

THE FOUR RESPONSIBILITIES OF FATHERHOOD

Father's Day 2017

By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is "The Seven Responsibilities of Fatherhood." How important is fatherhood? According to the National Center for Fathering (2015): 24.7 million children (33%) do not live with their biological fathers. 71% of all high school drop outs come from fatherless homes. 71% of all pregnant teenagers come from fatherless homes. 85% of all children with behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. 85% of all youth in prison come from fatherless homes.

But these statistics only illustrate the negative effects of an *absent* father. That does not mean that being a good father just means being present, or that it just means living with your kids. A bad father can be worse than an absent father. An abusive father, a neglectful father, a father who is addicted to drugs and alcohol; this can be worse than an absent father. So it's not enough just to live with your kids, or to be physically present. For your children to get the benefits of fatherhood, they need a good father.

So what does it mean to be a good father? Good fathering does not come naturally. All of us have inherited a sinful nature from Adam and Eve. As a result, our natural inclination, or what comes natural, is sin. What comes natural is selfishness. What comes natural is to seek our own comfort, our own happiness, our own pleasure, our own security at the expense of everyone around us. By contrast, good fathering requires selflessness, discipline, persistence, diligence, patience, dependence on the Lord, righteousness, courage, and knowledge.

Since good fathering does not come naturally, it must be taught. The best way to teach it is from father to son. That's the most natural way to learn fatherhood; it is to grow up under the care of a good father. Men who grow up with a good father don't need to read a book about fatherhood; they don't need to hear a sermon on fatherhood; they learn just by living with a good father. I was blessed to be raised by a godly father. He wasn't addicted to alcohol or drugs. He didn't curse. He brought me to church every time the doors were open. He came home every evening at the same time – 5:30 PM. He loved the Lord and showed me how to do the same. He loved my mother and was faithful and devoted to her. They were best friends. My dad loved his family. He didn't leave his family to go hunting and fishing or goofing off with his buddies. He loved to spend all of his spare time with us. My dad was a hard worker; a good provider. My dad was kind, and affectionate, and encouraging; I don't remember him ever raising his voice at me. At the same time, he disciplined me; he taught me to behave, and he rebuked me and spanked me when I needed correction. I could keep going, if time

permitted. But the point is that I had the privilege of learning fatherhood the very best way – by being raised by a good, godly father.

Unfortunately, most men in America today don't get that privilege. They were either raised without a father, or they were raised with an ungodly father. And so there is a great need in our society for men and boys to be taught how to be good fathers.

As well, good fathering requires commitment. A commitment is a decision on a course of action regardless of the cost. To be a good father you must learn what fatherhood is all about, and then you must make a firm commitment to be a good father. You must commit because it is not easy; it is not the most comfortable path, or the path of least resistance. It is the most rewarding path, but it's not easy. That why you must commit.

So today this is what I hope to accomplish. I want to teach you the four basic responsibilities of fatherhood, and then I want to encourage you to make a commitment to them. So let's begin with the four things every father must do.

Four Things Every Father Must Do

1. Love the mother of your children.

The first thing that a good father does is he loves the mother of his children. This is not always possible, if you had a child out of wedlock, or if you have already gotten a divorce. But if you are still with the mother of your children, then one of the first and most important things you can do for your children, is to love her.

Why? First of all, this is simply what a godly man does. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church. We love our wives out of obedience.

As well, God made it clear through nature that the best context for raising children is with a married mother and father. Just as it takes the intimate, loving one-flesh union of a man and a woman to create a child, it takes the intimate, loving union of a man and a woman to raise a child.

There is a plethora of social research that has proven this point. **Eric Metaxas** on Breakpoint said, "Children from divorced or never-married homes are more likely to die in infancy, more likely to get divorced themselves or become unwed parents later in life, more likely to live in poverty, more likely to fail in school, less likely to graduate from college and get a good job, less

likely to be in good physical health, more likely to abuse drugs as teens and adults, have lower life expectancies, have higher rates of mental illness, be at greater risk of suicide and child abuse—and on and on.”

A child needs the constant presence of both a mom and a dad, but with divorce, that is impossible. The child will always be without one or the other.

As well, a child raised by married parents is able to get a lot more attention and affection. But in a single parent home children are left to themselves a lot more often.

Also, when parents are divorced, it makes parenting harder, because each parent has contradicting rules, expectations, and values that they are teaching their children. Not only that, but when a child is being raised by parents who aren't together, the parents are tempted to compete with each other for the child's affection; this can cause the parents to go soft when they need to show tough love.

As well, when you have a healthy marriage, you are teaching your kids how to build a healthy marriage. You are teaching your kids how a man should treat his wife; and how a wife should treat her husband.

So one of the first and most important responsibilities of a good father is to love the mother of your children.

How do you do that? One of the easiest ways to figure out how to love your wife is to consider how you want your daughter to be treated by her husband. If you had a daughter, how would you want her husband to treat her? You would want him to marry her; to commit to her for better or worse. You would want him to be sexually faithful to her – visually, mentally, and physically. You would want him to provide for her; to work hard and make a good living. You would want him to treat her with respect and kindness – not to insult her, or yell at her, or hit her. You would want him to pursue her romantically – to take her out on dates; to show her lots of love and affection; to make her feel special and desired.

2. Lead your children spiritually.

The third thing a father must do is to lead your children spiritually. Look at **Ephesians 6:4**. “Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

Let's take this verse apart. First, it is addressed to "fathers." It is the father's job to bring up the children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Dad, you are supposed to be the spiritual leader of your home. You are like the pastor of your home. Second, it says to bring them up in the "training". Some translations use the word "discipline." That means teach them how to behave. Third, it says to bring them up in the "instruction." That means teach them what to believe. Fourth, it says "of the Lord." Teach them how to behave, and how to believe, in a way that pleases and glorifies God. It is the father's responsibility to lead his children to become fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

How do you do this? **First, set the example.** Give them a real life model of what a fully-devoted follower of Jesus looks like.

Second, bring them to church. Some dads say they don't want to force their kids to go to church, because that might cause them to hate God. That's ridiculous. You force your kids to do things all the time – to go to school; to do their homework; to clean their room; to take a shower; to brush their teeth; to go to the dentist. You can't force your kids to believe; but you should force them to go to church so that they will have every opportunity to believe. Forcing your kids to do something won't teach them to hate it; it will teach them that it is very important to you, and that it should be very important to them.

Third, teach them the Bible at home. We call Bible Time at my house. Four nights a week I sit down with all six of my children to read them Bible stories, do catechism, and teach them the Bible. That's something every father should be doing. And if you don't know how, call me and I will personally mentor you in how to disciple your kids at home.

3. Discipline your children.

The sixth responsibility of every father is to discipline your children. Go back to **Ephesians 6:4**. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (ESV)." Discipline is "the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishing to correct disobedience (Google)." Don't think of discipline as negative. The goal of discipline is positive – to teach your kids how to behave in a way that pleases Christ.

Discipline involves a positive and a negative action. On the positive side, to discipline is to teach your kids how to behave. **Proverbs 23:12** says, "Apply yourself to discipline and listen to words of knowledge." Discipline here is associated with words of knowledge. Teach your kids the right way to behave.

On the negative side, to discipline is to correct your children when they do not behave in a way that pleases Christ. If you want your kids to behave, it's not enough to teach them the right way to behave. You must correct them when they don't behave. **Proverbs 12:1** says, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but one who hates correction is stupid." Here the word discipline is associated with correction.

But there are two kinds of correction. First, there is a rebuke, which is a verbal correction. A rebuke is when you tell your kids to stop behaving a certain way because (fill in the blank). "Stop that! Don't do that! Don't act like that! Don't say that word! Don't look at people like that! Don't treat people that way!" **Proverbs 13:1** says, "A wise son responds to his father's discipline, but a mocker doesn't listen to rebuke." Notice here that discipline is associated with a rebuke – a verbal correction.

The second way to rebuke your child is the rod. Aka, spanking. Or to put it more generally, pain. **Proverbs 23:13-14** says, "13 Don't withhold discipline from a youth; if you punish him with a rod, he will not die. 14 Punish him with a rod, and you will rescue his life from Sheol." Notice here that discipline is associated with the rod. It doesn't have to be a rod; it can be a spoon, or a paddle, or kneeling in the corner, or a pinch on their trapezius muscle, or time out. As long as it is painful. You want to help your child associate painful consequences with bad behavior so that they will avoid that behavior in the future.

Some fathers refuse to spank their kids, because they say they love their children too much. Listen, the Bible says in 1 John 4:8 that God is love. God knows much more about love than you, and He commands you to discipline your kids by spanking them. And here's what I've found. If you use spanking correctly, then you won't have to do it very often. I can't remember the last time I spanked one of my kids. Once they know that the rod is a possibility, your teaching and rebuking become a lot more effective.

Now discipline must be applied with love. We don't spank our kids because we want to get back at them for making us miserable or for embarrassing us. We discipline them because we love them and we want what's best for them.

There are **four types of parental discipline**. Neglectful parents are low on love, and low on discipline. Harsh parents are low on love, and high on discipline. Permissive parents are high on love, but low on discipline. Balanced parents are high on love, and high on discipline. A good father needs to be balanced – be high on love, and be high on discipline.

4. Love your children.

Finally, don't forget to love your children. A good father is loving. Jesus said in **Matthew 22:39** that the second most important commandment in the entire Bible, after loving God, is to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Who's your closest neighbors? Your wife and your children.

By the way, what does it mean to love? Our society thinks that love means making someone feel good about himself. Love is holding up a mirror and helping someone like what she sees. That's not love. Love is doing what is best for someone.

How can you love your children? Dr. Gary Chapman, a Christian counselor, has discovered what he calls the five love languages. These are the five ways that every person gives and receives love.

First, words of affirmation: Tell your children that you love them; compliment them; encourage them. Second, physical touch: Drown your kids with hugs and kisses, tickles, wrestling, snuggling, holding hands. Third, acts of service. Be available to tie a shoe, and help them button their pants, and teach them to ride a bike, and help them unscrew a jar. Fourth, gifts: On birthdays, at Christmas, and at random times buy your kids gifts – both things they need, and things that they will enjoy. And fifth, quality time. Give your kids your undivided attention; a listening ear; throw the ball; go for a walk or a bike ride; go out for a daddy-daughter date.

Bo Jackson was one of the most famous athletes in America during the 80s and 90s. He starred in both professional football and baseball. His commercials catapulted him to even greater fame. But there was something missing in Bo's life: a father. He spoke candidly about this in an article in Sports Illustrated: "My father has never seen me play professional baseball or football. I tried to have a relationship with him, gave him my number, said, "Dad, call me, I'll fly you in." Can you imagine? I'm Bo Jackson, one of the so-called premier athletes in the country and I'm sitting in the locker room and envying every one of my teammates whose dad would come in and talk... I've never experienced that." Bo Jackson seemed to have everything on the outside – money, fame, talent. But on the inside he was hurting. Why? Because he didn't have a good father.

Fatherhood is essential. It's the most important thing you will do in your life, other than care for your wife. I encourage you to do a good job. Love your children. Discipline your children. Protect your children. Provide for your children. Lead your children spiritually. Love the mother of your children. And prepare your children for the future.