



TIM WRIGHT
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Hey, Dad,

Did you know that according to research the *primary influencer* of faith in your kids is *not*:

- The youth director
- The Pastor
- The Sunday School program
- The Church

That's not to say that the above are unimportant to the faith development of your kids.

But the number 1 influencer of faith in kids is...

...M O M!

Mom's number 1! Mom's number 1! ([Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations](#), 1990, Search Institute)

Perhaps you read that and immediately feel deflated. Over the last few years culture has not been kind to dads, suggesting that perhaps dads have gone the way of the black and white TV. And this simply adds more fuel to the claim.

Perhaps you read that and shrug your shoulders because it seems so obvious. Maybe your mom took the lead in forming faith in your home. Maybe you've followed that parental modeling in your own family and have left faith formation to your spouse.

My hope is that it brings out your God-given, testosterone-driven sense of competition; that something stirs in your gut that says, "What do I need to do to be number 1?"

(A confession: Guys, you know how coaches use "billboard" material to motivate the team? A snarky comment from the opposing team a day or two before the game? A headline calling the teams' talent into question? A point spread declaring the team an overwhelming underdog?

I did a little billboarding just now. Forming faith in our kids is not a competition. It's a team sport consisting of mom, dad, grandparents, mentors, and the Church. But competition is one of the gifts God has created into the DNA of men that can motivate us to good, noble actions. I want to tap into that spirit of competition in the hope of unlocking the power of Fatherhood.)

Research does say that, according to most kids and youth, mom is the primary faith influencer in their lives.

But dad...***you come in a close second!***

In fact, in other research, dad...you're #1!

Kara Powell, in her book, [*The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family*](#) (Zondervan, 2014) writes this:

...in evangelical Protestant families, 46 percent of children who feel "not close" to their fathers report that they have adopted the same faith as their parents. For children in evangelical Protestant families who feel "close" to their fathers, that rate jumps to 71 percent. That 25 percent gap in faith adoption dwarfs the 1 percent gain in the faith adoption between children who feel "close" to their mothers and those who feel "not close" to them...Children from mainline Protestant families who feel "close" to their fathers have a 17 percent gain in adopting the faith of their parents compared with those who feel "not close" to their fathers. Mainline Protestant children who feel "close" to their mothers have a 3 percent gain in following in the faith footsteps of their parents compared with those who feel "not close" to their mothers. (p. 63)

Think about the implications of that! The way you live your life...the way you live out your faith (or don't live out your faith) impacts the spiritual life of your child. No matter how active your kids may be in Sunday school, or the youth group, or in service through the church, or in worship, *your faith life practiced and modeled* (or not practiced and not modeled) *in the home, supersedes all of that!*

Talk about compelling, humbling, motivating, scary, significant, vital, and life-shaping!

As one author put it, “When it comes to kids’ faith, parents get what they are.” (Christian Smith, [panel discussion](#))

Dad...*With great power comes great responsibility.* Are you up for it?

The Power of Dad

Near the end of his book, [Do Fathers Matter? What Science is Telling Us About the Parent We’ve Overlooked](#), Paul Raeburn writes this:

*Multiple studies suggest that fatherlessness is a major contributor to crime and juvenile delinquency; premature sexuality and out-of-wedlock births to teenagers; deteriorating educational achievement; depression, substance abuse, and alienation among adolescents; and the growing number of women and children in poverty. That list comes from David Popenoe of Rutgers University, who says the decline of fatherhood “**is a major source behind many of the most disturbing problems that plaque American society.**”*

(Emphasis mine. P. 221)

That a book with the title, *Do Fathers Matter?* has to be written at all, is telling. In the beginning of the book Raeburn says that up until the 1970’s almost every major scientific study done on parenting was done on moms. And the research discovered what we intuitively know: Moms are absolutely necessary. Very few studies were done on the impact of Fathers. And even though no studies were conducted to suggest that dads are irrelevant...

*The irrelevancy of fathers had become an article of faith among researchers, and why would any of them question what they knew to be **true?*** (p. 6)

But once research was done on dads, Science showed that not only do dads matter, **they matter a lot.**

I've summarized some of the findings on Dad from Raeburn's book in a Top 10 list (my favorite talk show host was David Letterman). I highlight 8 of Raeburn's findings plus two Biblical reasons for why dads matter. I won't go into the Science or give much detail. You can check out his book. But these are some of the things I found fascinating about the power of dads.

We'll start with the science:

10. ***A father's environment, behavior, and even appearance can have a substantial impact on fetal health—and on the health of his grandchildren.***

- Obese fathers were associated with a 60% increase in the risk of having a child with a low birth rate. It didn't matter if mom was obese.
- Fathers involved with their partners during pregnancy reduce the risk of the child dying in the first year of life.
- Death rates for infants whose fathers are not around or not involved is nearly four times that of infants whose fathers are involved.

9. ***The children of fathers who embrace and support their partner's pregnancy have an easier transition into kindergarten.***

8. ***When the father is in the delivery room, women report less pain, need less medication, and cry less...but the fathers cry more!***

7. ***While moms tend to hold their children more than fathers, dads are more likely to play with their children when they pick them up.***

- Fathers, through play, are more likely than moms to encourage infants to explore and to challenge them.
- Interactions with dad that are playful, affectionate, and engaging predict later popularity in school and among peer groups, perhaps

by teaching their kids to read emotional expressions on their dads' face, and later on those of their peer group.

- Kids see mom as crucial to their wellbeing. They see Dad as a playmate on a certain level. His play, often unpredictable, helps kids learn to be brave in difficult situations or in meeting new people.

6. ***Fathers are not only important for children's language development, but fathers matter more than mothers.***

- Moms tend to be more attuned to their children and tend to use words the kids are more familiar with. Dads aren't as attuned so they use a broader vocabulary, and their kids therefore learn new words and concepts.

5. ***Children whose fathers play with them, read to them, take them on outings, and help care for them, have fewer behavioral problems in their school years and are less likely to get caught up in delinquency or criminal behavior as adolescents.***

4. ***Girls who have a warm relationship with dad and spend a lot of time with him in the first 5-7 years of their lives, have a reduced risk of early puberty, early initiation of sex, and teen pregnancy.***

- Researchers have discovered a robust association between father absence—both physical and psychological—and accelerated development and sexual risk-taking in daughters.

3. ***Sons who have fond childhood memories of dad are more likely to be able to handle the day-to-day stresses of adulthood.***

We'll wrap up with two Father affirmations from the Bible

2. ***God says Fathers matter!***

- God is neither male nor female. At times, God speaks from the perspective of a mother. But ultimately God chose to be addressed as and known by Father. That's how important dads are!

1. ***Dads are created in the Image of God—Male***

- God wired a dad’s brain and his hormones with a unique perspective on life that kids need, the church needs, the community needs, and the world needs.

Dad, you matter. God says so. And science validates what God says.

With that in mind...I want to explore with you your power for forging your children into followers of Jesus.

From Outsourcing to Dad Sourcing

Over the last 60 years Christians have increasingly outsourced the faith formation of their kids to the church. The busyness of life and our own sense of spiritual inadequacy drives us to entrust faith forging to the “experts:”

- ▶ Sunday school teachers
- ▶ Youth Directors
- ▶ Pastors

It makes sense, doesn’t it? If we want what’s best for our kids we want the best to pour the best into them. We want the best soccer coach or guitar teacher or dance leader. And we want the best in the faith business. To meet that need congregations have responded with building incredible, engaging, compelling Sunday school and Youth programs that will capture the attention of our kids and hopefully lead them to follow Jesus.

But faith formation doesn’t work like other things. It’s not first and foremost a skill set that can be instilled in us by an expert as is true with learning to play a piano or hit a baseball or sing.

Faith is about following. And that following happens in the moment—in close proximity to the person or persons we see the most: our parents.

Faith formation has always been most transformative when the home is the primary place for it *and* when that home-based faith formation is supplemented by the Church.

The Game Plan

The game plan, then, for faith formation comes down to this, dad: to look your son or daughter in the eyes as they grow and continually say to them—*Follow me as I follow Jesus!*

Another way of saying it is this: God, through Christ, is in the business of creating, igniting, and forging faith in our kids. But our role is to create environments where our kids can be encountered by God. To see God, hear him, and experience him. And that happens first and foremost in the home, when we as dads move from *outsourcing* our faith to the Church or youth group or Sunday school program or “dumb luck,” to *father sourcing* faith—living as openly Christian dads.

The point, dad, is that you bring a very unique and important perspective to the faith of your kids—the perspective of the Image of God—Male!

Dad—This is Your Brain

In forging his football team, the great Vince Lombardi always started with the basics: *Gentlemen: this is a football!*

Dads, forging faith in your kids starts with going back to the basics.

Being a man—being male—being masculine, means something. A man has a stance toward the world and toward faith that is different from that of a woman. And your kids need it!

We’re not talking stereotypes here (although just because it’s a stereotype doesn’t mean it’s wrong). We’re talking about the way God created you as a male.

So here are two basics you want to know about yourself as you think about your call to forge faith in your kids:

*Gentlemen: This is your primary hormone—**Testosterone***

Testosterone is:

- ▶ An action hormone
- ▶ A get-it-done hormone
- ▶ A movement hormone

Testosterone essentially makes you a male. When you were in the womb you were female until you were bombarded with testosterone, which in turn shaped your brain into a distinctly male brain.

(The primary chemicals/hormones in women are oxytocin and estrogen, which are calming, bonding, and connecting hormones.)

Gentlemen: This is your brain

Your brain:

- Tends to draw on the spatial-mechanical centers in the right part of your brain
- Responds more to movement and action than words
- Moves you to bond via activity, banter, and one-upmanship (which helps activate your verbal centers)
- Gives you the ability to laser focus on one task (often to the exclusion of anything else happening around you)
- Processes life best through data and “facts”
- Stimulates you to be competitive (along with those doses of testosterone)
- Problem solves

(A woman’s brain draws blood to the verbal-emotive centers on both sides of the brain, making her far more verbal. Women tend to bond via talking. They are more attuned to many things happening at once from words being said to voice inflection to body language. Women problem solve as well, but do so more with others, verbalizing the problem through to its conclusion where men internalize the process and speak the solution.)

This unique combination of testosterone and your testosterone-shaped brain provides you with an important, compelling set of skills for forging faith in your kids.

Dad—You Have a Particular Set of Skills

My all time favorite movie monologue comes from that gripping scene in [Taken](#), where retired CIA agent Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson) hears over the phone his daughter being kidnapped. The kidnapper picks up the phone dropped by Brian's daughter, breathes heavily into it, and Brian Mays responds with the following:

I don't know who you are. I don't know what you want. If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don't have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills; skills I have acquired over a very long career...

Dad, not only are you wired with a particular set of skills, but your life experience, your life as a man, gives you a skill set that can prove invaluable in forging faith in your kids.

Dr. Phil was a guest on [The Late Show with David Letterman](#). Dave talked about how challenging it was to be a dad to his son. Was he supposed to be his friend? Was he supposed to be tough on him?

Dr. Phil said that friends will tell their friends what they want to hear. Dave's job as dad is to tell his son what he *needs* to hear. Dave, as dad, needs to be not just any voice, but the *best* voice.

Dads, one of the skills you have for being that best voice is your passion for self-respect.

Moms generally excel at creating *Self-Esteem* in kids—the belief that no matter what, kids have worth and value; that they can be anything they want to be because they have been created in the Image of God. It is a vital gift that every child needs to grow to be a healthy, productive adult.

Kids also need *Self-Respect*. Self-respect balances out self-esteem by teaching children that they will win some and they will lose some; that they

will be good at some things and bad at others; that they have certain God-given gifts, talents, and skills that will enable them to succeed in certain areas but not others. Respect comes from accepting strengths and limitations. In other words, though kids have the potential to be whatever they want to be, and have worth no matter what, they don't have the skill set—nor does anyone one—to do and be everything. Dads build self-respect.

Another skill you have for being the best voice is your passion for instilling independence in your kids.

Moms, generally speaking, fueled by the bonding chemical oxytocin, among other things, want to protect their children for as long as possible. Kids need that!

Dads, on the other hand, generally speaking, tend to want to forge independence in their kids. They will tend to let kids take risks more than will moms. They want kids to get out into the real world and begin to build up calluses. Kids need that, too!

For example: Imagine you are teaching your child to ride a bike. If (when) the child falls, mom's first instinct is to run to the child and comfort her. Dad's first instinct is to quickly assess the situation to ensure his daughter isn't hurt, then encourages her to "shake it off," get back on the bike, and try it again.

On one of the last episodes of the 2015 season of [Downton Abbey](#). (and yes, I'm man enough to admit I watch it!) Robert Crawley (Hugh Bonneville) was playing a board game with his little granddaughter. Grandpa chided her a bit for a move she made, but her mom stepped in and lovingly asked Grandpa to let her child do whatever she wanted. Grandpa said, "How is she ever going to learn how to win and lose?" Mom wasn't interested in that lesson. But Grandpa was. And his granddaughter needs him to teach her that lesson.

Another skill you have dad, is to let your child "work it out" him/herself.

Moms, because of their chemical makeup, lean toward a “tend and befriend” posture. If their child gets into trouble, they want to get her or him out of it.

Dads, on the other hand, after ensuring their child isn’t in danger, tend to want their child to work it out himself or herself.

Dad, one of your particular skills is to teach your kids how to live in a world of ups and downs, wins and losses, and personal giftedness while acknowledging the giftedness of others. This skill is a powerful tool in forging faith in your children.

Three Tools to Get You Started

Dad, through this short book I hope you’ve discovered the power God has given to you as a Father to shape the spiritual destiny of your kids. To that end, here are a few tools that can help you live into God’s call on your life to lead your kids as you follow Jesus:

1. **FAITH5.** [FAITH5](#) is a simple, yet profound nightly huddle experience developed by my friend, Rich Melheim. Each night, just before bed, the family meets for a 5-10 minute faith-forming huddle. The huddle has five steps to it:
 - **SHARE** 1 high and 1 low from the day.
 - **READ** a passage or verse from the Bible. Read that same verse/ passage each night for a week to let it embed itself into your souls.
 - **TALK** about what that passage is saying to you about your high and/ or low, about your day, about God, about life. Each day you may have a different insight. Some days you may not have anything to talk about but someone else in your family might.
 - **PRAY** by turning your high into a prayer of thanks and your low into a prayer request. Pray for each other. Pray for those you care about.
 - **BLESS** each other in two ways: Offer each other a word of love or affirmation; and speak God’s word of blessing over each other: *The Lord bless you and keep you.* End the blessing time by marking each other with the sign of the cross.

2. Kara E. Powell has written a very practical, idea-filled book on how to build sticky faith in your kids: [The Sticky Faith Guide For Your Family](#). If you implement just one idea per month you will be well on your way to forging dynamic faith in your kids.

3. My friend, [Michael Gurian](#), and I have created several tools to help dads lead their sons in faith and for moms to lead their daughters in faith. We've also created some tools for congregations to use to support dads and moms in the adventure of leading their sons and daughters into high impact adulthood. www.TimWrightMinistries.org

Lace Up Your Training Shoes

Train your children in the way they should go...and when they are old they will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

Dad...what a great calling! What a compelling calling! What a bold, reckless calling...that God entrusts the spiritual formation of your kids into your hands!

But you don't go it alone. For the One who calls you to follow him will lead you in the way you should go. Follow him, and invite your kids to follow you!

Tim Wright Ministries has created several tools, in partnership with Michael Gurian, to help you forge faith in your kids. Check them out at www.TimWrightMinistries.org.

God bless you, dad!

[Tim Wright](#)

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