

Fathers and Daughters, Doug Hayhoe, September 2022

Research over the past twenty years has confirmed the critical importance of a father in a daughter's life. This essay surveys a film and two books on the subject. It also includes some personal stories, as well as stories from the Bible.

I have three daughters. I grew up with six sisters and a good father (as well as a brother and a good mother). So, you'd think I would have learned how to interact well with my own daughters when I became a father. But I didn't. I guess I was too focused on my own role as a young man while I was growing up.

Thus, it was that when I had been married for 17 years, now with three daughters of my own, as well as a busy teaching career, my wife had to confront me one day about how I was interacting with my daughters. I hadn't been getting along well with my fifteen-year-old. I was laying down too many rules with little time to appreciate her. Things were starting to boil over. One day I arrived home to find the house empty. When I went upstairs there was a piece of paper with 26 lines on it, taped to my desk. My wife had written the 26 letters of the alphabet, and then methodically listed 26 things I had done to make my fifteen-year-old daughter and the rest of my family frustrated and angry.

This hit me like a sledgehammer. Those of you who know my wife will agree that it was totally out of character. I was shocked at finding such a strong, 26-dimensional rebuke. Not shocked that my wife would write such a thing; but that they would all be true of my current state of fatherhood. Needless to say, I had to change. One thing my wife encouraged me to do was plan a special outing with each girl, where they wanted to go, no matter what the cost or time involved.

Now, many years later, I've had the opportunity to see a comedy film and read some books about the importance of a father in the life of his daughters. I realize again how thankful I am to my wife for pushing me in the right direction when my daughters were young.

Comedy Drama: *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters* (2022)

The movie was released in the summer of 2022. Unfortunately, it's not readily available. To see it, you may have to [open a trial membership on Pure Flix](#). But that's easily done.

On the [IMDb website](#), it has this description: "When a wealthy businessman learns of his daughter's sudden engagement to a missionary, he embarks on a quest to keep her closer to home, but when his efforts go awry he must reconsider what it means to be a strong father." Six of the seven reviews on IMDb gave it a very high rating.



[Figure 1: See this website for the Trailer](#)

I enjoyed the movie. The message was simple. Fathers are their daughter's first love, their first male hero. Their role is to guide, love, teach, and protect their daughters – *and then let them go*. The Mexican pastor mentoring the American Dad was great. His advice was from Book 1, below, which he gave the American father to read in the film.

Book 1: [*Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters: 10 secrets every father should know*](#), Dr. Meg Meeker, M.D., 2007.

This book requires four to six hours to read. But when you compare this with the total cost of raising a daughter or son, which *Moneysense* put at CND \$253,000 back in 2015, what's six hours? Especially if it could change her life – and yours!

Each chapter gives a secret you as a father need to know. The text comes alive with true stories from the author's own practice as a doctor. In addition, the extensive academic research gone into the writing of the book gives it a high level of authority.

The first secret is the key: "You are the most important man in her life" (pp. 7-28). The author goes into considerable detail to explain this. On the negative side, "your daughter takes cues from you, her father, on everything from drug use, drinking, delinquency, smoking, and having sex, to self-esteem, moodiness, and seeking attention from teen boys" (p. 25). On the positive side, "fathers inevitably change the course of their daughters' lives and can even save them" (p. 28). The following nine then elaborate on this positive theme.

The book develops all the different ways in which the father's role feeds into his daughter's future character and career as an adult. These include leadership, humility, control of her body and reputation, and the determination to fight for a cause. They also impact her understanding of who God is and her decision about the man she decides to marry.

Book 2: [*52 Things Daughters need from their Dads*](#), Jay Payleitner, 2013.

This book has many short chapters on a wide range of topics, each ending with a single take away. For example, #30 ends with: "When your daughter invites you to do anything, do it. Drop what you're doing. Rearrange your schedule. Make her request to spend time with her daddy your biggest priority. This may be the only time she asks." Chapter 49 is interesting. "Before she starts dating, your young daughter needs to hear that ... [15 things]:

- 1. she has value
- 2. her virginity is worth protecting
- 3. boys think about sex a lot
- 4. it's really easy for her to send the wrong signals
- 5. sex is not the same as love
- 6. boys think about sex a lot
- 7. etc.

Many suggestions are straightforward, such as "Don't comment on every little thing." Others more questionable, such as "Friend Her on Facebook." I was intrigued by this one: "Ask her questions she wants *you* to ask." The author adds, "Your growing daughter will not tell you this stuff out of the blue. She is waiting for you to ask. She wants you to initiate the dialogue. When you ask her personal questions, she feels loved, protected, and secure" (p. 192).

Book 3: Fathers and daughters in the Bible

There are many verses relevant to the father-daughter relationship. Book 2 mentions these:

- “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).

It also refers to 1 Corinthians 13:3-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; 1 Timothy 2:7; Hebrews 13:4; James 1:19-20, and Proverbs 31:10-31, the woman you want her to grow up to be.

I’ll add two stories from the Old Testament. In [Genesis chapter 34](#), the patriarch Jacob visits a town in Palestine, with his twelve sons and Dinah, his only daughter. She visit the women of the town (verse 1). Right away, I have questions: She had never been there before; did she know the dangers? Her father had grown up nearby. Did he talk with her first?

Dinah then runs into Shechem, son of the local ruler, who “took her and raped her” (verse 2). The Hebrew word for “rape” can sometimes refer to mutual consent ([Deuteronomy 22:24](#)). Whatever the case is here, pre-marital sex was serious in that culture. The text doesn’t give many hints as to Dinah’s responsibility. But because of the rape, some of Jacob’s sons concoct a secret plan to kill Shechem and the men of the town, unknown to their father ([Genesis 34:5-31](#)). I think we can all agree that although Jacob may have a strong character in other parts of Genesis, he certainly appears to be a weak father here.

The other father-daughter story is very different, and occurs several centuries later. After Moses led Israel out of Egypt and across the desert, he died. His next in command, Joshua, then led Israel into the “promised land.” One of his best generals was Caleb. He wasn’t content to retire, even when he reached the age of 85, but insisted on staying at the front line ([Joshua 14:6-12](#)). As a result, when Joshua divided up the land, Caleb received Hebron.

Soon after, Caleb divided his inheritance for his children. This included his daughter Achsah. He gave her land in the Negev, a semi-desert region in the south of Israel. Like her father, she wasn’t content with just this barren land. So, when Caleb came to her to ask what she really wanted, she said “springs of water.” Our of respect for her, he ended up giving her both “the upper and lower springs” ([Judges 1:13-15](#)). Strong father, strong daughter!

Conclusion and Caveat

A father’s role in his daughter’s life is so important that each of us fathers should think carefully about how we can make our relationship with them a priority, using any resources available. One not yet mentioned is [The National Centre for Fathering](#).

There is an important caveat, however. It’s possible to pour your best into your children and they don’t turn out as you had hoped. This can be painful. A page on the above website calls this “[The paradox of ‘no guarantees’](#).” If this is a challenge you are facing at the moment, the full discussion found at this link may be helpful. In short, “there are no guarantees our children will turn out the way we want ... [nevertheless], our actions do have a significant influence on our children.”