

Amen: Daddy-daughter time

I've never had an alarm clock I've loved more than my current one. It goes off about 6:30 every morning, initiating the best part of my day.

"Dada!" the toddling timepiece yells from her bedroom crib. "Dada! Up! Up!"

While my 15-month-old gets to spend the whole day with Mommy when I'm at work, it's these early morning hours that serve as our special daddy-daughter time.

Sitting on my lap at the break of day, my little one plows through 20 books at a time – always pointing out the cat hiding in the tree on a beautifully illustrated page of "The Owl and the Pussycat" or giggling at the smooch Dada plants on her cheek at the end of "The Pout-Pout Fish."

When I'm holding her, I can't resist requesting a dance or two.

"Can you get into dance position?" I ask, straightening my posture and extending my left arm.

My blue-eyed ballerina inevitably obliges, raising her arm to meet mine while grinning widely. We whirl around the living room performing polkas, waltzes and the lindy hop. The dance party often ends with a tango that includes a dip in front of a hushed audience of stuffed animals.

Sometimes we look out the bay window for passing "doggies."

"Woof-woof!" my little one shouts triumphantly whenever she spots a canine.

I wish I could freeze time and live in these moments forever.

Since I can't, my prayer is that my daughter will live these moments anew in every stage of her life.

I hope she'll always be able to seek joy both in the everyday and unexpected places of life.

I hope she'll discover more amazing journeys through the pages of books with the

expert help of her librarian mother.

I hope she'll have the confidence to dance the way she likes - no matter what others might think.

Above all, when she's scared or unsure, I want my baby girl to remember the security of her daddy's arms and know she can always come to her parents for anything.

One of the books my daughter loves to read each morning is a picture book of children's prayers. She likes it for the cuddly lambs ("baa-baas") that grace almost every page. I like it because it gives me a chance to pray with my child to begin the day.

"For each new morning and its light," one prayer says, "for rest and shelter of the night, for every gift your goodness sends, we thank you, loving God."

Just as my wife and I watch over our daughter, I'm reminded that God is watching over our shoulders. He smiles when we rejoice. He laughs when we laugh and is with us in our sorrows. He is our dance partner through life. As our children rely on us, so too should we rely on God and be thankful for every goodness he sends.

Keep dancing, little girl. Keep looking for the "woof-woofs" and wake me up any time you want.

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