**Fathers and Daughters**

*How God taught me to help my daughters*

Fathers, our daughters are precious gifts from God! As you consider ways to draw closer to your daughters, I thought I would share some of the ways God has guided me with my two daughters. I have asked my girls to share their thoughts as well. I hope our stories can help you and give you an example of God’s guiding grace.

**My Daughters’ Stories**

My daughter Elizabeth was a lot like me: she tended to be anxious, self–critical, and to feel too much shame and guilt. Because God had taught me how to deal with those issues in my own life, I was able to help her.

I taught Elizabeth that it was okay to see and admit your weaknesses, but not to become overly self-critical and negative, and too motivated by guilt and shame. I shared with her my own struggles, and how God by his grace and love had helped me to become more at peace and confident in his grace. I explained that God in his love had sent Jesus to lovingly take away our sin and guilt. This helped her to learn how to look more positively at herself and to be more at peace. She eventually decided to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord and to become his disciple—she repented and was baptized into Christ.

My willingness to share my own challenges made a huge difference for her, and, of course, drew us close together.

*Elizabeth’s thoughts:*

*I’m forever grateful that Dad was so open with me. What a huge relief it was to know that I wasn’t the only person who doubted God’s grace or felt unworthy. Because Dad had worked through his own questions and feelings, he understood mine as few others did. He was able to work me through my struggles step by step and scripture by scripture, to build my faith and understanding of grace. I still remember the way he described grace as “the Jesus filter” that allows God to see us clearly, weakness and all—but with Jesus’ blood filtering out all the sin so that we stand sinless and holy before him!*

My younger daughter Alexandra had different struggles than her older sister. She had the strengths of being confident, outgoing, and talkative. But, just as all of us do, she had weaknesses that accompanied her strengths. Because of her confidence, she could tend at times to be too outspoken, and sometimes she did not listen sufficiently to others.

Since our personalities were so different, I didn’t know how to respond. At first I overreacted and became too upset and critical towards her. My godly wife Geri helped me to see that my daughter’s outgoing personality and outspokenness did not mean she was being disrespectful or critical—she just needed to learn some self-control. When I came to realize this, I made a decision to change my attitude and to become more giving, accepting, and patient. I strove to help her to learn how to be a good listener, but yet still carry on her strengths of being warm and outgoing. As a result, she grew and learned, and yet maintained her positive strength of being a talkative person.

We also set a time to go out together for breakfast every Friday morning as I took her to school. During those times I listened to her, and she to me. We prayed together. I was able to share God’s teaching and blessings with her. We really enjoyed our times and became much closer. Both of us grew in the way we understood and treated each other, and we are very close to this day.

*Alexandra’s thoughts:*

*In many ways, my father and I could not be more different. Growing up, I saw him as a thoughtful, quiet, and deeply introspective soul. For a loud daughter who connected by talking and talking some more, we mystified each other. Was I confident? Yes, absolutely. But I was also deeply insecure and longed for my dad’s approval. I often wondered, “What is he feeling? What does he think about me? Are we okay?” In my young teen years, I could tell that I was different from him and that my personality was a little baffling to him and his introverted self. These differences led to tension between us, to confusion, and to many misunderstandings. But over time, I saw my dad begin to reach out to me differently. Even though he had successfully parented three older children, my dad changed his approach with me. He connected with me in the ways I needed: taking me to McDonald’s or to a tea shop every Friday before school, listening to my bubbly middle school stories, and making concerted efforts to understand his daughter who was so very different from him.*

*Just a few years ago, the woman who studied the Bible with me told me a story I had never heard about my dad. She and her husband met my parents for a discipling time at a restaurant when I was about 12 or 13. I was sitting at another table with some other kids. Over the course of lunch, my dad asked this woman, my mentor, what he could do to be a better father to me. And she described his need to accept my bubbliness, to work with me and train with me as an individual, and to try not to interpret my extreme extroversion as willfully disrespectful. Just a minute later, I bounced up to their table, interrupted the conversation and proceeded to animatedly tell them a story. My dad got flustered and irritated and started to shut me down. I wandered off, slightly dejected. But then, he did something amazing. He stopped, and looked at my mentor and said, “I just did it again, didn’t I?” My dad was willing to see himself. To apologize to his daughter. To change his parenting style four kids in. To become not just what felt easy for him, but to become who his youngest daughter needed him to be.*

*Now, the things that once mystified my dad have become the things he cherishes the most about me. He is constantly expressive about how much he loves me and likes me— and that’s what I’ve needed the most. I might be different from him, but I’m still his.*

Fathers, let us enjoy the gifts of our daughters. Let us strive to understand them even when they are different from us! Let us love them in the ways they need to be loved. When they are secure in the love of their earthly fathers, they are better able to receive the love of their heavenly Father!