

#144 “How to Be a Godly Father”
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Many men desire to be good fathers, but the criterion that really counts is whether or not they are godly fathers. Here are four Biblical principles that, by God’s grace, will lay a sound foundation in helping fathers become godly fathers.

First, godly fathers are first godly men. It doesn’t work for fathers to bail out and say to their children, "Do as I say, not as I do" (Matthew 23:3). Children must be able to see an example of Christ in their fathers. Paul says to his spiritual children in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." Until men by faith follow in the example of Christ themselves, they cannot be godly examples for their own children. Those who imitate Christ in thoughts, attitudes, and actions are those who have the right and Biblical ability to properly train and disciple their own children.

Second, godly fathers love their children unconditionally. Unconditionally is a significant word. It implies that love is not merited or earned and that the father’s treatment of his children is not dictated by what they can offer him in return. Some fathers want to see their children work their way into their favor or accomplish something which will make the father appear more successful. In other words, their focus is on themselves and upon what they can gain rather than upon unconditional love for their children. I think of the father of the prodigal son who stood waiting and watching for his son to return to him (Luke 15:20). When he finally did return, the father didn’t judge the son or force him to earn back his favor, love, and approval. He simply embraced him and threw a celebratory party for his son (Luke 15:21-24). He could do this because his love for his son wasn’t based upon what his son could do for him but simply and strictly upon the fact that he was his son. He never disowned his son for leaving in a pattern of rebellion, but he waited, hoped, and longed for his lost son’s return. Godly fathers don’t make their children earn their approval, and they don’t use their children’s behavior as a condition for their love. That doesn’t mean that they don’t discipline, but it does mean that they never disown. Such is the nature of unconditional love.

Third, godly fathers train their children how to love and honor God. The willingness and ability to train in righteousness is the call of every godly father. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." Ephesians 6:4 echoes the Proverbs passage, saying, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." It is not good enough just to make children go to church, say their prayers, and learn Bible verses. Those things ought to be part of the training process; however, we don’t come to know Jesus or grow in Him by having external practices forced upon us. The issue as a father is teaching a child to love the Lord as they model their own love for Him. Kids aren’t stupid. In fact, they are a lot smarter than most parents give them credit for. They can tell when religious rituals are empty or hypocritical, and even though the child might come to know the Bible inside and out, he or she will likely develop a hatred or bitterness towards Christianity if the only Christianity the child knows is vain and ugly. Training in

righteousness requires learning the Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), but how that Scripture is applied must correlate with true righteousness. Otherwise, the child will be left spending years trying to reconcile the Bible with his own experience. But let us not forget the role of discipline in the training process. Even our heavenly father disciplines those sons whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6), and the fact that a father is willing to discipline his children demonstrates love. Young children need to know their boundaries as it makes them feel secure. As kids grow older, they must see that they don't run the home and that Biblical principles will be followed in the home. Discipline reinforces these realities through imposing consequences. But it must be evident to the children when they are being disciplined that the father's love for them has not changed. Discipline is never aligned with wrath because it is kindness that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Discipline is simply another expression of love (Deuteronomy 8:1-6, Hebrews 12:6).

Fourth, a godly father seeks to give his children good gifts such that his children are blessed through him. Of course, love and discipline and the training of the Lord in righteousness are blessings of eternal value, but godly fathers go beyond just spiritual gifts to seeking to give good gifts of all kinds. Our heavenly Father is the ultimate example of this. James 1:7 says, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Our Father is the giver of every good and perfect gift because He knows when, how, and what to give us. He knows what we desire and ask for because He knows and cares for what we really want and need (Psalm 37:4, Philippians 4:19). He is the Father of lights that don't vary or shift because He is pure, consistent, and devoted to His children. He can constantly be believed and relied upon to offer His children that which is kindest, wisest, and best. He is not a deified Santa Claus that spoils children and is subject to their every whim. Spoiling is not the purpose of giving good and perfect gifts. Rather, the purpose of such provisions and blessings is the security that God cares about us perfectly and intimately. Knowing that He knows what we need and that He cares about what we want and hope for is so important in our relationship with Him. In the same way, earthly fathers should seek to be in tune with what their children hope for, desire, and need such that they can wisely meet and address those needs and wants. A father's wisdom is a blessing and security to his children as they can trust what he does for them and gives to them.