

Dad Helps With The Home Stretch

By Marlin Detweiler

Here we are, just past halfway through the school year and talking about the “home stretch” already. It’s hard to believe, but there’s a reason for this. It’s called planning. It’s as simple as this: If we take the time to devise a plan for a project we are inclined to struggle with, we are far more likely to have success with that project. It’s also the perfect time for Dad to jump in and be a hero. It’s quite common for mothers to carry the day-to-day load of homeschooling. Consequently, they are the ones who will feel the brunt of the fatigue as the year wears on.

So, let’s address mothers first. Many platitudes come to mind: “Anything worth doing is worth doing well.” “Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly too.” “Don’t grow weary in doing good.” “Take it one day at a time.”

While platitudes are not always completely helpful, it is important to realize that raising children and all the work and tiresome, sometimes thankless days will not always be the routine. There will be a time when the children are grown, married, and have their own families. *Then*, the bedrooms will be empty and the halls quiet.

Cherish this time with your children. What you do with your children today will dramatically impact what you do with them when they are 30. These are the days that form the relationships you will carry into their adult years. Make sure now that those times will be filled with love and joy.

Now for dads.

The home stretch is a time for Dad to come to the rescue. There are many ways this can happen via easy, exciting, and memorable initiatives. First, after all, we’re talking about homeschooling, so one good thing for Dad to do is to ask to see the children’s schoolwork. If he already does this routinely, good; children love it when parents—particularly fathers—express pride and satisfaction in what their children do. Showing this level of personal interest in the education of each child is sure to inspire, energize, and invigorate everyone, including Mom, as the entire family enters the home stretch.

Dads can be quite helpful with springtime activities too. Things like throwing baseballs with children or going to the tennis court or driving range are great father-child activities that can build memories and give Mom a bit of relief. When our children were younger, for a time I committed to come home from work early to build a tree house with them. By the time we were finished, the tree house had four levels and was used daily; it became a key memory from that season of our children’s lives.

Dads who have the flexibility to go to work a bit later or come home a bit early can provide the energy that might be needed to push through the home stretch. It might even provide opportunity for Dad to do some of the formal teaching.

Another timely home-stretch, springtime thing to do is to plan and lead a weekend getaway. What if Dad planned a trip with fun and educational goals as the two primary purposes? I’m reluctant to suggest camping because I disdain it so much, but you might not. It is certainly a great way to enjoy each other and God’s creation while making memories and probably learning a thing or two.

Other weekend getaway ideas might include trips to big cities, with the goal of taking in the museums and other unique, educational, and fun things cities have to offer. Of course, if you live in or near a big city, going into the country might be the formula for refreshing and energizing the household to finish the year strong.

When your older children start thinking about which colleges to attend, what a great opportunity for Dad to ratchet up the discussion a notch or two, taking time to ask questions of each child and then leading them and joining them in researching their options. Just like college decisions, career conversations are not likely new to the relationship, but engaging with each child at an intentional and heightened level about each one's interests and giftedness is a great use of time during this home stretch time of year. Such discussions could easily lead to planning a vacation that includes visits to potential colleges. One last idea has to do with next year. Dads who take some of the above suggestions seriously might find themselves more engaged, better informed, and quite willing to take the lead in making plans for the following school year—and what a great outcome that would be.

Whatever Dad might do or whatever level of involvement he can and does take, we can all be certain of one thing: It will contribute to the cohesion of the family, the quality and effectiveness of the education, and the Godliness and maturity of the children. So, what are we waiting for?

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