

Moms  
Bringing  
Out *the* Best  
in Dads

JAY PAYLEITNER



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## Moms Bringing Out the Best in Dads

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*Her children arise and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her.*

PROVERBS 31:28

*With gratitude to Rita Anne,  
who continues to make me  
a better man and a better dad.*

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# Foreword

**W**e live in a fatherless period in time. I think often of this verse from a fatherless time in ancient history. What a promise God made as the final ink on the last pages of the Old Testament began to dry:

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children,  
and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

MALACHI 4:6

I've used this verse as a prayer in my home, asking God to make me the kind of mother who partners with God in turning the hearts of the Gresh children (and grandchildren) toward Bob! The kind of woman who turns Bob's heart toward our children (and grandchildren). If your children, like mine, have an involved dad in their lives, they are blessed. Let's be the kind of women who live as if we believe that!

My husband is what we call a Wolf Dad. He and I learned the term years ago from a mentor who was teaching us about parenting. You see, wolves co-parent, but they fulfill very different roles.

For the first six months of life, a litter of cubs stays in the den receiving nurture, nourishment, and protection from "mom." During that time, if a cub attempts to wander from the den, she gently picks it up by the scruff of the neck and draws it deep back in. Her job is to keep the pups safe, teach them to groom themselves, and cuddle. Otherwise, they would not bond.

But after six months, "dad" steps in. He invites those cuddly pups out of the den. In fact, sometimes he pushes them out. With each invitation

or push, the litter goes farther and farther with him. Eventually, they make it far enough to play a game of relay using sticks. His job is to teach them to take risks and to be hunters. Otherwise, they would not survive.

Bob and I believe that mothers and fathers, like co-parenting wolves, have different roles to play in the lives of children. We also believe that those differences should be celebrated and affirmed. Sadly, that's not what many women do when their husband parent differently. When they act like dads!

That's why I'm so thankful for this book from Jay. He provides practical advice for wives and moms to celebrate and affirm the unique role a dad plays in a child's development. This book will help you encourage your husband to move into his hero role in your family. That includes letting him parent differently. And, of course, it includes knowing when and how to practically help him or advise him.

From something as simple as teaching dads to swaddle a baby using the burrito fold to practical strategies for activating their strengths while overcoming their weaknesses, you have incredible opportunities to help your husband become the hero your children need. Jay Payleitner speaks from the perspective of personal experience and biblical truth to equip moms and encourage dads.

I've been following Jay for years, and I'm so thankful he has written this great book for women. Dive into the pages of it. It'll help you become the kind of woman who turns the hearts of a father and his children toward one another!

Dannah Gresh,  
author of *Six Ways to Keep the Little in Your Girl*  
and *Six Ways to Keep the Good in Your Boy*; founder, True Girl



## INTRODUCTION

# My Wife Made Me a Better Dad

I've sold more than a half-million books for dads. I've spoken on the topic of fathering on hundreds of radio stations, television networks, and podcasts—and at conference centers, gymnasiums, churches, and retreat lodges around the country. I even addressed more than a thousand dads in an assembly hall in Warsaw, Poland.

*None of it would have happened without Rita Anne.*

Of course, her motives were not entirely unselfish. Together we made five kids. Rita was smart enough to know that the best way to raise our unpredictable crew was with two dedicated parents in constant communication.

She knew joining forces was not an option. It was an imperative.

I'll take some credit because I was smart enough to listen when Rita nudged, encouraged, or admonished me. Over the years, she helped me prioritize my goals, equipped me with some surprising tools, and even helped me understand teenage girls. I took full advantage of everything she offered.

Thinking back, I see how my wife shrewdly set me up to be a hero for my kids. Sometimes her work was behind the scenes, but again, let me emphasize that Rita deserves full credit for making it all happen.

This book—with Rita's permission—shares many of her secrets. In addition, I gathered some profound insight from other resources and families.

Mom, on behalf of fathers everywhere, let me assure you: your husband wants to be the best dad possible. Sometimes, it may seem like he's putting his job, hobbies, or some other activity ahead of the kids. That

might be because he's more confident in those areas or gets more positive feedback in those roles. But I promise, he loves you and the kids and is eager for all the help he can get.

Over the years, I've talked to a lot of dads, and the ones who are struggling typically are not on the same page as their wife (or ex-wife). Don't let that happen to you and your children's father. Your kids absolutely need the best from both of you. Working together on that shared goal—raising awesome kids—is a mission that must not fail.

*Joining forces* is not just a platitude. It's a collaborative strategy for establishing a home filled with love, creativity, and security. It's a foundation from which you can successfully launch your children into the world. It's about bringing out the best in each other.

As you read, Mom, if you come across an idea or two that proves valuable to you and your family, I hope you'll share it with other moms you know. Drop me a note too. You can track me down at [jaypayleitner.com](http://jaypayleitner.com). I'll be sure to tell Rita you said hi.

Finally, thank you, Rita, my love. I'm honored to pass along your wisdom and secrets to another generation of moms—women who just might have a similar impact on thousands of fathers and children as you have had on our family.

## Teach Him How to Swaddle

My wife, Rita, likes to hold babies. Not coincidentally, babies like to be held. I will never forget the image of Rita wrapping up each of our five babies and holding them close for the first months of their lives, seemingly never putting them down. I knew instinctively those babies were feeling loved and secure. And that's a pretty good way to start life.

Let me confirm this loud and clear: I was never jealous, and I never thought I was missing out. Watching Rita work her magic with our newborns was truly satisfying and rewarding. I did my share of diaper changing and holding our babies, but I never mastered the art of the swaddle. Until years later.

When our youngest, Rae Anne, was nine years old, my wife got the urge to hold babies again. Around the same time, she also became aware of a desperate need in our community for short-term care for newborns exposed to cocaine while in their mother's womb. As a result, over a period of several years, we welcomed ten foster babies into our home. Mostly newborns. Several of these little ones were essentially recovering addicts.

It was during this season when Rita finally taught me how to swaddle, complete with lessons on the highly regarded "burrito fold." Mom, you may already know this maneuver, which involves just the right kind of baby blanket with just the right method of folding and wrapping. But I promise your husband has no idea what we're talking about.

I spent a good amount of time swaddling those babies (although not nearly as much as Rita did). My five kids also learned how to tightly wrap, hold, and snuggle the precious infants brought into our family for days, weeks, or months. The burrito swaddle was especially important for a few

of those innocent newborns who endured seizures and severe withdrawal tremors. Cocaine exposure in utero has that effect.

The good news is that love is the most powerful force in the universe. Snuggles from my family literally loved the residual cocaine right out of those babies. The boys and girls we've been able to keep track of over the years are doing very, very well.

Which brings us back to the swaddle. You might say I came to swaddling late, missing it almost completely with my own kids. Still, I can testify to the value and personal satisfaction that comes from swaddling newborns. Mom, I urge you, don't keep this experience to yourself! If you share this strategy with your husband, the dividends are obvious. Your baby gets double cuddles, and Dad gains a much-needed and long-lasting connection to his new son or daughter while your arms get a break.

Even better, that close relationship your husband develops with your kids will never end. Before long, he'll be tucking kids in and reading them bedtime stories. Later, they'll be wrestling in the family room or dancing in the kitchen. When you see them snuggling on a couch watching old movies or sitting close on a log watching a dancing campfire, you'll be able to trace that closeness back to the days when you taught him how to swaddle.

Now, of course, you will likely be a better swaddler and snuggler than your husband. Moms tend to be a little softer and often have the benefit of breastfeeding, which is an entirely unique form of snuggling. All of which means your husband needs the kind of encouragement and gentle instruction that only you can give.

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## TAKEAWAY

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Some dads are better at cuddling than others. Encouraging your husband in this area is a worthy pursuit that pays great dividends

to every member of your family for years to come. And if you don't already know it, go online and learn that burrito fold.

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*This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*

LUKE 2:12 ESV

## Remember, It's Not a Competition

For sure, moms can do dad stuff. And dads can do mom stuff. But can we agree that there are some things that tend to fall on one side of the fence or the other?

Here are just a few things dads might be more likely to do: Skip rocks. Give horsey rides. Stop at historical markers. Play H-O-R-S-E. Give noogies. Tell knock-knock jokes. Carry a clean handkerchief.

Here are a few things moms might be more likely to do: Kiss boobos. Know where to find the Scotch tape and the good scissors. Bake cupcakes. Shop for appropriate swimsuits that fit. Fly kites. Locate stuff in the refrigerator. Track down a lost remote.

Are you nodding your head? Or shaking it in scorn? Are some of these activities actually gender neutral? Absolutely. And that's the point.

The above list was made based on my own personal experience in the Payleitner household. And I will be quick to note that—especially in recent generations—gender roles have blurred a bit. I have, indeed, baked cupcakes and flown kites. I've watched Rita skip rocks in the Fox River and play H-O-R-S-E in our driveway. Truth be told, there are only a handful of activities truly limited by gender. Childbirth and breastfeeding come to mind.

Whatever life experiences you bring into your parenting has a lot to do with how you parent. Cultural expectations still have some influence, but not nearly as much as they did for past generations. Other factors include availability, physical ability, and priorities.

The big idea to remember—and remind yourself of regularly—is that

it's *all* important. Sometimes a task that is done every day may seem less important. After all, no parent gets a trophy or makes the news for wiping boogers, making lunches, and getting kids ready for bed night after night after night. But we've all seen and teared up at those viral videos of an army corporal returning from a year overseas and sneaking into a school assembly to surprise a third grader.

I say let's give a trophy to both of them. Being a parent is always a heroic calling, and it's important to appreciate the contribution and sacrifice of our spouses. Because it's not a competition. It's all about accepting responsibility and stepping up to meet it.

By the way, in a book for moms, this author needs to acknowledge that moms often do the bulk of those daily thankless tasks. It's possible your child's father might not realize how much you do and how hard you work. Well, he needs to know. But please don't make an eight-page list of all you do and dare him to match it. Instead, let him know you appreciate how much he *does* do. Even admitting that he does stuff you can't. He'll get the message.

Finally, allow me to stir this slight controversy even more. Mom, I hope you agree that it really is okay if Dad does stuff with the kids that you wouldn't do. In your own way, he needs you to cheer him on in activities like: Climbing trees. Playing with snakes. Standing up on a toboggan. Doing cannonballs off the high dive. Taking photocopies of his face. Seeing how many mini-marshmallows he can catch in his mouth. Dragging the kids out into the side yard to see a double rainbow.

That's all mostly dad stuff. (If you ask really nice, we dads may teach you some of our secrets.)

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## TAKEAWAY

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Can we all admit that boys and girls and moms and dads have different tendencies and proficiencies? Let's also affirm that

we're all in this together, filling in each other's gaps. This gives us the freedom to just go with our strengths.

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*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

EXODUS 20:12