full-grown woman, but inside she is likely still a little girl.

These changes can cause unexpected consequences. Kelsey was always a gifted athlete growing up. She played soccer and basketball from age five up through high school. I'm convinced she could have gotten college scholarships in either sport, but she chose not to go that route. One of her advantages was she was always faster than her competitors. I remember a soccer game in about eighth grade. I was commenting to another father how much faster she used to be when she was younger. I couldn't figure out why she couldn't run as fast as she used to—I thought perhaps she was not trying very hard. A nearby mom overheard our conversation and politely told me that my daughter had gone through puberty and now had breasts and hips, so of course she couldn't run as fast anymore. That thought had never occurred to me until then.

Hormones

Have you noticed any of the following behaviors in your teenage daughter:

instantaneous mood changes

taking things personally

a drop in self-esteem

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

19

hypersensitivity to what others say

not liking herself

trouble concentrating

difficulty making decisions

Family therapist Michael Gurian says, "If you noticed any of these or other symptoms of possible mood disorder or bipolar disorder, you've just described a normal adolescent girl."⁶

Teenage girls can be temperamental. As the great philosopher Curly Howard once said, "I'm temperamental—95 percent temper and 5 percent mental! Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk." That describes many girls during adolescence. One man told me, "My daughter changed dramatically at about thirteen years old. She used to think I was wonderful. But almost overnight I went from a guy who could do no wrong to a guy who could do no right. Suddenly I was a loser."

These symptoms are caused by the complexity of the female monthly cycle and the effects of a greater variety of hormones than males experience. Chemical imbalances in young females can cause drastic changes in their personalities and behaviors. Basically, hormones tell the millions of cells in a girl's body what to do, when to do it, and how it looks. They affect her mood, her appetite, her communication style, her self-image and self-esteem, and her primary emotions (anger, joy, grief). This interaction is all very complex, but here's a short summary of the most powerful hormones that influence your daughter.

Estrogen is a family of hormones that are the primary female hormone. They are the most influential hormone of a girl's physical, mental, and emotional experiences. Estrogen has been likened to "one of the most dominant forces on earth."⁷ Estrogen controls the amount of norepinephrine, serotonin, prolactin, and dopamine, which in turn control mood stability, thought process, perception, memory, personal motivation, anxiety, stress, and sex drive in a

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

20

female. This hormone powerfully affects the mood of a girl and her yearning for intimacy.⁸

Progesterone is another major hormone in females. Progesterone rises during the monthly cycle, shutting down estrogen levels. This often causes girls to feel withdrawn, irritable, and depressed. Progesterone is called the "bonding" hormone. Besides bonding fertilized eggs to the walls of the uterus, it also helps create complex social bonding structures when mixed with other chemicals like oxytocin. This is why females are often more nurturing and better caregivers than males. It is why families and relationships are so important to them. Estrogen and progesterone both need to be in delicate balance for a girl to feel balanced.⁹

Testosterone is also present in females, although to a much lesser extent than in adolescent males. Higher levels of testosterone in both males and females relates to less depression, more aggression, and a greater sex drive.

Your daughter's emotional state (her feelings) are a direct result of the influence of her hormones. These hormones cause her to want stronger and deeper personal relationships, more intimate friendships, and greater bonding attachments, and to have more compassion and empathy for others.

Let's take a break from hormones and look at a couple other developmental factors to be aware of.

Brain Works

There's a lot more going on inside your daughter's head than you can possibly imagine. As men, we tend to think in a structured, logical, and linear process. But her mind encompasses every detail of the world around her. Every emotion she feels and that anyone around her is feeling is part of this process. There are hundreds of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and imaginings all happening at once in her mind, some of them in conflict with each other.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

21

A big complaint from girls to their parents is, “You don’t understand me,” or “You really don’t know me.” They may have a point. Fathers and brothers typically think of teen girls as alien beings. And moms seem to have forgotten what they felt like at that age. I asked my wife many times when our daughter was going through puberty, “What in the world is she thinking?” Even though she had been a young woman once, my wife claimed to have no knowledge of our daughter’s thought process. Frankly, most girls don’t know or understand themselves, which makes it even more frustrating that no one else can tell them what is going on and why they act like they do.

For most of humankind’s history the female brain was equipped for taking care of children, requiring the development of emotive skills. In contrast, male brains developed mainly for hunting and other spatial activities like building and designing. The female brain, though, concentrated on processing the “emotional core” of the object she interacted with. Constant and intensive child care—as well as hands-on care of the sick, elderly, and disadvantaged—propels a brain structure to evolve toward in-depth emotive processing.¹⁰

A female brain develops areas that allow earlier language skills, verbal skills, and memory retention than males. Michael Gurian says, “The female brain, however, is coded to grow more quickly from right to left than the male. This is one of the reasons that female children, at very young ages, already use a higher quantity of words and more coherent language than boys. They speak, in

**Letters from Kelsey
(age 15)**

Hey Daddy,
Happy birthday! 48 wow! You’re old . . . er than me! Yeah, I know I’ve been acting weird lately, but I still love you a lot! I may not “show it” like other people or I may not say it as much as I should, but still know that I do love you! I like the fact that you’re doing this Better Dads thing, it’s just one more thing about you that makes me proud to have you as my daddy. I’ll love you always n forever, Kelsey Johnson
(your only daughter).

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That’s My Girl

22

general, earlier than boys. The left hemisphere, where most language takes place, develops earlier in girls.”¹¹

The female brain also produces more serotonin, which relates to greater impulse control. This is one reason why young girls can remain calmer than young boys do in the same situations. The female brain secretes more oxytocin than a male's. This means she has a greater capacity to care and nurture others. When a girl hears a baby cry, her body releases oxytocin, which produces a maternal instinct and causes her to want to hold the baby (which then causes more oxytocin to be released).

Even the way a female is wired biologically contributes to this nurturing ability. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania performed magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) brain scans on men and women. The experimenters induced stress in the subjects by having them count backward as quickly as possible from 1,600 by 13. Imaging showed that while under stress more blood flow went to the prefrontal cortex in men, the area of the brain that induces a fight-or-flight response. In women, more blood flow went to the limbic system of the brain, the area responsible for "tend and befriend" or nurturing behavior.¹²

A girl's sense of touch, hearing, and smell is greater than a boy's. She has a greater capacity to want to touch something for longer periods of time, deriving joy from the contact. She is creating an inner world that is much more sense- and contact-oriented than a boy's.¹³ Since the vast majority of brain growth occurs during the first five years of a child's life, this is the best time to lay a foundation for a girl's life. This is a time when we need to protect her brain from harmful media messages, dangerous people, and bad influences. During this period, be sure to give her continual physical and emotional bonding.

As a girl gets older, other areas of her brain will begin to develop and you'll notice significant changes. For example, due to a larger hippocampus and the greater number and speed of neuron

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

23

transmissions, girls typically have a greater memory capacity than boys do. By age eight or nine, most girls can complete a list of chores without being reminded, while boys typically cannot.

During adolescence, a girl will experience another rapid growth pattern within her brain. Puberty releases hormones that create a positive "neurologically traumatic crisis" within her brain.¹⁴ These dramatic changes can be confusing and frightening to a girl (and her father).

The ten- to twelve-year-old stage appears to be relatively significant in the brain development of girls. Brain growth during these years allows her to take on new skills, insights, abstract concepts, and abilities to think and argue. By twelve, many of the things she has learned will stick with her the rest of her life. Gurian says, A girl's relationships, intimacies, sports activities, art and musical activities, as well as academic learning during the ten-to-twelve period have a greater likelihood of "sticking" or at least "re appearing" later in her life because of their interconnection with the massive brain growth. . . . This is why, generally, we can say that if she enjoys piano at eleven, she'll probably remain somewhat musical during her life. If she reads a lot at twelve, she'll probably enjoy reading

throughout life. If she's in stable relationships at ten, she'll probably feel safer in stable relationships throughout life.¹⁵

Girls at this age tend to struggle with making decisions. Their brains, on average, are taking in more data and input to more *parts* of the brain than boys' brains are. Hence, boys tend to be single-task oriented, while girls agonize over five or ten elements of even a small decision. Frequently adolescent girls find it easier to let someone else make a decision for them than to think everything through and make no decision at all.

During the rapid brain growth that occurs throughout adolescence, our daughters actually need *more* guidance, input, and stability rather than less. This can be challenging because this is a

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)
That's My Girl

24

time when a girl is seeking more independence and does not want her father telling her what to do. But the truth is she needs you more now than she probably did even as a young girl.

Genetic Influences

One area that we tend to overlook in the development of our children is the importance of genetic influences, especially when compared to the environmental influences in their lives. I'm not a particularly big proponent of either the nurture or nature theory being exclusive in a person's development. I think most of us are a combination of both our genetic makeup and the environment we were raised in.

Recently, however, I have become more aware of the powerful influence our genetic code plays in our personal development. One rather humorous example of this is the similarities between my biological father and myself. I first met him when I was twenty-four years old. We look alike and stand with the same posture, and over the years, our wives have delighted in the fact that we also have a predisposition for the same clothing, foods, sleeping style, and many other habits and behaviors. When my dad and his wife drove up from California to visit us, we both were wearing the exact same unique brown velour shirt (there were probably only two of them in the entire country). Clearly, since I was never influenced by him as a child, these idiosyncrasies are the result of genetic coding that somehow determines my unconscious behavior, choices, and preferences in life.

But I have noticed even more destructive types of behaviors attributed to some form of genetic imprint. Most of us are aware of the generational cycles (or sins) that occur in families. Oftentimes these occur from modeled behaviors, but I'm convinced many are also derived (or at least influenced) from our genetic makeup. Modeled behaviors, especially from primary caretakers, *are* a hugely

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

25

powerful indicator in our own behavioral outcomes. We often see generations of families where alcoholism, abandonment, or abusive behavior that was modeled by parents is emulated and passed down from one generation to the next. However, genetics also appears to play a significant role in our outcomes, especially if we

are unaware of its influence.

I have observed this in many of the population we work with in our ministry. For example, virtually every female in every generation of one young woman's family—for as far back as anyone can remember—has been an unwed teenage mother. Even females who had been adopted out of the biological family followed this genetic blueprint for their lives. Knowing this predilection, her mother and father were determined to break this cycle with their daughter. However, despite raising her in a relatively healthy twoparent environment, being aware of the challenges they faced, and talking with her about those challenges, it took all of their mightiest efforts to keep that genetic legacy from coming to fruition. It was almost as if she was predisposed to make choices that forced her to accomplish the genetic coding in her DNA. She was prone to make self-destructive decisions and have attitudes that reflected those of the women in her family of origin, even though she had not been exposed to that kind of behavior.

This phenomenon is also observed in adopted children who act out in behaviors (substance abuse, promiscuity, out-of-wedlock childbirth) similar to their birth parents even having never met them. Certainly there are other factors involved in the behaviors of adopted children, not the least of which involves issues of abandonment, but many children raised in healthy adoptive families make destructive life choices eerily similar to those that their birth parents engaged in, even though they may not have any awareness of those behaviors.

I believe wholeheartedly that the models we are raised with while growing up are the biggest influences in the way we learn to live our lives. But perhaps more often than we recognize, we are

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

26

“preprogrammed” or predisposed to make choices that result in outcomes with a basis in our “generational heritage.” Being conscious of these historical tendencies allows us to make intentional choices to break generational influences instead of inadvertently falling into a preordained future.

As an example, if the women in your heritage have had problems with addictions or alcoholism, your daughter has a greater likelihood of being attracted to these substances.

We find that education is the first step to breaking generational cycles. Making your daughter aware of genetic propensities can go a long way to helping her avoid those traps. It also helps *you* not get blindsided by some tragedy that comes out of the blue. Other things like mental illness, diseases, depression, and eating disorders also have genetic components associated with them.

Look at your and your wife's heritage closely. See if there are specific cycles that present themselves throughout generations that need to be addressed. Many men are caught off guard by not being aware of potential potholes in the genetic coding passed on to their daughters. It's not that your daughter is predestined to act this way, but it may be something you need to be aware of in order to develop a comprehensive plan to raise her into healthy adulthood.

Menstrual Cycle

Until menopause, all women (and girls going through puberty)

are subject to a hormonal cycle each month (or every twenty-eight days on average). For most men, this process is mysterious and more than a little scary. Most of us feel this subject is strictly on a “need to know” basis, and we don’t want too much information. But as much as I don’t want to think about this in relation to my daughter, I believe it is important for us to have more than just superficial knowledge in order to understand what changes the women in our lives go through each month.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)
What Are Little Girls Made Of?

27

Understanding this cycle may help explain many behaviors of women that are confusing to most men. So here is a quick primer on a woman’s menstrual cycle.

Baby girls are born with ovaries, fallopian tubes, and a uterus. The two ovaries contain thousands of eggs. Each fallopian tube stretches from an ovary to the uterus. As a girl matures and enters puberty, the pituitary gland releases hormones that stimulate the ovaries to produce estrogen and progesterone. These hormones have many effects on a girl’s body, including her physical maturation, growth, and emotions.

About once a month, a tiny egg leaves one of the ovaries and travels down one of the fallopian tubes toward the uterus. In the days before ovulation, the hormone estrogen stimulates the uterus to build up its lining with extra blood and tissue, making the walls of the uterus thick and cushioned. This prepares the uterus for pregnancy. If the egg is fertilized by a sperm cell, it travels to the uterus and attaches to the cushiony wall of the uterus, where it slowly develops into a baby.

If the egg isn’t fertilized—which is the case during most of a woman’s monthly cycles—it doesn’t attach to the wall of the uterus. When this happens, the uterus sheds the extra lining. The blood, tissue, and unfertilized egg leave the uterus, going through the vagina on the way out of the body. This is a menstrual period. This cycle happens almost every month for several more decades (except, of course, during pregnancy) until a woman reaches menopause and no longer releases eggs from her ovaries.¹⁶ Most menstrual periods last from three to seven days. Body chemicals (hormones) rise and fall—sometimes dramatically—during the month to make the menstrual cycle happen.¹⁷

Many females experience symptoms associated with premenstrual syndrome (PMS), a normal part of the cycle process. One type of PMS is characterized by anxiety, irritability, and mood swings. Most likely, this type of PMS relates to the balance between estrogen and

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)
That’s My Girl

28

progesterone produced in the body. If estrogen predominates, anxiety occurs. If there’s more progesterone, depression may be a complaint. Sugar craving, fatigue, and headaches signify a different type of PMS. In addition to sugar, women may crave chocolate, white bread, white rice, pastries, and noodles. (Judging from these symptoms, I frequently suffer from PMS.) These food cravings may be caused by the increased responsiveness to insulin related to increased

hormone levels before menstruation. In this circumstance, women may experience symptoms of low blood sugar; their brains are signaling a need for fuel. A consistent diet that includes complex carbohydrates will provide a steady flow of energy to the brain and counter the ups and downs of blood sugar variations.¹⁸

Uterine cramping is one of the most common uncomfortable sensations women may have during menstruation. There are two kinds of cramping. Spasmodic cramping is probably caused by chemicals that affect muscle tension. Some of these chemicals cause relaxation, and some cause constriction. The other type, congestive cramping, causes the body to retain fluids and salt. Other symptoms of PMS include acne, bloating, weight gain, tender or swollen breasts, cramping, constipation, nausea, and mood swings. Additionally, there are several complications that can make menstruation very painful for women or girls. Premenstrual water retention is a phenomenon that accompanies menstruation for many women. Water retention makes women feel bloated. It can cause uncomfortable swelling in the breasts, swelling in the feet or ankles, and a bloated stomach. With all this complicated activity going on, it makes me pretty glad I'm a man.

Hormonal Influences

The hormone fluctuations a woman experiences frequently cause her to act easily hurt, angry, irritable, unreasonable, or illogical at times.

I don't know whether or not this cycle contributes to or promotes

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

29

disharmony in the home, but I have my suspicions. I haven't done any scientific studies to confirm my theory, but after having a wife and a teenage daughter in the house together, I do know there were specific times each month when things seemed pretty chaotic and frazzled around the home front. Much like coming face-to-face with a brown bear in the wilderness, there have been times where I had to follow the "Do not make eye contact—back away slowly" strategy to escape physical harm. Real or perceived slights and hurts were magnified, and expectations seemed unrealistic (at least to me and my son). The women in our home were irritable, easily hurt and offended, defensive, and downright angry during this time. They acted illogically, irrationally, and even appeared to suffer from temporary insanity. It's no mystery to me why ancient tribes used to segregate women from the clan during this time of the month. Just recently I made the mistake of mentioning that a particular blouse my wife had bought was less than flattering on her—it made her look heavier than she actually was. You'd think after thirty years or so I'd be smart enough to know better. I thought I was doing her a favor by mentioning this just before we went out to dinner, because she had previously gotten mad at me for *not* mentioning that an article of clothing didn't look good on her. She had recently lost a lot of weight and looked really good. I didn't think she would want to wear something unflattering. Once I had reattached my head after having it bitten off, I was pretty confused about what I'm supposed to do and what I'm not supposed to say (not to mention when to say it). A recent study conducted on the neurochemistry of the brain during menstruation shows there may be some significant biological

causes for a woman's erratic behavior. Using a technique called functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), the scientists looked at blood oxygen patterns in women's brains at two stages of their monthly cycle: just before menstruation and around a week after.

The scans showed that all of the women in the experiment had more electrical activity in the frontal lobe of the brain during the

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

30

premenstrual period, the time when most women might experience PMS.

Most often when PMS was present, they saw dramatic differences between the scans. They found that "when a woman feels good, her deep limbic system is calm and cool and she has good activity in her temporal lobes and prefrontal cortex. Right before her period, when she feels the worst, her deep limbic system is often overactive and she has poor activity in her temporal lobes and prefrontal cortex!"¹⁹

The study noted two distinct PMS patterns that respond to different treatments. One pattern involved increased deep limbic activity often accompanied by excessive activity in the temporal lobe. This activity "correlates with cyclic mood changes. When the limbic system is more active on the left side it is often associated with anger, irritability, and expressed negative emotion. When it is more active on the right side it is often associated with sadness, emotional withdrawal, anxiety, and repressed negative emotion. Left-sided abnormalities are more of a problem for other people (outwardly directed anger and irritability), while right-sided overactivity is more of an internal problem."²⁰

The second PMS pattern noted was "increased deep limbic activity in conjunction with increased cingulate gyrus activity. This area is the part of the brain associated with shifting attention. Women with this pattern often complain of increased sadness, worrying, repetitive negative thoughts, and verbalizations (nagging) and cognitive inflexibility."²¹

Okay, you can stop and take a deep breath now. Now that the uncomfortable stuff is over with, let's look at some topics that are easier to think about regarding our daughters.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- Establish habits with your daughter when she is young, and this will serve your relationship well later in life—habits such

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

31

as spending time with her, listening to her, and communicating effectively. What are some activities you can do together as part of "your" time that can become part of your relationship legacy? What are some ways you can be intentional about listening to and talking with her on a daily basis?

- To prepare for the physical, psychological, and emotional changes that will take place in your daughter during puberty, familiarize yourself with the biological changes and the effects that hormones have on your daughter's body. Develop a "game plan" or strategy before she enters puberty so that you are prepared for those changes and challenges.

2

Her Father's Influence

It is from her father that she begins to infer messages that will linger a lifetime—"I am, or am not, considered by men to be pretty, desirable, valuable, dependent, weak, strong, dim-witted, brilliant"; "Men are, or are not, trustworthy, loving, predatory, dependable, available, dangerous."

—Victoria Secunda, *Women and Their Fathers*

Fathers have been given a tremendous ability to influence the

lives of their daughters. This incredible paternal influence was once illustrated to me very powerfully. My office is in our family room, where the television is also located (probably not the wisest choice). One day Kelsey was home sick from school and was watching a program on television about training young women how to become models. On this episode, as part of their training, the young women—hoping to become famous models—were taking

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Her Father's Influence

33

acting lessons. The acting teacher was instructing the girls how to cry on command. She gave each girl a blank piece of paper and told her to imagine that it was a note from her father saying he was leaving her forever and never wanted to see her again. Every one of the young women instantly burst into tears, some of them sobbing in anguish.

After a few minutes of crying and hugging one another, the girls were then told by the instructor to rip up the paper and release their anger at their fathers. These young women ferociously tore into the papers with almost violent anger. It was a stunning illustration of a father's importance to a daughter. Either these young women were already the best actresses I've ever seen, or it was a gripping testament to the role a father plays in the life of a woman.

In preparation for writing this book, I asked dozens of women about the relationship they had with their father and the impact he had on their life. I wish I could say that they were all heroic and uplifting stories, but the truth is many of them were devastating tales of deeply wounded women who made terrible choices in an effort to try and fill the void in their soul that their father left unfulfilled.

The Power of a Father

Fathers have an incredible influence (positive or negative) on nearly every aspect of their daughters' lives. Because a daughter so yearns to secure the love of her father, she believes what her father believes

about her. If he calls her stupid or incompetent, she will believe that about herself. If he labels her plain-Jane or worthless or inept, she will have a hard time believing anything different about herself as a woman. But if he calls her intelligent, beautiful, competent, and accomplished, then she will believe that to be true. A father determines how a girl feels about herself.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

34

Author and pediatrician Meg Meeker describes the yearning daughters have for the approval of their fathers:

And I have watched daughters talk to their fathers. When you come in the room, they change. Everything about them changes: their eyes, their mouths, their gestures, their body language. Daughters are never lukewarm in the presence of their fathers. They might take their mothers for granted, but not you. They light up—or they cry.

They watch you intensely. They hang on your words. They hope for your attention, and they wait for it in frustration—or in despair.

They need a gesture of approval, a nod of encouragement, or even a simple eye contact to let them know you care and are willing to help.¹

Fathers have a huge impact on the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of their daughters as well. Toddlers with father attachments have better problem-solving skills.² Girls with close father relationships achieve higher academic success.³ As a girl gets older, father-connectedness is the number one factor in delaying and preventing her from engaging in premarital sex and drug and alcohol abuse. Girls with involved fathers are more assertive and have higher self-esteem.⁴ And girls with involved fathers also have higher quantitative and verbal skills and higher intellectual functioning.⁵

As a man and a father I'm pretty sure I did not recognize the power I had in my daughter's life. Yes, I probably knew on some level that I was important. But I never knew *how* important my approval and love at such a visceral level were to my daughter. If I had, I would have been much more intentional in the way I spoke to her and more aware of the messages I was really speaking into her heart. In fact, guys, if you want to understand your wife better, I suggest you look at the relationship she has or had with her father.

You can tell the endearment that women hold for their fathers merely by how they address them. For most women, her father is the most important male in her life. Girls usually stop calling their

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Her Father's Influence

35

mothers "Mommy" sometime around the age of eight or nine. But many grown women still call their fathers "Daddy."⁶ Lois Mowday says in her book *Daughters without Dads*, "Daddy, for the little girl, is the final authority in approving or disapproving who she is. Many women admitted to me that they had enjoyed a fair amount of affirmation from various people. But if their fathers displayed disapproval, it was as if all the other approval didn't even count. They needed the final okay from daddy."⁷

A Father's Words

A father's spoken or written words contain great power. A man's hurtful spoken words can cripple his child's soul for life. Many

women cherish notes or other blessings they've received from their fathers. Sometimes these words seem inconsequential to us and yet are treasures to our daughters. One woman spoke of a papercoated clothes hanger that was her most cherished possession.

Her father had written "I love you" on it when she was a little girl.

She carried it with her all through college and into her marriage.

Elderly people have told me their only regret in life was that they never heard their father say "I'm proud of you" or "I love you."

Most important is for you to make sure your daughter knows you love her. Because females are more verbally oriented than males, they place a higher value on words than the average male does. Consequently, a daughter has a powerful need to *hear* her worth from the important men in her life. She derives her self-esteem and value from what her father speaks into her heart (more on that later).

God has placed within a daughter's heart the inherent desire, even *need*, to love and respect her father. Even people who have been abused or abandoned by their fathers still *want* to love and respect them. Many girls with fathers in prison still hold them up on a pedestal and refuse to acknowledge their failings. Again, this

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

36

is a huge power that as fathers and men we need to recognize and treat with respect.

Role Model of Manhood

A father sets a huge role model for his daughter regarding the qualities she looks for in men and the standards she maintains.

He is the first man in her life and models how a man should treat a woman, how a man should act, and how a man shows healthy love and affection to a woman. He also sets the standard for how a daughter feels she deserves to be treated by men. He even determines how a girl feels about herself. If a father shows his daughter love, respect, and appreciation for who she is, she will believe that about herself as a woman, no matter what anyone else thinks. Dads who model a strong work ethic show young girls how men are supposed to provide for their families.

A little girl who has her father's love knows what it's like to be unconditionally and completely adored by a man. She knows the feeling of safety that love creates.⁸ As author Dr. Kevin Leman says, "The father-daughter relationship is the key to every woman's aching heart. It's the genesis of every grown woman's sighs. It's also, unfortunately, the missing ingredient in many lost souls."⁹

You are her first love. Every man in her life will be compared to you, whether consciously or unconsciously. A girl's father shapes her relationship with every other male she meets in life. As one young woman said, "My father's model of integrity was what I used to judge other men with. Without it I wouldn't have known what to look for in a man and I wouldn't have recognized it when I saw it even if I had."

A father also sets the standards a woman expects to live her life by. A woman named Mary told me, "My dad taught me to value honesty, hard work, education, and independence. I tend to have high expectations of myself because I always tried to do better

for myself, but also for my dad so he would say he was proud of me. I also tend to expect others to live up to my standards and expectations.”

Conversely, men who abandon or abuse their daughters set them up for a lifetime of pain, distrust, and feelings of worthlessness. You can feel the pain in this woman's statement: “I have expectations of being special, loved, cared for, and protected that my spouse is not able to live up to. I grew up feeling angry, unloved, unappreciated, not accepted. I know my value, but I struggle with believing that others know my value, even God.”

When men are angry or disrespectful toward the females in their families, it sets their daughters up to expect this kind of treatment from men. If a man does not provide for and protect his daughter, she has no expectations of this behavior from the men she enters into relationships with. Why would a woman willingly marry a man who can't or won't hold a job to support his family? Why would she intentionally marry a man who abuses her? She probably wouldn't. Perhaps that was the type of man that was modeled for her growing up, and she is subconsciously attracted to that model, believing she deserves that kind of treatment and is unworthy of anything better.

A father's model even influences how a woman feels about women in general. Dr. Leman explains it this way:

Women who have a low view of women invariably marry men with a low view of women. Ironically, it takes a strong father to give a woman a high view of femininity. Kids—especially daughters—get a sense from their dads that they're worth being loved. The woman who doesn't have a good self-image because she had no father or had a non-affirming father will typically marry a non-husband or a non-affirming husband.¹⁰

When dad is not around to provide a model of masculinity or to nurture his daughter's soul, the consequences can be devastating to girls and young women.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

The Effects of Fatherlessness on Girls

What happens when Dad isn't in his daughter's life? Does he still influence her in every area of life? Remember that a man does not have to be physically absent for a girl to be fatherless. He can also be emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically absent (or abusive) and can still wreak the same havoc in his daughter's life by his noninvolvement.

The truth is that a father's influence is so powerful on his children that even his absence affects them. In fact, one of the more accurate ways to measure the power of something is to look at what happens when it is absent.

Girls without fathers are much more likely to engage in early sexually promiscuous behavior, become unwed teenage mothers, drop out of high school, and suffer lower educational outcomes.

They are also subject to a variety of other risk factors—such as poverty; physical, emotional, and psychological abuse; drug and alcohol use; and crime—that attribute to a poorer quality of life.¹¹

But beyond the physical risks, girls without fathers suffer psychological disadvantages as well. A common theme among women who did not have a father is the inability to trust a man and to believe that he won't eventually abandon her. There is a deep anger toward men by women whose fathers have abandoned or wounded them. Counting on and loving a man is a leap of faith, because for them a permanent relationship with a man is entirely theoretical. These women tend to test the men in their lives by starting fights, finding flaws, or expecting to be abandoned.¹²

One woman who grew up fatherless readily admitted to me that she spent many years pushing her husband as far as she could just to test him and make sure he wouldn't leave her. Her fear of abandonment nearly drove her into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even girls whose fathers have failed them continue to yearn for his love and affection. You can hear the anguish of failed expectations in this woman's voice:

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)
Her Father's Influence

39

My father divorced my mother when I was seven years old. Because he constantly failed me while growing up, I had hardened my heart and finally cut him out of my life completely. Two years later I was pregnant and went into labor. I'm in the delivery room waiting to dilate enough to push and I look over at my mom and almost in a childlike voice I say to her, "Call my daddy." My mom thought I was joking. I told her I was not joking. I wanted her to call him and tell him I was in labor and that I needed him there. She called him. He said he was on his way to the hospital. He never showed up. I think for a brief moment in time that "little girl" in me yearned for her daddy, regardless of the twenty-five years of heartache he had put me through. Sadly, I knew the whole time he would never show up. I hoped he would but knew he wouldn't. Kind of like all the years as a child when he would say he was in town and would stop by. I would put my best outfit on and sit by the picture window of our house waiting for hours, hoping he would show but knowing he wouldn't.

Girls who do not receive healthy masculine love and affection from their fathers have a craving for it throughout their lives. Many women either willingly substitute or confuse sex for love in their desire for masculine affection. As one woman described it, "Daughters who sleep around never understand that the hole in their hearts they are trying to fill with sex is a hole that their fathers never filled with the cement of love and faithfulness." As I think back to when I was young, all of the girls available for sexual favors came from either fatherless or abusive backgrounds. Of course, the young men who took advantage of them did not recognize it as such, merely as opportunity.

Daughters who have had the benefit of healthy father involvement are more independent and self-possessed, and they are more likely to assume responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Father-deprived girls show precocious sexual interest (they are three times more likely to become pregnant out of wedlock than their fathered counterparts) and have less ability to maintain sexual

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)
That's My Girl

40

and emotional adjustments with just one male. Without a father, a girl must learn about boys without a man's perspective. She is like a lamb without a shepherd. Without a father's influence and guidance, even the most normal male activities may seem bizarre and strange to her.

Author and speaker Angela Thomas says, "I can be in a small group of women and tell you in a matter of moments which ones have had a healthy, loving relationship with their fathers. There is a certain confidence and peace that comes from a woman who has known such love. And there is an anxiousness and insecurity buried inside a woman who has never known a father's love or, worse, who has suffered wounds from his words or his distance or his hands."¹³ Women who have been hurt deeply in some way by their fathers tend to either take that pain out on men throughout their lifetimes or become victims of men.

Without a father around to provide a role model, healthy physical affection, and protection, a girl is left to the examples of manhood she sees on television, in the movies, and in music videos—by all accounts very poor options. Fathers can act as filters for much of the noise our culture throws at girls—without that filter girls are stressed and bewildered. They are left to the mercy of the young men (many of whom never had fathers either) who prowl around like packs of wolves. Males have an internal radar that can detect female sexual availability or vulnerability. This exposes young girls and women to predators who prey upon them and manipulate their unconscious desire and yearning for father-love. Combine this with a girl's natural longing for an older male's physical and emotional affection, and we see an increase in unwed teenage mothers, perpetuating the cycle anew. Many fatherless girls fall for the first male who shows them any kind of affection or attention that they crave. Without a model of how a woman and man interact together, a girl is left on her own to learn about the mysterious and frightening world of males—she doesn't have the real thing at home to watch

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Her Father's Influence

41

and examine. One fatherless woman told me, "I was fascinated by men. I wanted to please them, therefore I compromised some of my values." Another stated, "I was begging for any man to love me. I never believed anyone would love me if they knew me. I sought any attention I could from men—time, touch, promises." And still another described it this way: "I tend to be drawn to any man who pays attention to me. I feel flattered and surprised by the attention. I guess I sell myself short."

Any child deprived of his or her God-given right to a father suffers from father hunger. Both boys and girls suffer from this father hunger, yet each expresses it differently as adults. Your daughter needs you in her life, no matter how young or old she is.

Your Relationship with Her Mother

Perhaps the greatest gift you can give your daughter is to show her how a man loves a woman—model how she should expect to be treated and loved by a man. Just as fathers are the biggest influences as role models regarding masculinity for their sons, so too are mothers the greatest role models of femininity for their daughters. A mother

teaches what a woman's roles are in life, how to fulfill those roles, and what healthy femininity looks like. A mother also models to her daughter how to love a man, what level of respect men deserve, and what a woman's role is in marriage. A happy, secure, and confident wife teaches her daughters good things about men and relationships. Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, "The greatest gift a man can give his children is to love their mother." Your daughter is watching to see how she should expect to be treated by her future boyfriends and husband. Teach your daughter that she should *expect* to be treated with respect by other males. I see so many girls and women who allow themselves to be treated poorly by the men in their lives. The way a man treats his wife speaks volumes to a girl on how she should expect to be treated and valued by men

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

42

later in her life. If her father shows that he values her mother as someone worthy of love and respect, a girl will expect that from her husband (or boyfriends). But if he exhibits a model of abuse or disrespect for her mother, a girl may feel that she deserves to be treated that way as a wife as well.

The other day I was resting on a bench, enjoying the sunshine during my daily summer bike ride. From about fifty yards away, I could hear some people coming down the path. As they got closer, I could see a young woman striding purposefully, followed about ten feet behind by what I gathered was her boyfriend. Both were in their late teens or early twenties. She was fairly attractive while he was tall, skinny, tattooed, and unshaven, with pants sagging below his underwear. They were obviously having a disagreement and were sniping at each other as they walked along the trail. After they had passed by me about thirty yards down the lane, I heard him call her a filthy name and say, "You're lucky I don't smash your face into the concrete!" My first sad thought was, *Who taught them that was an acceptable way to communicate? And why did the girl think that she deserved to be spoken to like that?* Had either or both of them had that behavior modeled for them by a father or father figure? Or had one or both of their mothers allowed themselves to be spoken to like that?

Fathering expert Dr. Ken Canfield says,

All children are born as bachelors and bachelorettes. The first impression they have of marriage is what they observe in their own parents' union. They're watching you. They're taking notes. Your sons, however subconsciously, are asking the question: What does it mean to be a husband? They are also trying to figure out who these creatures called women are, and they are looking to you to see how you perceive them and what respect you give to them. Your daughters also have their eye on you. To submit to another in the mystery of marriage can be a fearful thing; your daughters are asking themselves how well their mother fared in the deal.¹⁴

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Her Father's Influence

43

Your daughter needs to see you praise your wife on a daily basis. Your praise means more to your wife than anyone else's. She needs to be constantly reminded how important she is in the lives of

her family. Her role is often a thankless one that does not receive the accolades of our culture. Her maternal role as nurturer and helpmate provides vital support to your role as provider and leader of your family.

Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade, said,

If a woman is beautiful in her teens and twenties, it's because God made her that way. But after she's married and the years pass, if she's still beautiful when she's fifty, sixty, and seventy years old, it's because of the way her husband treats her. So men, take another look at your wife. If for some reason she is dowdy and glum and depressed and discouraged, look in the mirror, and see who is the major contributor to her looks. Then cultivate her with love. Before long that dull countenance will become radiant and filled with joy.¹⁵ Tell your wife in front of your daughter every day that you love her, and spend time praising her for her good attributes. Tell her you appreciate her when she does something for you. Don't just comment when she disappoints you. Look for opportunities to use the power God has given you to lift her up to be the maximum woman God intended her to be. When your daughter sees those actions modeled, she will internalize them as how a woman should be treated.

As we will discuss throughout this book, a father also contributes to the kind of man his daughter will marry or be attracted to. Dr. Leman says this about a father's influence in this area:

If you act like a controlling, demanding, and lazy bum, your daughter won't think it odd or undesirable when she dates a boy who treats her this way. The best thing you can do to shape your daughter's view of men is to treat your wife like you want your future son-in-law to treat your daughter. More often than not, it will become

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

That's My Girl

44

a self-fulfilling example. Daughters and sons need to see Daddy treats Mommy as someone special. That tells daughters that they are worthy of respect.¹⁶

When our children were very small, I started intentionally opening the car door for my wife every time we got in the car. I had always opened doors for her, but not usually her car door. Frankly, it seemed a little courtly or old-fashioned. You don't see many men who do that anymore. But I wanted to model for my son how he should treat a woman, and I wanted my daughter to see how she should expect to be treated by a man. I also wanted to model honoring and cherishing my wife to them. Today, my son automatically opens doors for women without even thinking about it, and my daughter expects males to open doors for her and to treat her with respect. It was funny to watch in high school as she would stop at a door and expect the boys to open it for her. Of course, never having been raised that way, most of them did not know what she was doing. She would wait until finally one of them stumbled into opening the door and she would walk through and say thank you to him. You could see the momentary confusion on his face until the lightbulb went on as he understood what had just happened. Another thing that is important is for you to garner respect for your wife. It is vitally important (even if you are divorced) that you make your children respect their mother. As our children were

growing up I was quick to defend my wife's honor and make sure that they spoke respectfully to her. I would tell them, "That's my wife—don't speak to her that way."

Because a girl bases the value of a woman on what is modeled by her mother and on the respect her father extends to his wife, she needs to respect her mother. Respect is like a blackberry vine—when it gets a strong foothold, it grows no matter what you do.

Your respect for your wife causes her to respect you. That respect is passed to your daughter, which is then passed on to her children. Give your daughter the gift of respect and love for her mother.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Her Father's Influence

45

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- In what ways does a father have influence in his daughter's life?
- What effect do your words and actions play in the way she looks at herself and other men?
- Were you aware of those influences prior to reading this chapter?
- How will you use the power God has given you to be intentional in impacting your daughter's life? Remember—you *will* impact it significantly, whether you want to or not.
- Ask other men about examples of the influence they have had in their daughters' lives.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)