

# Fear and Fatherhood: A Godly Combination

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It happened one evening during family worship, and my son has not been the same since.

My three-year-old son David was standing and bouncing on the couch as he looked away from me and out the window. He was sidetracked by something outside, and his lack of attention was distracting my other four children and my wife. His behavior was unacceptable, even for a three-year-old. No one was able to listen as I read from the Bible.



I stopped reading and said firmly, “David, turn around and sit down right now.” His response was instant and calm. Unfortunately for him, it wasn’t very well calculated. He turned while still standing on the couch, looked me in the eye, and said with the defiant clarity one might expect of a rebellious teenager, “You don’t tell me what to do.”

The tension in the room was brief but palpable. My inner surprise was masked by an outward confidence as David and I stared at each other for a split second. Every other eye in the room rotated away from David and toward me as if being pulled by a single invisible string. “What will Dad say now? What will he do?” were the obvious but unstated questions.

Even David knew he had bitten off more than he could chew. The widening of his eyes in fear betrayed this realization even before his microburst of rebellion had passed fully out of his heart and over his lips.

“David,” I said decisively as I stood up, “come with me to my office.” Everyone, including David, knew what I kept in the office—the rod of correction. I took him by the hand and led him there. After a brief explanation of his error and the application of this God-ordained means of correction, David was fully convinced that as his father, I *would* tell him what to do, and that he would either obey or suffer the consequences.

What impressed me about this incident was the lasting effect of David’s new-found respect for his father. No one would say he has been perfect since that day—that was not his last spanking—but everyone who knows him would agree that he has gained a healthy fear of Dad, a demeanor that has shaped his character in excellent ways. His fear is not a

trembling uncertainty or terror, but a settled knowledge that the same Dad who loves and hugs him often is also not someone to be trifled with. To insist upon this kind of Dad-child relationship in your home is not to set yourself up as a household dictator or to go on some egotistical power trip. It is to pattern your own fathering after God’s.

If you address as Father the one who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth. (1 Pet. 1:17)

Clearly, Peter did not find fear and fatherhood to be mutually exclusive categories. The same God who loves His people also expects them to maintain a reverence for Him—a fear that transforms their behavior (Prov. 3:7; 8:13; 16:6). Likewise, the earthly father who loves his own children should conduct himself in such a way as to foster a reverence for his position, authority, and discipline (also see Hebrews 12:5-11).

I’m not suggesting that every act of disobedience requires a spanking. I’m not telling you to raise your voice or stomp around or display an angry countenance—the Bible also tells us that “the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). What I am encouraging you to do is to confidently and firmly establish your authority by winning *every* battle of the will with your children.

Quickly and decisively quell every outburst of sinful self-will in your children, whether it comes in the form of blatant rebellion (like David’s), or through whining, crying, glaring, complaining, eye-rolling, ignoring, patronizing, laughing, walking away, refusing to make eye-contact, moving slowly, or any other means of letting you know that they lack respect for you and your authority. When you let even subtle forms of rebellion pass by uncorrected (whether they are against you or your wife), you strengthen your child’s will to resist.

Passive or neglectful fathers tend to produce disrespectful, disobedient, and *unhappy* children. Your children will learn to respect and appreciate your authority only if you exercise it. The earlier you establish a godly measure of fear in your home, the better. The five-year-old who has no fear of his father will likely grow into a fifteen-year-old who has no fear of anyone—including God.

While your children are young, teach them the lifelong, and hopefully even eternal, benefits of learning to fear the father they love.