

## Become a Better Father

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I wish I had been a better parent to my four grown children. The time God gives us with our little ones to help shape and mold their lives seems long while they are growing up but, in reality, passes all too quickly. We must train our children to become responsible and productive Christians. Looking back, I can see a number of things I wish I had done better.

**First**, dads must make time to spend with their children. I have heard all kinds of discussions about “quality time”; but unless dads spend a good quantity of time with their children, they will not be able to meet the many spiritual and emotional needs of their children.

How much time should a dad spend with his children? This, perhaps, is the wrong question. How could a dad who loves his children not want to be with them as much as he is able? For many dads, time with the children is at the bottom of their list of priorities. Do your kids, your wife, and yourself a favor, Dad: **Go home and spend some time with your family.**

The role of the father is spiritually and emotionally crucial for children. The greatest need in America is an abundance of active, available Christian fathers. Malachi prophesied the “return of Elijah” in the man, John the Baptist; and said John “will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I [God] come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Malachi 4:6).

There can be little doubt that the social and moral problems of our country arise in part from the absence of active Christian fathers. With unwed mother’s birth rates at 36.7 percent and rampant divorce rates, many children face poverty and live lives deprived of the unique skills and security men provide. Research available from the National Center for Fathering ([www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com)) reveals the stark differences between families with and without fathers in the home. A feminist may fool herself into thinking she does not need a man, but her children always will.

Simply having a grown man in the house is not the same as having an involved father. Many fathers who live at home are nonetheless absent because they spend so little time parenting

their children. Men certainly have a greater responsibility to their children than merely bringing home a paycheck to provide for their physical needs.

Harry Chapin's folk rock song "Cat's in the Cradle" appeared in 1974 as an indictment against absentee fathers who had no time for their children. In the song, the dad's persistent refusal to engage in the life of his children came back to haunt him when his children had no time for him in his older days. The pitiable forecast for the absentee father is that one day his child is going to be just like his father; the promise of a "good time then" never finds fulfillment.

**Second**, dads must be the spiritual leaders of their homes. God chose Abraham "that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has promised him" (Genesis 18:19). Paul speaks specifically to fathers, "Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

While we may thank God for Bible schools, youth ministers, Christian colleges, church camps, retreats, and kids' programs, **God gives parents (especially fathers) the responsibility for the spiritual training of their children.** Fathers and mothers must never think that organized programs can give their children all they need to face the world with all its moral and philosophical temptations. Parents must not only know what they believe as Christians, they must also take the time to open the hearts of their children to the Lord and to His teaching. A child with a Christian mindset taught and modeled by parents has the best chance of remaining loyal to faith in Christ Jesus.

**Third**, dads must connect with **each** of their children. Each child presents a challenge, since siblings can be very different from each other. Parents cannot play favorites and expect to make the best impact on each child. Isaac and Rebekah maintained a family filled with agendas, distrust, rebellion, and deceit, because each parent favored one child over the other. Parents must show love and fairness to all their children if they wish to make a lasting impact for God and for good.

Since children differ, it is sometimes harder to find a way to connect with a child, but connecting is vital. Dads can connect by finding something he appreciates in his son or daughter, some area of association and interaction. Focusing on some positive aspect of your child can help

build a rapport. Children must feel they are loved and valued by a parent in order to develop healthy self-esteem. Few things stab the heart of child like feeling he is of no value to his parent.

**Fourth**, dads must employ the skill of active listening with their children. Children notice when parents dismiss them or filter them out; as a result, they feel unloved and unwanted. A parent who sets a pattern of ignoring his children will leave lasting scars on the child's heart. **Dads, consciously listen to what your children say. Give your child your undivided attention.** Listen with your ears, your eyes, and your heart. Be interested in them and in what is important to them.

When you listen, don't focus on how you are going to reply. Concentrate on what your son or daughter is trying to say. Avoid the temptation to interrupt or to read something into what your child is saying. Ask questions when you don't understand. When you have an accurate understanding, you avoid misunderstanding. Many problems and conflicts could be avoided by asking a few relevant questions in order to understand.

Good parental listening involves empathizing. Focus on the words **and** feelings. Let your child know you feel their pain or their joy with them. Without empathy, your child feels empty and alone. Empathy builds harmonious and trustful relationships and enhances your child's self-worth.

**Fifth**, be careful with anger. All children misbehave, rebel, and have accidents. How you react to your children's imperfections can either build your relationship or leave unfading scars. The father who blows up at his child over every mishap or infraction is subtly telling his child that he can never measure up to his expectations. Words charged with emotion often cut deeply and cruelly. James said, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires" (James 1:19-20, ESV). Persistent parental anger deeply hurts a child and teaches him to be unnecessarily frightened or defensive. When the child grows strong enough to have some power of his own, he may himself use anger destructively to bring harm to himself or others.

**Sixth**, tell and show your children you love them every day. Children need to be assured and reminded that parents really do love them. Loving is a mindset and a commitment to make whatever sacrifice is necessary for the best interests of another. Loving your children means providing for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. It means blessing them with good

things and with discipline. Solomon said in Proverbs 29:17, “Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul.” On the other hand, “a son who gets his own way will be a shame to his mother” (29:15). Therefore, “discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death” (19:18).

**Seventh**, but never last, parents must pray for their children. God regarded Job as blameless and upright in part because he prayed and offered sacrifices for his seven sons and three daughters daily, because “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:1-5). Every parent needs to pray for wisdom and patience to bring his children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (James 1:5-8). The most important thing any parent can do is to maintain a close, loving commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Parenting can be difficult, labor intensive, thankless work at times. However, both the temporal and the eternal benefits far outweigh any struggles we may encounter. May we rise to the challenge and parent to the glory of our Heavenly Father.