

52 THINGS  
DAUGHTERS  
NEED FROM  
THEIR  
DADS

JAY  
PAYLEITNER



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## **52 THINGS DAUGHTERS NEED FROM THEIR DADS**

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*To my Rae Anne.  
You brighten each day.*

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## FOREWORD

*by Robin Brown DeMurga,  
daughter of Steve Brown  
(author and founder of Key Life Network)*

Although there is no such thing as a perfect father and only God can fill that role, daughters need their earthly fathers...desperately. You may not think of yourself this way, but you are God's gift to your daughter. And it's clear you want to be the best father you can be. You want to love your daughter well. (After all, you picked up this book, right?)

My own father did the best he could. That's all any of us can do as we maneuver through life. Sure, you *want* to be a better dad, but you are always going to fall short and feel a little guilty when your perfect kids don't turn out so perfect. Thankfully, God's grace always makes up for our lack.

For me, life as a PK ("Preacher's Kid") was hard. What kid stands a chance competing with God and God's work? Dad was, for the most part, an absentee father...and he would be the first to admit it. In recent years, we've come to terms with our daddy-daughter relationship and have had great conversations filled not so much with regrets, but a new appreciation for God's faithfulness, forgiveness, and our own human limitations.

There is nothing like time and maturity—all by God's grace—to enable us to finally see our parents as the struggling human beings they were and are. And in the case of my dad and me, working side by side at Key Life Network has literally forced healing, reconciliation, and growth.

The memories I do have of Dad from my growing-up years are

strong ones that I cherish. A father–daughter lunch date at IHOP with chocolate-chip pancakes and a chocolate milkshake (that still sounds like a great meal to me!). As a teenager, lots of bedroom-door-slamming on my part with Dad frantic and frustrated, but caring immeasurably, on the other side. When we first moved to Miami from Boston, Dad’s first attempt at breaking open a coconut using just about every tool imaginable—with all of us laughing and keeping our distance (for the record, a hammer and nail did the trick). Dad fiercely going to bat for me with a high-school English teacher (I was so embarrassed!). And at age five—with Mom’s urging and only after my passing what seemed like a theological pop quiz (he didn’t think a child that young could understand salvation)—Dad gently guiding me into a relationship with Jesus...as I sat on my bed, folded my hands, and prayed alongside him.

In spite of my dad’s lacks, my sister and I never doubted his unconditional love for us. He told us often and repeatedly how much he loved us and how proud he was of us. He also humbly apologized whenever he was wrong or neglectful (he still does to this day).

And now Dad and I are both a lot older, my growing-up years are long over, and God has given me a new perspective on just how much my father was able to build into my life.

As I read the book you hold, Jay Payleitner’s *52 Things Daughters Need from Their Dads*, I nodded my head over and over as I laughed and cried. You’ll find here solid suggestions—all practical, all doable, many crazy fun, and many surprising and brand-new—for being the best father you can be.

And even when you fail or fall short, God’s grace will make up for your lack. Isn’t that a relief?

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## Always Daddy's Little Girl

Look back at the photo on the front cover of this book. What do you think?

(For the record, it's not me and it's not my daughter, Rae Anne. I don't have that much hair. And Rae is 20.)

I lobbied my publisher hard for a cover photo featuring a father and his daughter right around 12 years old. Because dads fear that age. Don't we?

For her entire life, our sweet little girl has been worshipping her daddy. Anything we say, she believes. Anyplace we go, she wants to tag along. Anytime she's scared or hurting, all we have to do is show up and all the bad stuff melts away.

We like being the daddy of a little girl. It's really pretty easy. And great fun. But we also know that magic won't last.

Change is coming. And we don't know what our relationship is going to look like on the other side. We've heard ominous stories of teenage girls raging against their fathers. We feel helpless when we consider the world she's about to enter. We imagine the worst: sexual promiscuity, eating disorders, alcohol, drugs, depression, obsessing over looks, sleepless nights, parties she isn't invited to, parties she is invited to, homework assignments we can't begin to help with, and whether or not we matter anymore.

In the debate about what photo best paints the father–daughter picture, the editorial and design team at Harvest House Publishers made an excellent point. *No matter what age she really is, we always see our daughter as our little girl.*

I must say, I had to agree.

Rae Anne has four older brothers. All out of college. Three of them even married. But the dominant mental images I carry in my head of Alec, Randall, Max, and Isaac are of their coming-of-age season in middle school or high school.

Rae Anne is a beautiful, strong, dedicated, fierce, and fabulous young woman. But...sorry, Rae. You will always be my little girl.

Dad, fear not. Stop imagining the worst. You and your daughter will be fine. Better than fine. With a little prayer and preparation, your future will be filled with good conversation, lively debates, some tears, much laughter, quick hugs, longer hugs, a few sleepless nights, some grand celebrations, and memories that sweep you into the next stage of life for you and your family.

I must warn you that some of the chapters in this book do contain cautionary tales and warning signs to watch for. But anticipating what might be lurking around the next corner is part of what you signed up for as a dad.

Most important, I hope this book will help you realize you're not alone in this adventure called "raising a daughter." Every situation is different, but there are certainly quite a few friends and family members cheering you on. And, God himself gave you that little girl to love, protect, and provide for. His plan for you and your family is rock solid. Count on it.

*"Certain is it that there is no kind of affection so purely angelic as of a father to a daughter. In love to our wives there is desire; to our sons, ambition; but to our daughters there is something which there are no words to express."*

—JOSEPH ADDISON

*A Daughter Needs Her Dad...*

## To Be the Perfect Father

Your daughter needs a father she can count on 100 percent of the time. With 100 percent perfect advice. Infinite vision into the future. Providing for her every need. Available 24/7/365. This is what you might call an imperative. A must-have. An absolute life requirement.

To relieve any pressure you might now be feeling, let me say this: “Dad, that ain’t you. No one expects you to be a perfect father.”

For sure, you love your little girl 100 percent of the time. But that’s not enough. You are going to make mistakes. You are going to set expectations that are impossible to meet. You are going to get angry at things that are really not a big deal. You are going to give her things she does not need and cause her to miss opportunities she should have. You are going to open the wrong doors and close the wrong windows. You are going to be silent when she needs to hear you say, “I love you” or “I’m sorry.” You are not and cannot be the perfect father.

You probably already know where this is going.

Since you can’t be the perfect father, you’ll be glad to know that your daughter has a Father in heaven who is exactly that.

He does have a perfect plan for your daughter. “‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

He will never leave her stranded. “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

But wait. If God is all the father your daughter really needs, then what in blue blazes is your job? Are you an afterthought? Are you a fraud, an imitation? Are you superfluous? Redundant? Nonessential?

Of course not. You're not God. But you are a dad. Just like Joseph filled the role of husband to Mary and father to Jesus, you've got a job to do. Like Abraham trusted God's plan for Isaac (Genesis 22). Like Jairus wept for his dying daughter and sought out Jesus' help (Mark 5). The Bible acknowledges and has all kinds of clear instructions for earthly fathers. Don't exasperate your kids (Ephesians 6:4). Manage your household (1 Timothy 3:4). Discipline your children (Proverbs 19:18). Look for teachable moments with your kids (Deuteronomy 6:7). Love your wife (Ephesians 5:25).

So yes, Dad. You have a job to do. Even though you can't be the perfect father she needs, you are the best she has right now. And can I say, Dad, you're doing a pretty good job? The fact that you're still plowing through this first chapter of a book with a title like this is a good indication of what's in your heart and your deep desire to be the father your daughter needs.

There's an oft-told story that might help you embrace your role.

A sweet little girl who looks a lot like your daughter is frightened by the crashes and flashes of a thunderstorm. From her bed she calls out to her daddy. He comes in with a gentle smile and sits down on the edge of her bed, assuring his daughter that she need not be afraid—she is safe and Jesus is always with her. The little girl thinks about that idea for a moment and then says, "I know that, Daddy. But right now, I need someone with skin on."

You're not God. But to your daughter, your physical presence—your words, actions, hugs, provision, and example—is part of God's big design for raising a woman of virtue and achievement.

Years from now, you'll look back and see that even during times when you didn't know what to do or how to respond in a crisis, your presence was all that was really needed. You may have felt like you didn't do enough. But to your daughter, you represented "God with skin on."

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## Takeaway

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Too many fathers beat themselves up or neglect their fathering duties because they don't always know the right thing to do or the right words to say. It's really okay. Join the club. Making mistakes is part of being a dad. In the meantime, make sure your little girl is growing in relationship with her perfect heavenly Father.

*“If you... though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”*

—JESUS, IN MATTHEW 7:11



*A Daughter Needs Her Dad...*

## To Do Stuff with Her Only

I don't know how many kids you have. But you should make it a point to do something at least once a month with each one of your kids by themselves. Just you and them. With a son, you can call it whatever you want. "Man time." "Palling around." "Dadapalooza." But with your daughter, go ahead and call it a "date."

You're not babysitting. You can't babysit your own kids. So when your work colleague calls in the middle of your time together, don't say, "I'm babysitting." Say, "I'm on a date with Ashley."

Daughters need to date their dads. If she's a toddler, it's pretty easy. Ten minutes lying in the grass, rustling in the leaves, or making snow angels. If she's five, it's still pretty easy, but invest a half hour. Go for ice cream. McD's. Donuts and juice. A bike ride. Goofing in the driveway with a hula hoop, basketball, bubbles, or sidewalk chalk. By second grade you can teach her four-square or hopscotch. Again, it's just you and her.

Then about third grade or so start thinking about real dates. With a plan, a time, and a destination. A movie date, lunch date, or library date. Take a class together. Coach her sports team. Or sit in the bleachers during her practices and take her out for a Slurpee after. Do something girls do with their moms, like pottery painting, jewelry making, or calligraphy. Go window shopping. Mini golf. Frisbee golf. Visit a museum. Visit a pet store. (Pet a puppy, talk to a parrot, or buy a reptile without mom's permission.) Go ice-skating. Visit an apple orchard. Make a pie. Go horseback riding. Go on a double date with your daughter's best friend and

her dad. Go to the bank and start a savings account. Give her \$100! Wash Mom's car. Bowling. Bird-watching. Browsing a bookstore. Or just go for a Sunday drive.

In the middle of your date, hope something goes terribly wrong. The bowling alley is overbooked with leagues. The restaurant wait is 90 minutes. The skating rink is closed for repairs. A flat tire. Ants at the picnic. You lock your keys in the car.

With any of these minor catastrophes, you have a delightful opportunity to demonstrate patience, resourcefulness, and a sense of humor. These are all traits your daughter should expect in any fellow who takes her out. Of course, I'm not suggesting you orchestrate any near-calamities on your daddy-daughter dates, but I'm not ruling it out either.

Here's the point. You might think the primary purpose of dating your daughter is quality time for the two of you to make some memories. Nope, sorry. When you take her out, the real reason you need to show up on time, open her car door, treat her with respect, and handle any mishaps with grace and a smile is because you are modeling for your daughter the way any boy should act when she goes out on any date at any time.

Finally, when your daughter does start dating boys her own age, that doesn't mean your dates with her should stop. Actually, that's the season in life when you want to spend more time with her, not less. You may have to work a little harder to get on her busy social calendar. But if you ask nicely, she just might fit you in.

Oh yeah. Dad, don't forget to date your wife too.

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## Takeaway

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Daddy-daughter dates don't have to be extravagant. But they do have to be intentional. If it's been more than a couple months since your last dad-daughter rendezvous, go ahead and plan something big for this weekend.

*“Watching your daughter being collected by her date feels like handing over a million dollar Stradivarius to a gorilla.”*

—JIM BISHOP

*A Daughter Needs Her Dad...*

## To Spring for Flowers for the School Bus Driver

I think most elementary schools around the country make a big deal about the one-hundredth day of the school year. It occurs sometime in late January or early February. In our hometown, the kindergarten kids celebrate the day by bringing exactly 100 of something to school for show-and-tell. For some kids that means such uninspired collections as 100 Cheerios glued to a poster board or a zip-lock bag of 100 pennies.

Well, I think dads should inspire their kids to do a little more than that. That's why Max brought 100 helium balloons, Isaac brought 100 balloon animals, and Randy brought a birthday cake with 100 lit candles. (Coincidentally, that year 100-Day happened to fall on Randy's birthday—and, no, the fire alarm didn't go off in the classroom.)

What did Rae Anne bring to 100-Day when she was in kindergarten? One hundred crickets. More accurately, somewhere between 75 and 150 crickets. It's not easy to get an accurate count of crickets inside a shoebox covered with screen. There's lots of jumping and chirping and jumping and chirping. And jumping and chirping. You get the idea.

Rae Anne was very excited about her crickets. The kindergarten teacher not so much. Mrs. Sanders totally appreciated the creativity and extra effort. But she also knew the risk. As a veteran teacher she kept the box of crickets sealed and safe for the entire half-day of class, and she certainly didn't let any of the boys sneak a peek or lift the lid. When the bell finally rang, not a single cricket had escaped the shoebox. Operation 100-Day

had been a success! Now all Rae had to do was get the crickets home and turn them loose in a nearby field where they could live free and happy.

Except that's not how it turned out. The actual facts are a bit murky, but here's what we do know. My bride, Rita, was waiting at the corner when the noon kindergarten bus pulled up. The door swung open, and seeing the horrified look on the bus driver's face, Rita had a pretty good idea of what had happened. With encouragement from some of the boys on the bus, Rae Anne had agreed to one more episode of show-and-tell. But somehow the lid came off and it became a surprise episode of jump-and-chirp.

Crickets were everywhere. Girls were screaming. Boys were stomping. Miss Jenny, our wonderful and patient bus driver, was panic-stricken. In a flash, Rae Anne was off the bus, and the bus rolled down the street with a baffled driver, a dozen agitated kids, and a small swarm of unwanted insect passengers.

We're pretty sure there were no formal reports filed. No one got called to the principal's office. But the next morning, Rae Anne did bring a nice bouquet of flowers to Miss Jenny. Strangely enough, that was her last week as bus driver. For the rest of the year, the cricket episode was never mentioned again.

Looking back, no regrets. A girl bringing a box of bugs to school may not be a typical kindergarten scenario. But why settle for typical? Dad, your daughter doesn't always have to be the center of attention, but she should rarely settle for same-o, same-o. Encourage her to approach most assignments, performances, or art projects from a fresh angle. She could write that report on the Jurassic era from the dinosaur's perspective. She could sing "Jingle Bells" while jingling car keys. She could paint a still life with a banana, apple, and worn-out baseball in a wooden bowl.

One more example. Your daughter's sixth-grade science-fair project could very well be something tediously typical like "Which brand of paper towel is most absorbent?" or "Which tastes better—Coke or Pepsi?" Or it could be something entertaining like "Who can pogo-stick the longest, boys or girls?" Then be ready, Dad. If someone breaks an ankle, you may need to spring for another bouquet of flowers.

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## Takeaway

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Sometimes girls just want to blend in. They don't want to be the center of attention. Sometimes they may feel creative and courageous. Dad, you need to know your daughter well in order to read all her signals. Sometimes push her to be daring. Sometimes back off. Try to get it right. But even if you get it wrong, she'll appreciate that you cared enough to be involved.

*“Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper. But all other flying insects that have four legs you are to regard as unclean.”*

—LEVITICUS 11:22-23