

Influential Fathers, Captive Kids

Steve Burchett

A businessman with a hectic schedule took a day off and went fishing with his son. This father and son talked and fished all day, even though the dad couldn't stop thinking about the growing mountain of work that awaited him back in the office. Both the father and the son wrote about the day, and their writings were discovered years later. The father penned these sad words: "Took my son fishing. Another day lost." But here's what the son wrote: "Spent the day with dad. It was one of the greatest days of my life."¹

Fathers, God has given us a captive audience. We should take advantage of these days because they won't last long. With God's help, our influence may lead our kids to a life of faithfulness to Christ. Here are three impactful strategies that I have learned from other fathers:



Keeping the Office Door Open

I heard a dad say that he doesn't shut his office door at home because he wants his kids to freely come in and out. I've adopted a similar strategy. Last night, my son came in and asked me to pray for him that he wouldn't have "scary dreams." I'm glad he feels the freedom to come to me with his fears.

Another benefit of keeping the door open is that children get to see what their dads do. Sure, my kids sometimes see me checking out the scores on ESPN's website, but hopefully they regularly see me reading my Bible, working on important projects, and praying. What our children observe may have a significant effect on them. John Paton, a famous missionary to the cannibals on the New Hebrides islands, wrote about the impact his prayerful father had on him when he was a boy:

How much my father's prayer at this time impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in family worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the heathen world to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Saviour, and learned to know and love Him as our Divine Friend. As we rose from our knees, I

used to look at the light on my father's face, and wish I were like him in spirit—hoping that, in answer to his prayers, I might be privileged and prepared to carry the blessed Gospel to some portion of the heathen world.²

One-on-One Bible Reading

One of the pastors of my church encourages "Evangelistic Bible Reading" with unbelievers and/or with those who profess to be Christians but show no signs. The aim is to read through a book of the New Testament with one or several people in order to introduce them to Jesus. For example, someone may gather a few men at work and read two or three chapters of Luke once a week during lunch until they have read through all twenty-four chapters.

I'm taking a similar approach with my children, reading with each of them individually at least once a week. Currently, I'm reading through Matthew with my son and John with my daughter. We read the same translation, but we each have our own Bible. My goal is *not* to preach at them every other verse, but we take turns reading (we enjoy ten verses at a time) and I'm hopeful that the Holy Spirit will use the Scriptures to convict my children of their sin and to reveal to them the glory of Christ. I try to answer their questions, but if all that we do is read for 25-30 minutes, the time is productive. I wasn't sure at first how my kids would like this, but it seems to be a highlight of their week and they often ask when we can read again.

Daddy Time

This idea, which I heard from a pastor on the radio, is very simple. One child gets to stay up thirty minutes extra one day a week while the other kids go to bed. Those thirty minutes are spent with dad. If he's in his office working on his computer, the child is right there with him. If dad is watching the ballgame, the child is by his side. The boy or girl is free to read a book or play with a toy (if it's not noisy!), but only if he's with dad.

Serious conversations may happen during this time, but not always. Even without significant dialogue, something good is happening—kids need to know that their dad enjoys spending time with them. "Daddy Time" is a small gesture that helps keep a father's relationship with his children warm and the communication lines between them open.

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¹ Steven J. Lawson, *The Legacy: What Every Father Wants to Leave His Child* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1998), 29-30.

² John G. Paton, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2007 [Reprinted]), 21.