

The Role of a Father

When I asked one of my young daughters what she thought the role of a father is, she answered, “To teach his children about God’s Word, forgive them their sins, and to be there for them.” She shrugged and added, “I suppose there are many other things as well, but that is what I think is most important.” When I thought about her answer, it again occurred to me how basic the needs of our loved ones are: they need love and forgiveness and a secure home in which to live.

A Father as a Husband

According to Scripture a man should be a husband before a father. Therefore, being a responsible father first necessitates being a loving husband. One must love, honor, nourish, and cherish his wife in every aspect of her life (Eph. 5:25–30; Col. 3:19). In this way he also teaches his children to love and respect their mother. As the children grow older they can use this example of love in their own relationships. The apostle Paul also sets the husband as the head of the wife and he instructs the wife to submit to the husband (Eph. 5:22–24). What does this mean? It can be misunderstood to mean that the husband is an authoritative figure that rules over his house in a demanding and overbearing way. This matter is addressed in the book *Treasure Hidden in a Field*. “In speaking of the husband being the head of the wife, the Greek New Testament uses the same word as the point of the plow, which receives the bumps and blows when cultivating. The word, which is often referred to, now receives broader content. To be the head means to protect and support” (pg. 105).

Throughout my life, I’ve learned to understand that the husband sets the tone for the entire house. The husband is to love and support his wife as the weaker vessel (1 Pet. 3:7). If he with tenderness loves and supports his wife, she is able to perform, with joy, the responsibilities of a wife and mother.

A Husband as a Father

As a father, no challenge rings clearer in my mind than that set forth by the apostle Paul, who says, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). In just a few words, Paul speaks of the responsibilities of those who have been given the duty of being a father.

First, a father is not to provoke his children to wrath. It means that a father is not to do things that make his children angry, as it can make them discouraged and bitter (Col. 3:21). There is a difference between doing something right for them that does not meet with their approval and doing something that angers them for no good reason. Disciplining our children and setting boundaries provides a safe and stable environment where the children know what is expected. On the other hand, setting strict rules with the “I’m in charge” attitude often results in negativity. A father appropriately uses toughness and tenderness and is not afraid to set firm but fair limits.

The second primary aspect of a father’s responsibility is to bring his children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Yet, it feels like this is the most important aspect of being a father. The believing father is the spiritual head of the home. God’s presence should be felt in the home through the father’s forgiveness, gentle love, rules, leadership, and example. A father who was granted the grace of repentance later in his life, once expressed his longing to have entered into God’s kingdom when he was a young father. He could see the difference in his two sons, whose hearts were hardened from the ways of the world, and those raised in a believing home. He wished he had been able to teach them of the forgiveness of sins and to raise them with love and tenderness that comes from a believing heart. That we have God’s kingdom and His love to help us in raising our children is a precious gift fathers should treasure.

Training and admonition mean more than simply discipline or punishment for wrongdoing. They imply that a father should spend time instructing and training his children to do that which is right according to God’s Word. They must be instructed how to do that which is good and avoid those things which are evil. Children must be instructed regarding the straight and narrow path that leads to heaven. Often we go into the flesh when a young one has disobeyed our wishes. God’s Word teaches that we should instead go to him or her in love and patience and offer forgiveness for their sins. We often find that our children, from a young age, have a thirst for forgiveness and an eagerness to forgive us, too. The ultimate goal is that God’s Word would be grafted into their hearts, and would bring forth fruits of righteousness. God willing, they will carry this training with them into life. Therefore, an incredible but rewarding challenge lies before a father. Children need to be taught from a young age (Prov. 22:6) to live according to God’s will as revealed in His Word (1 Tim. 3:15; Deut. 6:5–9).

The Father’s Blessings

Children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps. 127:3–5). As with all blessings, there is accountability. Fathers must realize that God gave this charge regarding children to parents. He did not give it to the day care. He did not give it to the babysitter. He did not give it to the grandparents. He gave it to parents. Each one of our children is a unique blessing. This also brings a challenge. How can fathers become more involved with their children? First, they can give each of their children exclusive attention as often as possible. In a large family this feels like a difficult thing to accomplish. Do not feel discouraged. One of my daughters told me that when we were busy with kids in each stage from babies, to toddlers, to teenagers, to adult kids, all it took was a few moments of special time to feel that she was loved and remembered. When

the father is with his children, he should enjoy their company without allowing outside distractions to interfere. As a result, the children will feel noticed and special. There is no single formula for how this might be accomplished, as each child is different and special in his or her own way. A father and child might work, play, visit, learn a skill, or read together. It is important that they notice each other and acknowledge a common interest. This type of undistracted attention promotes a sense that each is important to the other.

Few events will change a man's life as much as becoming a father. Being entrusted with the responsibility for the care of another person can be an awesome task. I remember when my first child was born. I was driving home from the hospital and planning the many phone calls I would make to family and friends, when a thought struck me, that now I am responsible for the raising of this precious gift that God gave me. I said a prayer that God would give me the understanding, strength, and ability to raise her. God has blessed that prayer. Through endless forgiveness, a weak father continues the work of raising his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

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Questions for discussion:

How does it affect the family when the father is able to ask for forgiveness?

Discuss how the believing family is like a small picture of God's kingdom.

How are some ways that you've experienced the father's love in the family?

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