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Message for New Dads (and Dads-to-be)

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Message for New Dads (and Dads-to-be)

Abstract

"You'll realize that you've come to love this kid more than you previously thought possible, and you will feel that love deep down in your soul."

Posting about the joys and challenges of parenting from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/a-message-for-new-dads-and-dads-to-be/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

A Message for New Dads (and Dads-to-be)

 [all in allthings.org/a-message-for-new-dads-and-dads-to-be/](https://allinallthings.org/a-message-for-new-dads-and-dads-to-be/)

Neal DeRoo

My son is now 5 and my daughter is 3 and a half. They are (mostly) great kids, and I am (usually) glad they are in my life. I love my kids, and would do almost anything for them (but, no, son, I will not do silly animal dances for you while we're waiting in line for the cash register at Walmart). But that sure isn't what it felt like those first few months of fatherhood.

So there's something I want new dads (and dads-to-be) to hear: there will (probably) not be a magic bonding moment that happens the moment you see your newborn baby. You will almost certainly not immediately feel a deep connection to your child, and you will not immediately be content to re-arrange everything in your life to satisfy the whims of this small poop machine. This does not mean you've made a mistake. It doesn't mean you aren't ready to be a dad, or that you're going to be a terrible father. It just means you are a dad. Welcome to the club.

My initiation into the club came at the house of friends of ours, while my wife and I were expecting our first child. My friend pulled me aside and told me: "Just so you know, you will not bond immediately with your kid when he's born. You will still love him; you'll still do what you have to do to help him, because you love him and feel a duty to do it. But you won't feel a bond or connection right away. I want you to know that that's normal and you shouldn't feel bad about it. Your wife will seem to have this deep bond with him right away, and that'll make you feel like crap, because you won't feel the same way, but you'll think you should, and you won't want to admit to anyone that you don't, because you'll think that they'll think you're a terrible person. But your wife has already been bonding with him directly for 9 months. It'll take you at least 6-9 months, and maybe longer, to really feel that bond or that connection. You need to know that that is okay and totally normal. It doesn't make you a bad person. It doesn't make you a terrible father. It just makes you a father."

I thanked him at the time for telling me that, but I didn't fully appreciate it until my son was born and things played out almost exactly as my friend had said. When my son was about 8 months old, I really thanked my friend, and told him that that had saved me so much pain and mental anguish. Even knowing that it was normal, I still felt bad that the bond wasn't deeper, quicker. If he hadn't told me to expect it, and that it was ok, I would have spent those first months of my child's life thinking I was a terrible father and a terrible person. (OK, I did spend most of that time thinking I was a terrible father anyway, but at least I understood that other people felt that way, too; somehow, being terrible is ok, as long as you aren't alone in your terrible-ness.)

So, any new dads out there—if you did not have the Hollywood moment where you see your child for the first time, and suddenly everything changes, the triumphant music crescendos, the color palette in the room gets warmer, time slows down and you feel, down to the depths of your soul "This is my child!"—don't feel bad about that. You don't need psychological counseling or emotional counseling on how to connect to other human beings—you just need time. You've felt your wife's stomach as the kid has moved beneath it—she's felt him move. You've heard your wife say that the kid just won't settle down; she's felt him toss and turn inside her body. Even though you've been talking about your child, and maybe sometimes too him for months now, and even though you've felt him move and he's heard your voice, the two of you haven't interacted directly with each other yet in the way your wife and the baby have. Just give it time.

Not that time will make everything perfect. You will still feel like a terrible father sometimes, and you'll still

often find that you have no idea what you're doing (just when you finally get things figured out, the kid gets older and moves on to different challenges, and your extensive knowledge of all the different engines on Thomas the Tank Engine is rendered entirely useless).

But for now, with your new child (or as you expect your new child), please don't let the fact that your baby sometimes feels like someone else's kid who somehow ended up in a car seat in your car make you doubt your love for him or her. Don't even let the fact that you don't always *feel* the love for your kid cause you to doubt that you do, in fact, love her or him. The feeling will come. The bond and sense of connection will come. Just give it time. And about a million diaper changes. And more than a few feedings. And some playing, and smiling (it's not always just gas), and fun and tears. Just love them, and act like you love them—and eventually you'll start to feel it.

Just don't be surprised if you don't feel it right away. Someday—whether it's a few months from now or a few years from now—you'll be wiping the poop out of every crevasse in your annoyingly ornate change table (seriously, why the need for multi-sided slats in everything? It just makes more surface area for fecal coverage), or warming another bottle in the middle of the night, or making the same overly large gesture accompanied by a grossly exaggerated facial expression time after time after time until every muscle in your body aches but the kid is laughing as hard as ever and keeps saying 'Again, again', and you'll realize that somehow, amid all the daily grind and chores of parenting, you're pretty sure you'd do anything to make this kid happy. You won't believe that somehow you made something so beautiful. And you'll realize that you've come to love this kid more than you previously thought possible, and you will feel that love deep down in your soul.

That day is coming, even though it doesn't feel like it right now. For now, just get back to the diapers and the screaming and the trying-to-grab-an-hour-of-sleep-whenever-it-comes-and-I-don't-care-if-it's-the-middle-of-the-day-I'm-going-to-bed. You're a dad now. Welcome to the club.