



By Gordon Dalbey

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The Cry For Daddy

After a year, the late-night nursings were beginning to exhaust Mary, and I knew it was time for Dad to take over.

I didn't look forward to being awakened randomly at night. I admired Mary's perseverance, but I'm a heavy sleeper. "I don't know how you do it," I'd often said.

Now it was time to find out.

I confess I balked at nighttime feedings partly because John-Miguel always awoke crying "Mommy!" I felt like a second-fiddle mom--and not a very good one at that.

In fact, I started out more hindrance than help. John-Miguel's cries were not loud enough to wake me, but they did wake Mary, who soon learned that only a well-placed elbow in my side would bring me to consciousness.

The elbow and relentless cries for "Mommy!" were not pleasant motivators, and at the first nighttime whimper I began bargaining with the Lord. I prayed. I rebuked spirits. I begged. I was ready to deal. Please, Lord, make him sleep! It's better for the baby, after all. I'll write an extra hour a day. I'll increase my tithe!

But still the cry for "Mommy!" went on.

Yawning, I rolled out of the sack and stumbled into John-Miguel's bedroom. Maybe it won't be all that bad after all, I told myself, and took a deep breath. "Daddy's here!" I announced hopefully. "It's OK!"

To my pleasant surprise, the room fell silent. "Well, that wasn't so hard!," I thought, and confidently stepped toward the crib.

"Mommmyyyyyy!" Shattering my eardrums along with my ego, the cry blasted forth with renewed vigor.

Startled, I stopped--then sighed. Gingerly, I picked the boy up, and put him on my shoulder.

Week after week, bottle after bottle, I pushed on through the cries for Mommy--dutifully, if not lovingly. Soon, however, I began to enjoy just holding my little son. Before long, I was praying for him, even singing my prayers softly at times. On a few especially tough nights, we walked out on the patio under the stars and talked about moons and dogs and raisin bread.

And then late one night, it happened.

Lost in heavy sleep, I stirred as a strange sound tapped lightly on my ear.

"Daa-dee..."

My eyes flickered open, closed again. Shifting, I reached to pull the covers higher.

"DA-DEE! DAA-DEEEEE!"

Bold and full-throated, the small voice pierced the dark morning stillness like a bugle.

My eyes exploded open. Lurching from the bed, I raced into John-Miguel's room and scooped him up in my arms. "That's my man!" I cried out, laughing and lifting him high above my head. "Haleluia! That's my man!"

"What's going on in there?," Mary called out sleepily from back in our bedroom. "I didn't even wake you up, and you're in there making all that noise?"

Sheepishly, I lowered a confused and bleary-eyed John-Miguel to my chest. "I'm not sure...exactly what's going on," I called back. "But...it's OK. I mean, it's good."

I held my son against me at last and smiled. "Real good," I whispered, shaking my head. "Real good."

What, indeed, stirred--even leapt--within me that night when I first heard my son cry out "Daa-dee!"?

Partly my joy, certainly, after waiting so long for him to acknowledge the bond between us. And yet, when I had rejoiced fully and both he and Mary were asleep again, I lay in bed staring at the ceiling in awe, gripped by something deeper.

I was identifying with the cry of my son. In his baby's voice, I heard something I recognized in myself.

I believe every man harbors that cry deep within his masculine soul, awaiting the night. It's the primal, human cry for centeredness, security, and saving power in a dark and broken world: "Save me, Daddy!"

Even as Jesus cried, "Abba!," a man's cry for "Daa-dee!" stirs the heart of Father God like no other. "That's My man!" I imagine His proclaiming, as the angels chorus "Haleluia!":

"The Spirit you have received is not a spirit of slavery leading you back into a life of fear, but a Spirit that makes us sons, enabling us to cry 'Abba! Father!' In that cry, the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:15-16TLB). When I was single and writing about our brokenness as men today, and even after Mary and I were married, my best friend--a father of two--told me, "Nothing will help you understand the love of God like having a child of your own."

He was right.

May we men listen to the cry for Daddy in our own hearts, so that we might recognize it in our children, and respond in godly love.

NOTE: This article was adapted from Gordon Dalbey's book, ***Fight Like A Man***, and appeared in *Focus on the Family Magazine*.