

DAD is a verb

REACHING TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE
BY BUILDING RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS

by Andrew Graham



Throughout the histories of Christendom and scientific inquiry, there has allegedly been an unbridgeable chiasm between two distinct disciplines. Yet it is increasingly evident that accurate biblical hermeneutic and accurate scientific discovery are compatible. God has chosen to reveal Himself through His Word (the Bible) and His work (creation). God is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) so it can be concluded that these two disciplines (Christianity and science) are not only compatible, but complementary as two components of God's revelation. The alleged disconnect is present when the Scripture is inaccurately interpreted or the scientific data is flawed. It is puzzling that informed people are surprised when honest scientific inquiry parallels principles found in Scripture. More and more scholarly research that is published affirms what Christians have been saying for decades. This phenomenon even encompasses the traditionally humanistic disciplines of psychology and sociology as data relating to the importance of the family consistently affirms biblical teachings.

Cutting-edge studies on the development of children and adolescents quantify the importance of Dad's relationship

with his children. Clearly this finding is not a surprise to anyone familiar with the book of Proverbs. Recently published articles related to family structure have produced reliable outcomes that indicate that homes in which Dad is not present correspond to higher rates of poverty, depression, incarceration, physical abuse or neglect, drug use, obesity and academic problems. Just being there for children is enough for Dad to reduce the likelihood of these problems.

Christian dads, though, should want more for their young people than the absence of those problems. Proverbs 23:24 says that a joyful father is the father whose children are righteous. Just as the influence of Dad impacts a child's material and social position, so the influence of Dad impacts a young person's spiritually. It has also been noted that many of the leading atheists, such as Darwin, Huxley, Nietzsche and Freud, were raised in religious homes but felt alienation from and resentment toward their dads.

As the 21st century begins to unfold, dads who are concerned about the spiritual direction of their young people must recognize that the culture around them views life with a postmodern perspective.

Each parent-child relationship has its stressors to one degree or another; this time it's different. No longer does Dad simply have to combat the intergenerational differences; the dynamic is so different that it would better be categorized as intercultural.

In previous generations, what was heard from the pulpit and in conservative holiness homes was reinforced by society. Today's culture teaches young people to question and challenge the belief system presented to them. This postmodern dynamic presents a new paradigm that must be addressed in order for today's young people to be reached effectively. If a postmodern generation is to be reached with the truth of the gospel, it will be through relationship and not rules. Once an authentic relationship is built and biblical convictions are demonstrated, then the likelihood of our young people embracing the teachings of biblical Christianity are greatly increased. Relationships, and father-child relationships in particular, lay the foundation upon which beliefs, values and behavior are constructed.

The need for a relational connection is paramount. Christian author Josh McDowell has *(continued on page 6)*

(from page 2) outlined some key connecting points in which this relational connection can be established: affirmation, acceptance, appreciation, affection, availability, and accountability.

Affirmation. Romans 12:15 admonishes believers to share in the emotions of others. This builds a bridge, not a barrier, to a healthy relationship. Affirmation validates the feelings of young people, giving them a sense of authenticity: what they say has value, even if it's in disagreement.

Acceptance. Romans 15:7 is a mandate to "receive one another." Just as the Father loves His children unconditionally, so fathers must express unconditional love toward their children. They are loved for who they are, not for what they do. This forges a sense of security and opens the door for greater trust in communication.

Appreciation. Everyone wants to feel as though they are making a difference, and young people are no exception. Building a relational connection involves moving away from trying to catch them doing wrong to punish them and toward

trying to catch them doing right and praising them.

Affection. Expressing love through words and appropriate touch lets young people know that they are loved. Young people who report that their parents say "I love you" daily report significantly higher levels of self-esteem.

Availability. Jesus affirmed the importance of being available for children when, in Matthew 19:13-14, He set aside other responsibilities to present Himself as available to them. Affirmation, acceptance, appreciation, and affirmation are just lip-service if young people see themselves as last on the list of priorities.

Accountability. The first five connecting points must be balanced with reasonable boundaries. Accountability fosters responsibility; it provides markers between which a young person can operate safely and securely. Young people who report having clear, reasonable boundaries report that this proves their parents' love toward them.

Each year dozens of studies come up with similar conclusions: the most impor-

tant relationship in the development of an adolescent or a teen is their relationship with Dad. If dads want to build a relationship with their young people, they need to do more than just quote Scripture. They need to build up their connecting points by putting them to practical use: show respect for God and His word, respect for church leadership and respect for their mother; spend time with your children even if it means sacrificing personal gain; eat together as a family; read Scripture together as a family; earn the right to be heard by listening; discipline out of love; be a role model by demonstrating honesty, humility and responsibility both outside the home and in.

Each step of connecting with today's youth mirrors the steps of God's connection with His church, His children. If 21st century dads hope to capture the hearts of their young people and turn their hearts toward God, they'll need to recognize the need for establishing a relational connection. On this, accurate Scriptural interpretation and sound scientific data agree: Dad is a verb. ☉

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