

A FATHER'S CRY – A MOTHER'S HEART What Do Women Want? ...by Kim

Remember Mel Gibson discovering women's thoughts and getting into their minds in his movie, *What Women Want?*

If you haven't seen the movie, it was produced back in 2000. It's about an advertising executive who's had great success in the past, but he finds himself working for a woman on a women's marketing campaign. He and his buddy can't seem to come up with material because, quite frankly, they have no clue what would appeal to a woman. This stereotypical womanizer characterized by Mel Gibson decides to start trying out women's products...make-up, pantyhose, nail polish...you get the idea. In the midst of this, he gets electrocuted and suddenly, he wakes up and finds that he can hear women's thoughts. He hears his housekeeper, his estranged teenage daughter, the women at work as well as at the coffee shop. To his dismay, instead of thinking he's such a stud, they smile on the outside, but inwardly think, "What a jerk!"

Well, you get to climb into this woman's head today. And the question is, "What do women want from their children's father?" I can hear it now – a man asking his wife, "what do you want from me? I'm trying to be a good dad. I'm doing the best I can." Last weekend I saw another movie where a man asked a woman friend of his, "What do women *want?*" The woman quietly answered, "They don't know." Encouraging, huh?

I'm going to share with you some of my answers to the question regarding what I want in my child's father.

I've thought, why should you care what I want...as a woman? Because I don't think I'm any different than most women. My temperament or my personality might be different than some of the women in your life, but if you ask her, the mother of your children will agree with some aspect of what I'm going to let you in on today.

Let me begin by giving you some background about me. My husband, Dave, and I teach Fathering Conferences and are passionately involved in helping men to be great Dads. Like many ministries, God has used our own heartaches and struggles – our "story" - to reach out to others.

I married young – 18 – and at 20, I became a mother. I have 2 sons who are now adults. It didn't take long to observe Dave's fathering style...and there were definitely things that made me uncomfortable...like the time our toddler had a spoon in his hand and got close to an electrical outlet. Instead of instructing him to stay away and telling him he would get hurt, daddy jerked him up and screamed at him. The child didn't even know what he had done to be in such trouble...but Dave had worked in the hospital ER where kids came in every day, often with fatal outcomes as a result of some accident. While that explained his over-reaction, it did not help my confidence in his ability to be a good dad. I had never seen a dad react that way before. My father certainly never would. My concern as a mother was in protecting my child emotionally. Dave's concern was also in protecting his child - physically. Both are important – in balance.

So that is how the parenting went in our family. Dave and I at opposite extremes, each compensating for the others weaknesses. My prayer for my boys was always for the Father to protect them from our mistakes and imperfections as parents. I trusted God, that in spite of some emotionally damaging dysfunction in our family, He would shelter them. ...that in spite of screaming and throwing things and lecturing for hours at a time, they would still love and respect their father...even if I couldn't. I worked diligently to make sure they didn't hate their dad. I told them his job at the hospital of saving people's lives is what made him act crazy...all the time praying that God would heal Dave's angry heart. James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

However, a time came when I abandoned my faith that God would protect my children – that He would bring honor and glory to himself out of all this hurt, because at 16, our older son left home. That was the most devastating thing I had ever experienced. It was a death – and I grieved. Brady was angry, rebellious, out-of-control. His grades went down, he refused to work, do anything responsible at home; he became a different person that I did not even know. Drugs can do that, you know. But that was Brady's way of escaping the conflict and turmoil of our home. Casey, the younger son, continued trying to be perfect, which was just as painful to watch. He was so much like me, thinking that if he did everything just right, he could avoid the wrath of Dad. So, as I said, I abandoned my faith in God. He let me down. Dave was unpredictable – wonderful at times...unbearable at times...we never knew what would set him off. And God refused to intervene. Or so I thought.

After months and months of not knowing if Brady was alive or dead, he finally ended up in jail on a charge he couldn't get out of. We didn't bail him out because he was safe and away from his punk friends. To this day, as hard as it was at the time, I so respect my husband for that kind of tough love of leaving him in jail. To make a long story short, Brady went into a Christian rehab, completed 7 years adjudicated probation, married, graduated from Bible College where he was captain of his soccer team, and worked as an ordained minister in South Dallas with his incredibly wonderful wife. It wasn't an easy road, and there were lots of ups and downs, but God restored the years the locust had eaten and was indeed faithful to answer my prayers concerning my son.

And what about Dave? God placed just the right Christian men in his life and, on a men's retreat, Dave received true deliverance. He was a new creation, the old had passed away and all things became new. I wish I could say the trust and healing of relationships was instantaneous, but that's not the way it worked. I struggled with some serious depression and found my heart hardened toward my husband and toward God. Over the course of several years however, our family was healed and restored. That's why we know, if God healed us, He can heal any family. But things did not change for the better until the FATHER in our family became whole in Christ. That's what this Fatherhood ministry is all about. Men becoming whole, so their families can be whole. And men finding the support they need to be great dads.

In our Fatherhood Conferences, we have participants examine how their dad has influenced them. We examine the good, bad and the ugly. And we seek healing in the areas of hurt that affect men

as adults. Then we focus on Ken Canfield's 7 Secrets of Effective Fathers promulgated by the National Center for Fathering.

7 Secrets of Effective Fathers – the 7 things that effective fathers have in common:

Commitment

Knowing Your Child

Consistency

Protecting and Providing

Loving Their Mother

Active Listening

Spiritual Equipping

There is an eighth secret, but it's a mystery – perhaps God's Grace – because like a farmer knows when he plants a crop, just because you have all the right elements, the right formula, the right ingredients, there are some things outside his control. Children are individuals, with their own choices – outside of our control. It is often a mystery how they can end up so incredible.

So let's get back to What Women Want. What are some of the characteristics I deeply desire to see in my children's father?

Here are some of my answers to the question regarding what I want in my child's father.

I want him to be willing to sacrifice some of his own interests to spend time with his kids. Notice I said some. A parent must keep balance in his life with work and pleasure and model that to his children, but if he's so busy pursuing his own interests and the things that feed his ego that he can't enjoy the common activities of family life, then that's a problem.

If a child perceives that Dad works all the time and that is why he can't spend time with him or her, then he will do one of two things. Either he will model that parenting style when he become a parent and be uninvolved with his own children, or he will rebel against it. By rebel, I mean he'll make an inner vow NOT to be like his Dad, therefore never developing a good work ethic, or perhaps he'll blame work for taking Daddy away...again, forming a negative attitude about work. That happened in my own family. Dave, was a work-a-holic. And I didn't help my children's attitude when I would always blame the hospital for taking him away from us. I decided I would rather my children be mad or disappointed in the hospital than at their Dad. That's probably why they both decided they would never go into health care! Perhaps, just perhaps that contributed to the fact that Brady son had a very poor work history during his teen and young adult years – and there was definitely a problem with rebellion. But my children DO remember dad taking them to the park to fly a kite, and going to the toy store...just no bedtime stories!

But I want a man who is secure enough with himself that he can set aside his manly quests when his child needs him...and be able to recognize what those needs are. Attending the school choir program or helping with a homework assignment is more important than that extra hour of work for a boss or client who will forget about it in a week. Your child will always remember.

Secondly, I want him to enjoy his children. There's more to being a parent than disciplining and lecturing all the time. Sometimes we as parents are more critical of our children than anyone else. I think it's because they are such an extension of us, it becomes a form of self-criticism. The man who can enjoy hanging out with his children at bedtime, while getting ready for school, while running errands on the weekend or while cleaning out the garage is the man I respect. The ability to have fun while doing ordinary things is a gift.

Third, I want my children's father to exude authority. There is a tremendous need for children to learn to respect authority. They want and need positive authority figures who won't back down or wimp out just so their kids will 'like' them. It is a fact of life that children go through periods of disliking their parents. Trust me, even if you consider your child to be *your* best friend, you may not be your child's best friend. In the end, he or she needs you to be the authority figure – the parent.

Next, I want him to respect authority. A rebellious father yields rebellious children. Teaching a child to submit to authority is a life-skill lacking in American culture.

We've spent quite a bit of time at a Youth Detention facility working with young male youths to teach them what being a father is all about, since many of them don't even know their dads. The superintendant told us recently that the kids coming into the facility more recently are frighteningly different. They cannot emotionally connect. They have no conscience. They do not even respond to authority.

So do you respect authority or are you constantly challenging it? When a child can learn to disagree *respectfully* without verbally or physically destroying one in authority, he can truly make a difference in his world. *Do you know how to disagree respectfully without ranting or raving?* We all have to submit to some one or some thing. When a father models this in a healthy way, the school is free to teach his children, an employer is free to hire his teenagers and run successful businesses, and home becomes a safe place instead of a center of turmoil.

Several years ago, we had a 17-year-old young woman live with us. She was a senior in high school and pregnant. Her family situation made it necessary for her to leave home, so we were the refuge for her during this time. Just recently we saw each other – hugged and reminisced - and she commented about our time together. She said, "I had never before seen family members just stand around the kitchen and talk and laugh together until I came to your house. All I had ever seen before was fighting." Now, here she is, over 10 years and several children later, trying to model something better for her kids. Her husband has helped with every birth of every child. They're not perfect parents and have some huge challenges to overcome, but they desperately desire their home to be a safe place for their children.

Finally, I want my children's Dad to be a provider. Provision is more than monetary, but stems from an outpouring of all types of resources. Certainly the provision of shelter, food and clothing are the foundation of security for children. *The father I respect most is one who makes providing for his family a priority – not because he 'has to', but because he is committed to do so.* There are 2 extremes when it comes to providing.

There's the poor provider...sometimes referred to as the "deadbeat" dad. Some of these dads think if they charms people enough or pray enough, then somehow the rent or the car payment will miraculously get paid. Some have trouble keeping a job, and may act nonchalant about it, but deep inside they're afraid. And their children sense it. Often times the children grow up thinking they're victims, or that everyone owes them something. They seldom realize they have the resources to accomplish anything that God sets before them.

Then there's the other extreme - the workaholic who makes material provision such a priority that he offers no emotional or spiritual provision for his family. Many dads...and mothers too, because we live in such prosperity compared to the rest of the world, get confused as to what our children need versus what they want or desire. We think our kids need those expensive shoes in

order to be a better athlete. Or they need to be in this club or wear those clothes so they'll fit it. So we *provide* some things we didn't have growing up, while getting deeper and deeper in debt. Providing emotional and spiritual support is equally important to children as providing for their material needs. When a child fits in at home and knows his father loves him it makes being accepted elsewhere less important. Unfortunately, those emotional and spiritual areas are often left to mothers, but the impact of a father in these areas cannot be underestimated.

Men, you model your child's impression of the heavenly Father. If you are distant and detached, if you don't believe in anything, then what message are you sending? I challenge you to ask yourself how well you provide for your child's physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

In closing, men, ask your children's mother what is most important to her in a father. Find one area of Fatherhood in which you can improve. Don't take on too much all at once. Remember the only perfect dad is our Creator. (Mom's you need to remember that, too.) So men, when you listen to your wife or child's mother, when you focus on what you can improve, and you love your children, you become a knight in shining armor – a true hero. And *that's* what women want!