



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 93 – Supporting Fathers

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy with Dr. Meg Meeker

Meg: You know I've talked to thousands and thousands of men who will come up. And one of the most common things they will say to start a conversation is, well I know I'm not a very good dad but. And I'll stop them right there. And I say why do you...why do you know you're a bad dad? Well I just don't know, you know. I have a daughter I don't understand her. But I said, that doesn't make you a bad dad. So assume your husband feels a little intimidated with your daughter. Just assume that, because they are intimidated. They don't understand how a daughter's brain works or her thoughts or her feelings, and they do feel intimidated. It's different with boys, but you know, talking with daughters. But I encourage wives, make room for your husband to enter.

Voice: You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His. Find out how these realities free you today on *God Hears Her*.

Eryn: Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I'm Eryn Eddy.

Elisa: And I'm Elisa Morgan. We know that this is mainly a show for women, but we love our brothers in Christ too and want to chat about fathers and fatherhood and how we as women can support the men in our lives to be good dads.

Eryn: Yes, we brought back Dr. Meg Meeker to share practical advice for dads and those of us who may be hurting from the relationship we had, or didn't have, with our dads.

Elisa: Dr. Meg Meeker is a pediatric doctor and the founder of Parenting Great Kids. She's also the author of multiple books including the bestseller *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters*. She currently lives and works in Traverse City, Michigan, with her husband Walter.

Eryn: Let's learn more from Dr. Meg on this episode of *God Hears Her*. Elisa, I am so excited about this guest that we have on today. She was on our show before, and she was so amazing that I'm glad that we brought her back again. I am so excited to have Dr. Meg Meeker on the show.

Elisa: Yes, welcome, welcome, Dr. Meg.



Meg: Oh thanks so much for having me on. It's always a pleasure. And I love talking about kids. I love talking about dads and the influence that dads have on their kids. Because I think a lot of men just have no idea how much impact they have on their...on their kids.

Elisa: You know it might seem...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...surprising at first glance to have Dr. Meg talking about fathers. It might, you know, throw somebody. So maybe fill in the blanks for us. How did you become passionate about fathers and fathering and...and how have you been shaped yourself on this topic?

Meg: You know it's funny. I decided to write the book after my publisher and I a number of years ago sat down. She had a husband who was a stay-at-home dad. She had three daughters. My husband had stayed home for a few years with our daughters when I was doing my residency. And we were so grateful to these men.

Elisa: Can I just interrupt and say you were...

Meg: Sure.

Elisa: ...you were before the curve. I mean this was a while back.

Meg: Oh yeah. Oh this was a while back. I...

Elisa: Don't...don't want to [inaudible] here, but this wasn't two years ago.

Meg: No, no, no. You know I was in medical school in the 80s when only...less than 25 percent of my class was women.

Elisa: Yeah.

Meg: And most women weren't married. I was. And nobody except for me had a baby in medical school.

Elisa: Whoa.



Meg: The only reason I was able to do that and do my residency is because my husband said this when we went to do residency. He is in medicine as well. He said, I don't want to both do residency which is about 90 hours a week. It's pretty crazy work with our daughter. It's not fair to her. And he said, I will stay home with her and you go first finishing your residency. Because he said, I'm afraid if you stay home and I go first, you may not go back, and I don't want that to happen. And you know what? In that moment, I just loved that man so much. I think it meant so much to me that he freed me up to do what I really believed God had called me to do, of course in addition to being a mom. So my publisher had a husband who was a stay-at-home dad, great dad. My husband had stayed home with our daughters, and he was great with our oldest two daughters cause he was there with them. And my own father had a huge impact on my life. And as I was seeing in our culture, people were really putting men down—particularly fathers. They're not necessary. We don't need them.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: You know women need a man like a fish needs a bicycle, this kind of a thing. I thought wait a minute. You know the kids in my practice who do really well and who recover from problems, eating disorders, drinking, addiction, whatever, are the ones whose fathers are invested. Now I'm not talking dads with a PhD in psychology, just good enough dads. And I said, you know, there's a huge disconnect between what our culture is telling us about dads and dads about themselves and reality.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: So I said, I need to come forth and show reality through men like my husband, my dad, and my publisher's husband, to show them what fathers really mean to their daughters.

Eryn: That's good. So I feel like there is this pressure for fathers to provide. And when I think of like a good father, I hear like he provides for the household. And when I think of that, I think of, he financially provides for the household. But there're so many other elements that a father gives the household. Could you share and unpack what you have seen in some of the ways that father are gifts to a household apart from financial provision?

Meg: Well you know it's interesting. When I start talking about this and I sort of split them off from a mother's influence, it raises hackles in many people, particularly women. Because fathers bring something to their children that mothers don't, to the home, to the relationship. And mothers are taught, and this is hard for them and sad for them, particularly single mothers; you can bring it all. You can be everything. You can supply all of your child's needs. Don't worry. But then the mother goes, I know that's not really true, because I'm trying; and it's not working. So fathers bring to the home, the kids, a sense of
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security, a sense of trustworthiness. They show kids, particularly daughters, what it's like to feel love from a man, to feel security from a man in a very different way than they get from their mother. You know, their mothers...this is very interesting. Kids taught me this through talking to them. They told me, in a child's eyes, even a teenager's eyes, a mother's love is non-negotiable. You know mom has to be your mom. Mom has to say nice things. If your mom won't even say nice things to you, you might as well just not live.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: Because that's where you start.

Elisa: There's no getting out of it.

Meg: But...

Elisa: That's right, yeah.

Eryn: Right.

Meg: ...no that's it. But when it comes to a dad, kids perceive that their dad's love is negotiable. In other words, I have to do something to keep my dad's attention, to get his love. And that's why I need to really be on my toes, because my dad doesn't need to love me. But if he chooses to love me, wow am I something. In other words, mom can tell you, oh you're smart. You're smart. You're smart. And it kind of goes in one ear and out the other unfortunately. But when a dad says you're smart, you stop and you feel really smart. Now that's not a slight on mothers. We bring something very different to our families. So back to your question, Eryn, what dads bring which is far more important than the money into the household, now mothers bring a lot of money too into the household of course.

Eryn: Right.

Meg: But they bring this sense of authority and love and security to children that is very, very different from a mother's but equally as important. And we can't look over that.

Elisa: I hear this and I...I want to beat my drum and say I get it. But then I go on the other side, is this a cultural reality? Or is this the way we're made? And then I go, I didn't grow up with a dad. And you know I know my single mom couldn't provide that, so it feels like a quandary of whether or not it's cultural or created. We're stuck, you know, if we don't have a great dad? You know what do we do there?



Meg: But you aren't stuck. That's the good news.

Elisa: Talk to...talk to us, yeah.

Meg: Yeah, you aren't stuck. And here's the deal I hear a lot from single mothers. Oh okay, now you just talked to me about the importance of dads. So my kid hasn't a chance to succeed. I said, no, no, no. That's not what I meant. You know single mothers often try to be mom and dad. They won't tell you that, but they're trying. And I say to them, stop. You can't be two people, but you can be a great mother. So they need to let themselves off the hook. Be a great mom, and don't worry about filling in holes from the dad; because you can't.

Elisa: So in what ways do single moms, you know, try to fill the role of a father? And how can they stop?

Meg: You know it's interesting, because I think a lot of single moms try to fill the role without even thinking about it. In their minds, they would think, well if he had a dad; that dad would be his soccer coach. So I'm going to be his soccer coach. Or you know, dad would...would take him on a fishing trip; so I'm going to try to learn to fish and take him on a fishing trip. They think of things that a father would give a son or daughter, and they step into that. And they don't even know they're doing it. But what ends up happening is they burn out. They just burn out. And they end up trying to do more father kinds of things, fill in more father holes. And what they forget giving the child, which is really too bad, is the best of them as a mom. Because whenever you try to add something, you know, give them something a father would do; you don't have the time or energy to give them something that you're really good at.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: So what I would encourage mothers to do, and I found myself doing this with our son; cause my husband works a ton. And we only have one son and three daughters. And I feel more confident in my relationship with my daughters. But because my husband works so much, when our son was growing up, I kept thinking *Gee whiz, what would he like his dad to do?* For instance, he loves soccer. There was a famous soccer team playing in New York. And my husband didn't have k...time to go, and I said, no big deal. I'm going to take you. And I would step in doing things like that over and over to compensate for my husband. So here's what I would challenge single mothers with. Think about the things that you do for your kids or you feel like you're compensating for the father not being there. And if you're doing that, stop doing that.

Elisa: And that's just as true for a woman who's in a great relationship with a dad who's present.



Meg: Ex...exactly, exactly.

Elisa: But we need to not compensate. That's good.

Meg: And that's what I found myself doing, and I would feel guilty if I stopped. Cause I thought, this kid needs to go to a soccer game. Because this is what dads are supposed to do with their kids. But you know, and people would say, well that's his dad's responsibility. I would say, I know it is. But he's not doing it, so I'm going to do it. But we need to step back and...and in a way say, I can't be dad; so I'm not going to be dad. And my son kind of knows what I'm trying to do. And in a way, it's magnifying the fact that his dad isn't doing it.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: So I should do things with him and say, you know what honey? I'm sorry dad's not around to do that. That must be really disappointing for you. Is that disappointing for you? Yeah, mom, it really isn't fair. All my friends' kids have dads that do this, and you do that. You don't feel sorry for him, you know, which is one mistake a lot of single moms can fall into is gee whiz, you know, I feel really sorry for you cause you dad isn't around and we talk to our sons as though they're very needy. And we can't do that either. We can't do that. We don't want to feel sorry for them. You want to empathize, you know, but you don't want to feel sorry for them. And you just help them through it. But it's hard. It's really, really hard. But think about what you can give your son that's really healthy, and focus on that. But here's the good news. If you're a child of a single mother and you missed having a dad, there's a grief going on inside of you that you may not even recognize. And they'll say what's wrong with me? What's wrong with me? I just don't know. Something's missing. And in my book *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters*, I wrote it to dads to encourage them on how their daughters see them and what to do. But I've had many adult women who will read it and go, now I know what I wanted from my dad but I didn't get. And that's the beginning of healing, because you realize you wanted protection. You wanted security. You wanted your dad's love. you wanted your dad to say, yes, and to say no and to check out your boyfriends. And if you didn't get it, you...you hurt. But when you recognize what you wanted and then recognize that you didn't get it, then you can grieve and heal. But if you live in a culture that says, no, no, no, you didn't need that; you live with that ache. And you feel crazy.

Elisa: Yeah, crazy [inaudible] totally, yeah.

Eryn: Wow.

Meg: Because you have that ache.



Elisa: That rings true.

Eryn: Wow.

Meg: And that's the damage that we do to kids by telling them, you know, you're growing up with a single mom; but everything's fine. You didn't need a dad anyway, so what's wrong with you? And that child feels like, well you're telling me that, so there must be something really wrong with me because I hurt.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: But I don't know specifically why I hurt. But if you sort of map it out for them, the lights go on. And then they go, I get it.

Elisa: And our audience is mainly women, but we also have a lot of brothers listening to us. And I think the same thing is true there just knowing my younger brother growing up without a dad. The same ache, it's different perhaps. But it's the same ache and the same grief that needs to be done.

Meg: Yeah.

Eryn: That's really good.

Meg: It is. Really that's the way God made us.

Eryn: Right.

Meg: And it's interesting, because you know once you can help a woman or a man, you or your brother, sort of understand what it...you want from a dad and what you didn't get, but to realize in that healing process it really speeds the process up and helps you immensely if you can see God the Father and ask Him to come in and fill those needs. That's a little tricky for some people, because their experience with someone called father has not been positive. And they feel abandoned or they feel wounded and hurt. So sometimes they're blocked towards turning towards God the Father and saying, okay well I didn't get this. But can You help me fill it. But God can fill in anything everywhere. He can fill your heart so full. And so that's why I think He really allows us to have that father hole because it has to be filled either by the earthly father or God the Father.



Eryn: Yeah. That's so good. Because I think about well with grieving, I mean you can grieve whether you wish your children had a certain type of father. And you can grieve you wish you had a certain type of father. And by grieving, it is allowing yourself to open yourself up to seeing the places in which the Lord can come in and love and nurture you and protect you. And you know we're using these words "father's love, bring security and protection." And I mean that's very masculine to me. I think I've heard you talk about masculine love before versus feminine love. Would you share a little bit about the difference between the two?

Meg: Sure, again you know there are going to be people listening go nah, that's not true. We're all the same. But we aren't all the same, and we all know it. You know anybody who did grow up with a mother and a father knows intuitively what we're talking about. Because you know they know that mom said different things than dad, and dad said different things. And you know in some ways more strict. But masculine love is one that, to a woman, makes her feel safe if he's a good man. Which, you know, if he's not of course it...it's horrible.

Eryn: Right.

Meg: But he is the one who has the protective instinct to fight off anyone who will hurt his child. Mom has a protective instinct, but let's face it. She can't fight off people who are trying to harm her kids the same way a dad would. And this is...

Elisa: I get what you're saying. But there's a pretty fierce mother cub out there, you know.

Meg: Oh yeah, oh yeah. There...and...and you know it...and I lead the...

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: ...pack. Yeah, I totally get it.

Elisa: Okay, okay, okay.

Meg: But there's a different kind of protection. I guess I'm talking physical protection. If you or I were going to walk down the south side of Chicago at one in the morning alone, we would be more frightened than if, you know, my husband went or my six foot three son went. Now they wouldn't like it. But the truth of the matter is, we as women are far more vulnerable physically. And dads know that. And so dads want to protect their daughters in a different way. I think moms want to protect their hearts. And moms want to protect their self-confidence, their self-esteem and so forth. But also, a dad's love is different. A dad loves *godhearsher.org*



in a more pragmatic way. He...he just...you know he'll say I love you and know it and mean it. And if you ask him to repeat it, he'll scratch his head and say, I just told you that, 16-year-old daughter. Why do you need me to repeat it?

Elisa: I said it once, yeah.

Eryn: That's good, yeah.

Meg: I said...but then to dads, their love is clear. It's there. They're going to be faithful. That's the way it is. And they don't blend everything together. So you know it is tinged. Their love is tinged with a lot of things that a mom's love is not. But they're equally powerful and important.

Eryn: What would you say to the woman...how would you empower her that has a husband that's working and his presence is not there as much as hers is. But she wants to empower his voice, but it's easier for her to have a stronger maybe more dominant...maybe I wouldn't use the word stronger, but more dominant voice in the household...

Meg: Yeah.

Eryn: ...cause she's there more.

Meg: Right.

Elisa: I was just thinking about that, Eryn. That was so good. You know what do you say to the...the woman who wants her husband to be what you're describing.

Meg: Yeah.

Elisa: But he isn't right now.

Meg: Well you know it...that's great. I have spoken a number of times to the Navy Seals wives. And this is interesting. I went out and I spoke with them cause I thought, oh you know, it's going to be hard. Their husbands are being deployed and da da da. And they said no, you need to speak to them because the husbands are coming home. And I said really? It's harder for them to come home? They said yeah, it's a much bigger transition, because mom has run everything. Mom has been the disciplinarian. Mom has provided everything for the kids. She's been the authority in the home and run everything, and now dad comes in and she doesn't know where to put him. And she doesn't want him in some of her space. So



there's that. But dad wants to be there. And so you know that can be pretty tricky. But I think you know one of the most important things is again, for the women who's h...husbands are gone a long time and they're the sole caregiver to their children while they're gone, if they're having problems with their husband being gone; complain about it to a friend not to your children. Never, never, never put the dad down whether you're divorced or not divorced. Because kids then will take sides.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: Whether they want to or not, they'll take a side. But what she can do with her children, because her children are going to be grieving because dad's not around, is to periodically ask them, how are you doing with dad? What do you think dad's doing right now? Do you think dad would want to be home? No, he wouldn't want to be home because he's never home. I bet he would, and I bet he misses you a lot. So what you're trying to do is draw the kids out regarding their feelings and anxieties about not having d...dad around. But you're doing it in a positive way. You want to affirm how they feel...

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: ...and not tell them they're crazy. Because dad's a good guy, and he's earning the money. And don't you realize he'll be home in three months? You...you've got to really sort of unpack that. But you also want to do it in a way that honors dad. You know it's sort of a tension that you have to live. But then of course you're living with your own difficulty because you're exhausted. You're doing everything. You're maybe a little resentful of this guy who is off flying planes somewhere that every man wants to do. And you'd like to fly a fast plane, but...so there's that tension. But I think the more you do it and working that out and talking that through with your spouse when he's home is really important. But it can be really tough. It can be tough.

Elisa: Okay, so say you...you're married to a man who isn't flying planes. You know, but he really...he does want to be a good dad, but maybe he's scared. You know maybe he didn't have a great model. Maybe...maybe he is just a nervous to love so much that he gets rejected, whatever his reasons is. You know there are a lot of times in my life where I found myself just getting in the way to be honest. You know I would think I'm supposed to know how to do this mothering thing, and so I would swoop. You know I'd helicopter in, you know, provide whatever I could see needed to be happening there. It wasn't always my best choice, because I look back now and see that I pushed my husband out of situations. And he's like geez okay. You got this.

Meg: Right.



Elisa: You don't need me. You know talk to us about that, about how can we stoke the fire of this man who truly does want to be a good dad.

Meg: I think that's a terrific point. You know I've talked to thousands and thousands of men who will come up. And one of the most common things they will say to start a conversation is, well I know I'm not a very good dad, but. And I'll stop them right there, and I say why do you...why do you know you're a bad dad? Well I just don't know, you know. I have a daughter I don't understand her. But I said, that doesn't make you a bad dad. So assume your husband feels a little intimidated with your daughter. Just assume that, because they are intimidated. They don't understand how a daughter's brain works or her thoughts or her feelings. And they do feel intimidated. It's different with boys, but you know talking with daughters. But I encourage wives make room for your husband to enter. And by that I mean, a lot of husbands or fathers feel that they orbit the home, you know. The mom and the kids are the center of the home, and dad just sort of flies around the edge. And we complain because he's not doing anything. But then when he does something, we complain about the way he does it. So we say okay, stop that. And he goes back into orbit. Back to what you were saying, Elisa. That's exactly what I do. I would see my husband. You know I'd say, you need to talk to the girls more. You need to do more things with the girls. And when he would do it and I'd hear him talking to the girls, I would be out of the room. And I'd think to myself, *Righteous self, that's not the way you say it. Don't you get it?* And I'd swoop in, and I would interject something. And then my husband would back out. The message is to my daughters and to my husband, mom gets this. Mom knows how to do it. Just get out of the way. Now I thought I was being helpful. It's terrible. My one son-in-law said to me one time something that hurt, but he was right on about my other son-in-law...two sons-in-law. I was with one son-in-law who had his little daughter. And his little daughter was crying. And she reached out to me, and I grabbed her and patted her. Oh, it's okay. My other son-in-law said, Meg, don't ever do that again. I thought well why? I'm just loving on my granddaughter. He said no. The message you gave to her was dad's not enough.

Elisa: Wow.

Meg: And I thought oh. He was right on. Because we so naturally step in and take over. And this doesn't encourage a strong father-daughter relationship.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: So in order to encourage shy men or insecure dads into that relationship with their daughter, we've got to encourage them to be more bold, try it even if you mess up, move in and that we will get out of the way.



Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: It's kind of like saying you never do the dishes...never do the dishes. The guy...poor guy finally does the dishes. He does a horrible job, and we go okay, forget it. See? We've got to accept the way they do it and let that be. And then just keep coaxing them along. Because they'll get better as they go on. If a father feels not wanted, and if he has a teenage daughter who's snarky and doesn't want him to touch her, which 99 percent of teenage girls do not want their fathers to touch them, and it happens in a day. You know it happens in a day. And dad's again, you know, they say...you know my daughter was so loving and affectionate. And then something happened. I did something. She came downstairs one day, and I went to hug her. And it was like hugging a telephone pole with spikes all over it.

Eryn: That's so true.

Meg: And he'll say, what did I do? They get their feelings hurt. And so they go okay. They're very pragmatic. Okay, she doesn't like me anymore. I'll go away. But we say no, no, no, no. She doesn't want to hug you. It has nothing to do with you but everything about her. She feels so self-conscious. She doesn't want you to see who she is. And she believes you'll see her. So it's not about you, dad. To encourage them, don't get your feelings hurt. Dads' feelings get hurt so quickly. And we don't see that as mothers. And so we just encourage them, pursue her; but don't back out. So as mothers, we need to be behind our husbands, not telling them what to do but telling them they can do it. They've got it. Use their instincts, and move forward, and not get in their way. But that takes a lot of concerted effort, cause it's not our nature.

Eryn: That's good. Well what would you say to the mom that is divorced and the husband is a good guy maybe, but she struggles with encouraging his voice.

Elisa: Maybe even trusting it.

Eryn: Yeah, or maybe even trusting it, that dynamic. Maybe they're working through coparenting struggles and triggers of how he was as a husband pops up all the time. I feel like I've seen that circumstance often amongst my friend groups. What would you say to that?

Meg: Well that's really pretty common, because the reason you divorced him in the beginning was because something was wrong, right? You were angry with him. There's something you couldn't reconcile. And so now as you go into coparenting, you're still mad at this guy, right?

Eryn: Yeah.



Meg: And you don't want him to do to your daughter what he did to you. Well most men are very different husbands than they are fathers. And most daughters relate quite differently to their dads than wives do to husbands. Now here's the thing. Even if your husband really did a lot of bad stuff, I don't mean killed people or whatever, you can divorce him as a wife. But your daughter can't, and she doesn't want to.

Elisa: That's good.

Meg: And so your job as a good mother is to swallow your feelings about him, unless of course they're dangerous, you know, that he's really going to physically or sexually harm the child, is to encourage your daughter to have her own separate relationship with dad than you have. That means that you cannot taint your daughter with your feelings. Now this is hard, but you need to do it; because it's critically important. Your daughter deserves to have her relationship with her dad and it not be mixed with your relationship with your husband, cause they are very different. And you don't need him, but she needs him. Remember the...remember the hole?

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Meg: Yeah, he wasn't filling up a hole in your heart.

Eryn: Right.

Meg: Cause you're an adult. But he needs to fill a hole in her heart even as a broken, messed up guy that you couldn't stay married to anymore. But you need to encourage that. So a couple of rules that are critically important for your daughter, okay. Because if you poison your daughter against your ex, it will come back to bite you really badly.

Eryn: Really?

Meg: When she grows up and oh...she grows up and she's 25 and says mom, why did you tell me dad this and dad did that? Mom, how could you tell me that? Dad's a good guy.

Eryn: Wow.



Meg: Right? Because she learns as a child to see her father through your lens, and that's not fair. That's not fair. So you do your best to never say critical things about her father to her. Now you really have to work at that. If you have a grievance and you're mad at your ex-husband, you go to your girlfriend and you just have it out with her and you tell her. You do not tell your daughter, because it's not fair to her. And it's not fair to her dad.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: And if he's a really pretty good guy, a decent guy, you speak up about him in front of your daughter. You talk about her dad's positive character qualities. You know your dad really loves you and he's so kind to you. And you just sort of build him up. The other thing is this, and I think this is brilliant and not...I've not seen many couples do it. But I think it's brilliant cause one of my patients told me that her parents did it, is the parents don't tell the kids why they got divorced. And people say well, they should know. No, they don't need to know. You know kids aren't adults. They don't handle it the same way. But a girl who was 17 when I asked her, cause fabulous mom you know. And she has two daughters by, you know, her ex. And then she remarried and has another. And these daughters are just the kindest, nicest, kids I've ever seen. So I said...so I asked them right in front of their mother. I said I want you to give me a bullet-point list of everything your mom did right for you girls to turn out so well. And...and right at the top of the list was, we don't know why my parents got divorced, and I'm so grateful they never told me.

Eryn: Wow.

Meg: Because I don't know the dirt about my dad, and that frees me up to just love him my way. And I thought, what a stri...she said one day, if I want to know, I can ask and they'll tell me. They're not, you know, having secrets from me. But they're recognizing that there're things I don't need to know that if I did know would be harmful to me and my relationship. So she said, I've always felt free to have my own relationship with my mom and my own relationship with my dad. And that gives kids so much freedom.

Eryn: Wow.

Meg: So that's...that's really important for spouses, ex-spouses, to do. And that goes for men and for women.

Eryn: Yeah, alleviates the pressure off of the child to choose.

Meg: It does, exactly. Then they don't have to choose. They don't have to feel sorry for one of them.



Eryn: Right.

Meg: Which they always do. One...kids always take a side, and usually the side they take flips as they get older.

Eryn: Yeah, wow.

Meg: You know it'll flip back and forth. And that really isn't fair to a child to do, because they want an equal relationship with each. And they deserve to have a fair chance at an equal relationship with each parent.

[music]

Elisa: When we come back, Dr. Meg will share with us about how we may need to heal from some of the wounds of the past that were caused by our parents' broken relationship or our own relationship with our dad.

Jade: Hey, friends. I'm Jade Gustafson, one of the producers for *God Hears Her*. This Father's Day, we want to share a free *Our Daily Bread* devotional called *The Perfect Father*. No matter what your relationship looks like with your earthly father, we all need the reminder that our heavenly Father loves us deeply and wants a close relationship with us. Check out the free resource in the podcast description or on our website at godhearsheer.org. That's godhearsheer.org. Happy Father's Day.

Eryn: Let's get back into our insightful conversation with Dr. Meg on this episode of *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: So when a relationship between a father and a child has been broken, for whatever reason, there are lots of reasons. There are so many good men who have tried their darndest and whatever. You know, kids are kids. What steps can that father take to try and restore them? We can't control our children's choices, but we can control our responses to their choices, you know. So what can a father who really longs to be in relationship do to restore?

Eryn: That's a good question.

Meg: I've seen...you know I've seen that so many times. The first and most important thing for that dad to know is your child wants you. And dads go no, no, no. you don't know. Yes, I do know. And this is why I can talk about fathers, because I know kids. And I know what kids want. And I know what kids want from their parents. You know I...I've never been a man. But I know what kids want from their dad. And here's godhearsheer.org



the thing. A father doesn't need a child. It's great to have a good relationship. They hurt if they don't have one. But a child needs the dad, literally when they're born. They...they need their parents to keep them alive. And so they look to that parent. And their relationship with that father starts off on a very different footing than his relationship with them. Because they look up to their dad, and they need his love, his trust, his care, his protection, whatever. And so they are tied to that father with what I call a fine cord of gold. And it kind of goes one way, because they need the father's love. And they need that, and they need it for years and years and years to come. I've talked to so many adult women, 40s and 50s, who still long for their father's approval. Fathers, on the other hand, hurt because they don't have a close relationship with their daughter, but it's a very different kind of hurt. So to understand that your child, deep down in their heart, wants restoration and needs restoration more than you do. So that's good news. So that means that, as you begin to restore that relationship, eventually you're going to hit soft territory but not at the beginning. So when you need restoration, dad has to start. Because in that 40-year-old daughter's eyes or son's eyes, you're still dad. And he's still the kid, right.

Elisa: So he needs to take the initiative.

Meg: You need to take the initiative because it's still in some part, even though you're adults, it's a still sort of child to sort of adult relationship, okay. It's still unequal. So dad has to make the overtures. You email. You call. You write a letter. You text., whatever. Probably you're going to be rebuffed over and over and over. That's okay. You keep at it, and you keep at it. And you gently sort of keep pursuing that child. I strongly encourage fathers to write handwritten letters. There's nothing that shows a person's personality and their uniqueness through their handwriting. And I challenge any person who has a letter handwritten from their father to throw it away, even if you had a bad relationship. Well maybe you'd want to throw it away. But when you see that handwriting, it's your dad.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: It's not so much in an email. So you pursue. You write. And if you do it month after month and you do not give up, eventually that child will say, okay. Maybe I'll give you a second try. And then you're ready to go. Now this may be the hardest part, because you have to be willing to go to that child and say, I know I hurt you terribly. If you know what you did, then you ask for forgiveness for that thing. You don't just say, please forgive me. I've made a lot of mistakes. That doesn't go over well with kids. Please forgive me for abandoning you and your mother when you were 12. That was very painful for you. I can't imagine what you went through. Will you forgive me? If you don't know what happened, then you have to ask the child. Say, you know, you were an alcoholic and you missed years of your life. Please tell me what was most hurtful for you, and what did I do that was most hurtful for you? And what did it feel like? And then that kid knows you're serious, because you're willing to face yourself. And you unravel that, and then you ask for

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forgiveness. Then the third tier comes. And that is, the kid's going to test you. Do you mean it? Do you mean it? You left me once. Are you going to leave me again? Okay, you're going to be nice for a few months. You're going to say you're sorry. It's going to be all nicey nice, and poof, you're gone again. So you have to be ready to take the high road and show that child year after year that you will reconcile. So the child needs it so much, they're going to put you through the wringer. Because they're not going to reattach to you if they sense there's any chance you're going to bail. They can't. They need to protect that heart, because it's been wounded once. So you need to go through these three tiers. You need to be diligent. You need to mean it. But if you're not serious about reconciling, don't. Because it's going to traumatize the child twice.

Elisa: Wow, yeah. Yeah.

Meg: It's better for the child to grieve that you're gone than to grieve that you left, and now you're coming again. And there's hope, and then there's more painful grief because it's the second time.

Elisa: So don't yo-yo it, yeah, yeah. Makes sense.

Meg: Don't yo-yo. Yeah, because that child needs you far more than you need them.

Elisa: Could we speak for a few minutes to that woman who longs for her father to do anything to create connection. You know you're saying that dad needs to go first, but he doesn't, you know. And but she knows better. She's ready. What steps can she take?

Meg: Yeah, that's great. You know I was just thinking about this, this morning. First, she needs to, going back we talked about earlier, figure out how her dad let her down, what she wanted, and what he didn't give her. And she needs to be specific. How did my dad hurt me? And where are the wounds and to face them and to start to heal with that, knowing that you're probably not going to be able to work it out with your dad because he's abandoned. He's distanced from you. So you walk into that to renewing that relationship with a reaching out to your father without the hope that it's going to turn out well, because it may not. So then you think, I can heal about my father wounds separate from my dad. So when I want to approach my dad, what do I want to happen? What...what's the best scenario? And you say, well I want to reconcile. I want to have what I didn't have with him. That's probably not going to happen. Because if you go into that hoping okay, he's going to be a very different person now. He's not going to be. So then you make the overtures. You're going to go and you're going to be standing on fairly firm ground realizing that you're not going to probably get what you want, but that's okay. You'll take what you get, because you don't need him to say certain things, to respond a certain way, to whatever. You're not setting yourself up for that. And then you send out a letter. And you prepare, just like the dad would. You know godhearsher.org



he'll probably reject you because he feels so ashamed. He feels guilty, which he should. But it's going to hit home with him, and it's going to make him feel more ashamed. But you keep reaching out. Dad, I don't want a father-daughter relationship with you anymore. It's okay. I just want to know you. I want to have coffee with you. That's it. I don't have any expectations. So if you let him know you don't have expectations and you don't have expectations, that frees you both up to sort of start fresh and see what happens. Because the only way you're going to have something good come out of the relationship, unless he's completely open to saying I really botched up. I'm so sorry. Thank you for reaching out. You know I was a mess. I'm dep...I was depressed and alcoholic, but now I'm not. Now we can start fresh. Okay, that's different. But assuming he's not any different than he was 20 years ago when he left, which is the safest assumption, cause you don't want to [inaudible] up. Then you say, I don't hold a grudge. And you don't hold a grudge. Let's just sort of start from where we are and let's you know, with very, very low expectations. I think that's the safest way. Because when you start there, then if you find healing and you find reconciliation and you find a birth of a new father-daughter relationship, wow.

Elisa: Yeah, it's a bonus, yeah.

Eryn: That's good.

Meg: Wow, wow. You know you are blessed beyond belief. But I think that going in there hoping that, not to say it can't happen, but you need to go into it preparing for that not to happen...

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: ...to sort of safeguard yourself.

Eryn: Yeah.

Meg: There are a lot of women who will reach out to their father and find a lot of healing, because they'll see their dad through an adult lens. And they'll see this man who was really depressed, a bad alcoholic. And they'll start to go wow, I never knew how much pain you were in when you left. Now I get why you did what you did. And they have empathy.

Eryn: Yeah, I would love to just maybe spend just the last few minutes talking about how Jesus was such an example of a love that we all desire. And maybe this is a moment in which a wife can be like, honey, I want you to listen to this last part of this podcast.



Meg: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The truth of the matter is, we're all grieving as women. And men are too. Because our fathers did mess up, and our fathers don't give us a lot. And even if they're perfect dads, they don't give us a lot. That's why we need Christ. And that's why we need who He is as a man and as God. Because He is perfection. He is the love that comes that is so overwhelming it's almost unbearable because it's so strong and wonderful and pure and clean. Even when we're doing horrible, horrible things and thinking awful thoughts, He's there. He will never leave. And I think that, because we all have small holes and big holes and crooked holes and whatever, we all need filling. We all need perfected love and trust and kindness and peace and goodness. And the thing that's really remarkable about Christ is that we really don't have to do anything except say, please Lord, I want you to fill those places. I want you to...to be for me, something my dad couldn't be, or to even be something for me my mom couldn't be. Because there's a lot of Christ's character qualities that we would label feminine, you know, the humility and the humbleness. He is not domineering. He is not out there rapping a stick over our head going, you better this or you're in trouble. And that's what I think people who don't live with the presence and the life of Christ with them every single day feel a constant emptiness that they do. And for those women out there who do feel sort of a longing and a little bit of an emptiness and know there's something a little missing, I can guarantee you that's what's missing. And Christ grieves that that's missing. So I would just encourage them to turn and see what His face looks like and open yourself up to Him. Cause you will never, ever, ever be disappointed.

Elisa: Fathers are an important part of our lives, and we need them in our lives. Dads, we appreciate you, and we love you. Happy Father's Day.

Eryn: We hope that no matter what emotions Father's Day brings up for you, that you can find comfort and peace in your relationship with our heavenly Father.

Elisa: Well before we close out today's episode of *God Hears Her*, we want to remind you that the show notes are available in the podcast description. You can also find a link to check out Dr. Meg's website and order her book *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters*. There are also links to connect with Eryn and me on social. You can find all these links when you visit our website at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Eryn: Thank you for joining us. And don't forget. God hears you. He sees you. And He loves you because you are His.

Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Gabrielle Boward and produced by Daniel Ryan Day and Jade Gustafson. We also want to thank Dave and Joyce for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.



Eryn: *God Hears Her* is a production of Our Daily Bread Ministries.