



## For Men Who Are Becoming a First Time Father

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Pregnant women experience a variety of emotions and life changes. But most first-time dads have their own feelings and concerns to deal with, too.

If you feel shocked, panicked, overwhelmed, scared, or like you're just not ready, you're not alone. Like any big change, this will require a major adjustment. And if the pregnancy wasn't planned — half of all pregnancies aren't — you may be feeling these emotions even more intensely.

You don't have to feel guilty or anxious about having mixed emotions; it's completely normal. And you can take steps to get more comfortable with the pregnancy, the idea of parenthood, and the preparations that can make both go as smoothly as possible.

Anxiety about pregnancy and parenthood is like anxiety you might feel about anything. Use stress-relief strategies that work for you — perhaps exercise or enjoying movies, books, music, or sports.

### Will I be a good dad?

Remember that you're not going to have to tackle every part of fatherhood at once. For the first few years, a lot of the parenting involves skills taught in childbirth classes and mastered through practice.

It's much like other new roles that you might take on in your life. If you're married, you didn't automatically know how to be a good husband. You learned along the way with your wife.

You have plenty of time before you have to set curfews, teach your child to drive, and dole out relationship and career advice. These opportunities to teach your child will feel like a natural progression when they arrive. If you need guidance, check for resources in the community, including parenting classes.

It may help to talk to and spend time with other fathers and discuss issues you may be grappling with. If you feel like you have issues about your own father to work through, try to talk with someone — maybe a counselor or a family member — before the baby arrives so that they don't interfere with your relationship with your own child.

### How can we afford this?

Feeding, clothing, and educating another human being is going to cost money that's now spent on other things — there's no question about it. But you can seriously reduce your stress about the finances.

It may help to get a sense of what your costs will be right after the baby is born. Your health insurer, employer, or your partner's employer may be able to give you an idea of the costs and what is covered. Many workplaces now offer some paid paternity leave, so be sure to ask.

You may want to talk to other new parents you know to get an idea of how they managed and what unexpected expenses cropped up. You may want to start putting away a few dollars each week to fund items like childcare and diapers. That way, you'll have a head start on meeting your child's financial needs.

Remember, you won't have to pay for certain expenses. For instance, if your partner decides to breastfeed, you'll save money on the cost of feeding your newborn. Also, many families share maternity and baby clothes because pregnant women and babies wear a particular size of clothes for such a short time.

### Is this the end of my independence?

Fatherhood doesn't have to spell the end of fun. True, you may not get much sleep or time for yourself during the first few months until your baby starts sleeping through the night. But when the baby sleeps more, you and your partner will have more time for things you enjoy, together and individually.

Again, it's important to work together, communicate, and trade off on the childcare responsibilities so that you each get what you need. And try to get to know other new parents, who can share their perspectives and offer a sounding board.

In the early years, you can include your little one in many activities — maybe your child can sit with you while you watch a basketball game or read the newspaper or a book. Check out the special baby carriers that let parents take their tots along on walks and hikes.

It's easy to fear losing out on free time, but most moms and dads discover that once their child is born they treasure time spent with their baby.



## Seeing the Best in Him By Chrystal Evans Hurst

It was my first time attending this Bible study. The group was a sprinkling of generations. Expectant moms, soccer moms and women with graying hair all greeted one another and settled in for their morning together.

Then, one by one, the women of different ages and seasons stood to celebrate their husbands, acknowledging how hard their husbands worked, expressing gratefulness for the ways their husbands helped around the house, or praising their husbands for little displays of love for their wives and families.

It appeared I was surrounded by happy women with perfect husbands. Jealousy rose in me as I wondered, Am I the only person in the room who doesn't have a great story to share?

Then it dawned on me: These women were making the decision to look for the good in their husbands. They were choosing to focus their thoughts on what was "excellent and praiseworthy" (Philippians 4:8).

After years of being a perfectionist, that type of positive thinking didn't come naturally to me. Instead, the high expectations I had of myself and even higher expectations I had of my husband meant I tended to view both of us in light of where we fell short, rather than focusing on what we did well.

But in choosing this perspective, I had allowed my attitude, behavior and words to slice away at the confidence my husband felt I had in him, tearing down the very thing I wanted to be building up — a solid, thriving, love-saturated marriage.

Something needed to change, and that day, in that Bible study, I decided to start making a different choice. Maybe these women were on to something.

So, when my turn came, I stood and chose to celebrate my husband. And you know what? After I decided to be deliberate in applauding my mate, I realized there is so much to applaud him for!

When I acknowledge the little things he does to show he cares, tell him that his presence in my life brings me joy, or speak well of him — in front of him and in front of others — these recognitions not only strengthen our relationship but also build his confidence.

Consider making a list of what you love about your husband, telling others about the love and appreciation you have for him, and most important, communicating these things to your husband!

Choose to focus on the good and celebrate the man you married.

Chrystal Evans Hurst is co-author of *Kingdom Woman: Embracing your purpose, power and possibilities*.

(NOTE: Men can learn from this article too. Please celebrate your wives in much the same way.)



# Being Grateful Can Change Your Life

By Leo Babauta

I remember one evening, when my life was pretty different and I was overweight and deeply in debt and a smoker and had such a hard time changing things ... I wasn't feeling too good about my life.

I felt horrible about myself, and wondered why I was stuck. I felt hopeless and helpless, and generally depressed about the state of things around me.

Then I looked up at the sky, and saw the stars set in a deep blue-black canvas. And I thought what a miracle life is.

And I resolved to mentally list the things I had in my life that were good.

My list of good things was something like this:

- I had a wonderful wife
- I had 5 amazing children (now 6)
- I had loving parents and siblings and grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins
- I wasn't sick
- I had a job
- I had decent shelter and food

- My family was healthy
- I could see, and appreciate the beauty of the world around me
- I could taste delicious food
- I had great books to read

The list went on, but you get the idea. Even when things seemed horrible for me, actually I was OK. And more than that, I had some amazing blessings in my life.

That night I resolved to count my blessings more often. I resolved to be grateful for what I had, for the people in my life.

I started the habit of gratitude.

Now, this seems like a trivial and maybe trite and hokey thing to many people. I'm here to tell you that it's not trivial, and as trite/hokey as it may seem, it changes lives.

Here's what happened to me, as I changed my thinking from one of negativity, to one of gratitude:

- I appreciated my wife Eva more, and told her so, and felt good about having her in my life, and we deepened our relationship.
- I also appreciated my kids more, and instead of getting mad at them so much, I would notice their lovingness, their curiosity, their humor and playfulness.

- I appreciated my other loved ones more, and while I don't always tell them how grateful I am for them, I do think it a lot, and do tell them much more often now.
- I was kinder to others around me, at work and everywhere else, because instead of seeing the faults in everyone, I saw the good, and was grateful for them.
- I needed less, because instead of thinking about what I don't have, I was grateful for what I did have.
- Little things bothered me less, because instead of complaining about every little thing, I would find things to be thankful for.
- I appreciated nature all around me, smaller things that I might have missed before, beauty in everything.
- Habit change became easier, because instead of focusing on how hard the change was, I found the joy in the changes, and joy in seeing myself overcome challenges.
- Each and every moment became cause for gratitude, and living in the present became easier.

The list goes on and on, but each of these things is incredibly powerful. Not trite. Not hokey. Pure wonder.

So how do you pick up this habit? It's interesting, because so much

of our lives is spent in unconscious mental habits. Without knowing it, we complain, we nitpick, we stress about little faults, we see the bad in people and situations. Changing that doesn't happen immediately.

But. You can change a little at a time. Start with a small gratitude session, and really be thankful. Really feel the happiness that something or someone is in your life.

Take a moment to make a list, right now, of the things in your life you're thankful for. You just might be looking back on this moment years later, as the moment your entire life changed.

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