

# Better Fathers

## God as Father shows us how to be good fathers

If you were blessed with a good father, you will unconsciously and sometimes consciously treat your children the way your father treated you. If your father was rather selfish, unreasonable, cruel or simply absent, you are likely to compensate by trying to be the very opposite towards your own children. If you live the sad experience of having no father, remember that our good God is and shall always be a “Father of the fatherless” (Ps. 68:5). Many of us today face the challenge of being fathers ourselves. What type of father are *you*? As Christians we have a perfect role model of fatherhood in God Himself. Reflect on the following ways in which God acts as Father.

**1. He affirms:** When the time was right to begin his public ministry, Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him. As they came up from the water, the heaven opened and Father God spoke loudly so that all present could hear: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17). The Father affirmed the Son as He begun to live His special calling on earth. To affirm is to proclaim what is true. As a father, you may also speak true words to your children, to let them hear that you love them, that they are unique (Mat 17:3-5), that you are proud to be their father and happy to have them in your family. As a father you can also affirm your child by letting him or her know what gifts or talents you see in them and, more important today than ever before, by affirming them as a *boy* or as a *girl*. Purposefully speak truth over your children – it is a way of blessing them.

**2. He gives:** In both Old and New Testaments we find that fathers provide for their families. We follow God’s good example as a Father who provides. The Lord Jesus explained it this way: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Mat 7:11). Our heavenly Father is a giver of *good* things. A loving father is not one who always says ‘yes’. He also knows when to say ‘no’ and ‘not now’ - and he does so with calm confidence. A father should feel responsible to work to provide what his children need, but he should avoid the temptation of ‘giving things’ in order to make up for our lack of time. The best you can give them is yourself, your time, your attention. Your children need it.

**3. He teaches:** The teachings, deeds of love, miracles and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus did not stem from His own ideas and initiative. Jesus explained “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me” (John 8:28). “These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me” (John 14:24). “The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31). Be thankful if your children have been blessed with a wise mother, with good teachers at school or at church. But we as fathers retain that key responsibility to teach our children. Wise fathers make use of the normal and unexpected events of life to teach something: you can make some helpful comments round weddings, funerals, accidents and things your children see at school, at church or in the news. But you can also seek and plan regular teaching moments, perhaps a short Bible reading after one of the meals, to teach your children about God, the Bible, relationships and about life in general. Obedience is something that has to be learnt. We read that even the Lord Jesus, as man on earth, “learned obedience” (Heb 5:8). As a father, like a good disciple maker, you are responsible to teach your children to obey

(Mat 28:20). Obedience involves recognizing true authority, obeying appropriate instructions, and doing so on time and with the right attitude.

**4. He corrects:** Our decisions have consequences. You and I know that we are responsible for the choices we make. Disobedience also has consequences. From Scripture we read that our heavenly Father disciplines His children. “We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:9-11). Clearly there are different ways to correct children, there are different strategies to help a child feel the consequences of disobedience. But a father who avoids confronting a disobedient child is not loving him. Wise Salomon, after observing many families, pointed out that a father disciplines a son because he “delights” in him (Prov 3:11-12). An obedient son remains a delight to all those who meet him. Be reasonable and clear with your chosen boundaries. Take time to explain the reason for each boundary. But once your child knowingly violates a boundary, do not fail to take prompt action. Never correct with anger. A punishment, if applied, should always be for the benefit of the child and never an expression of anger or frustration. “The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Heb 12:6). We fathers should do the same.

**5. He shows how:** After healing a paralytic man near a pool in Bethesda, Jesus was criticized by a number of Jews because he had healed on a Sabbath. In answering, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19). Dear fellow father, let this heavenly model burn a place in your mind and heart: “whatever the Father does the Son also does”. Your children may forget many of your wise words, but they will never forget the way they saw you live. How do you speak to the mother of your children? If your children see that you love and respect her, even with her imperfections, they will be inclined to follow your example. Your children are listening to the way you talk about your boss at work, their school teachers, the police and other figures of authority. Your children are watching how you interact with members of your church, your relatives and neighbours. The way you respond when you are angry or frustrated with the unexpected, the unjust and the disappointments in life, will be burned in the memory of your children. By living our role as fathers, we are teaching our children how to love, how to forgive, how to work, how to serve, and how to be a follower of Jesus Christ: “Whatever the Father does the Son also does”.

**Conclusion:** Being a father is a great privilege and a great responsibility. As we recall the life of our own father, we may recall moments of joy and disappointment. As Christians we benefit from a perfect role model, that of our heavenly Father. If you aspire to be a better father you must develop in an environment of *grace*, grace towards your children, their mother and towards yourself. God is the only perfect father, and even God has disobedient children. Join the team of Christian fathers who truly love their children and take their father role seriously. But remember that you as father are never owner of your children. You shall never control them. They will give account to God of their actions and live their own life – hopefully with some happy ‘father’ memories.

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