Last year, when it was time to fix a sticky door in our house, I dug out the power tools, went to the hardware store, and got to work. As a bonus, our eleven-year-old, self-proclaimed do-it-yourself expert, Lucy, pledged to help me with the project.

At one point in the process, as we were sanding the door in preparation to rehang it, our thirteen-year-old son opened the door to the garage, noticed Lucy standing there, sand paper in hand and wearing her protective goggles, and said: “Lucy, that’s a man’s job.”

I was mortified. Let the reader understand that we are an avowed egalitarian household, and all of our kids have heard Daddy speak on gender equality on multiple occasions. Standing there, covered in sawdust, I thought with dismay, “I’m raising a complementarian!”

Being an egalitarian father is not for the faint of heart, but here are five tips for thriving in this vital role.

1. Understand the current of culture is flowing against us

Make no mistake about it, the river of culture is strong, and it moves in the direction of patriarchy. Tragically, that is particularly true in church culture, where it often seems like gender roles are chiseled in stone. And while it doesn’t solve the problem, knowing that egalitarian fatherhood is an upstream proposition makes it somewhat easier.

Speaking personally, understanding what I’m up against moves me to pray, and it fuels my actions with a profound sense of urgency.

2. Take every opportunity to teach and train

In light of our counter-cultural commission as egalitarian fathers, we must embrace every opportunity to help our kids grasp the Bible’s message of gender equality. For example, in our house we can be rigorous about interpreting the commercial messages we see on TV. During last year’s Super Bowl, we followed nearly every commercial with a family conversation in response to the question, “what is that ad communicating about the relationship between women and men?”

From Super Bowl ads to the US presidential campaign and plenty in between, 2016 tragically provided a lot of chances to talk about concepts like the objectification of women, hyper-masculinity, sexism, and power dynamics, all of which were playing out across the US every week. It matters how we as fathers respond to these things.

It’s easy to question how much kids grasp from these conversations. Sometimes it seems like all their brains can manage are school, video games, and trying to consume as much milk as possible. But they absorb more than you might think. So on a daily basis, I’ve found opportunities for teaching and training when I’m processing the school day with the kids, helping them think about the power dynamics in their social
networks. Whether it’s a more formal teaching time around the dinner table or on-the-fly interpretative conversations, egalitarian dads don’t waste the chance to teach and train.

I am convinced of this: it is my sacred task to help our kids understand and lament gender inequality, and work for equality. It is my duty as a Jesus-following father to call out sexism in all its forms, and to invite my kids to embrace an egalitarian view of others.

3. Model, model, model

As an egalitarian father, I am keenly aware that how I live and what I say is the strongest message my kids will receive regarding gender equality. In light of this, my wife Amy and I strive to live out our egalitarian convictions in how we parent and in how we co-lead our household. For instance, our aim is to have both parents present for the important parenting conversations, so that our kids can see how partnership works. We’ve chosen not to divide up the household tasks along traditional gender lines, demonstrating that women can manage the money and men can do the laundry.

Modeling our values also means being ourselves, especially when gender-based stereotypes tell us we should be embarrassed to do so. When my daughter, Lucy, ran in the fourth-grade district finals in cross-country, I found myself in tears before her race. Part of it was empathy, since I knew how much she would suffer during the run, and part of it was this fierce belief that she could do it. As an egalitarian father, I likewise know that she’ll face hardship and pain as a woman, but that she will overcome. Standing alongside the race course that day, I let the tears flow. I am okay having others see who I am as a father, even if it defies the stereotypes.

Further, for me as an egalitarian father, I know I have a holy obligation to model for my kids the egalitarian heart of the Father God. And this high calling demands my best. In light of this, I’ve learned that I need other egalitarian fathers to hold me accountable to live what I believe. Welcoming others into my life in this area is not easy, but it is tremendously life-giving.

4. Find allies

One of the best things about being an egalitarian is the wonderful egalitarian community! And successful egalitarian fathers will take advantage of being in fellowship with other like-minded and like-hearted believers. The reality is that my kids can’t only hear this message from me, and so I strive to find them egalitarian mentors and models who can augment what I am trying to teach at home. For our family, part of finding allies is being involved in a church where women are fully empowered to serve and available to mentor the next generation.

5. Keep the faith

The journey toward embracing a theology and practice of gender equality is just that, a journey. And as a father, I need to understand that my children are on their own personal journeys. They won’t become leading gender equality advocates overnight! Probably the most profound thing I’ve learned about being an egalitarian father is that guiding the kids on their journeys calls for a strong dose of faith. I must trust that ultimately Jesus will be their greatest model. And so, as an egalitarian father, my greatest and deepest calling is to pray for my kids to fall more and more in love with Jesus, the ultimate egalitarian.

Back to that day in the garage... After a robust debrief, Josh now knows that woodworking is not exclusively a man’s job. He knows that it’s anyone’s job. My job? To teach the kids this truth, as often as I can.

That’s the job of an egalitarian father.

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