

7 Ground Rules to Becoming Fathers of the Future

Parenting children is such a mammoth responsibility. From infant through adulthood, children rely on their parents in more ways than the pocketbook. While no one is the perfect parent, certain parenting behaviors have serious negative effects on children.

For example, studies show poor parenting can lead to higher risk for psychological disorders, academic performance problems, depression and low self-esteem, violence and behavior problems, failure to thrive, problems with the law, and poor social adjustment.

Gulp.

I would add that absent fathers leave girls and boys without a role model for how the family unit is supposed to work, how to have a healthy loving marriage, and how a man lives out his faith in good times and bad. This has devastating impact on our economy.

The kids are watching ... waiting ... learning. The question is how, what, when and where should you be teaching them?

Here are the 7 ground rules to becoming fathers of the future:

1. Be a good shepherd. First, for a baseline understanding of fathering, let's look at John 10:11-13, where Jesus teaches a powerful parenting concept comparing the "good shepherd" and the "hired hand."

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons

the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”(John 10:11-13)

From this metaphor, there are at least two major thoughts we can apply to fathering:

- **Accept responsibility and be available.** Don't act like a hired hand and be absent when they need you the most. Jesus said the good shepherd is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. If you act like a hired-hand, your children will be vulnerable to danger.
- **Look out for your children.** A good shepherd, or father, is on the lookout for danger, sharing his experience while the sheep are grazing unaware of the worldly enemy.

2. Be a role model. Remember “wysiwyg” (what you see is what you get)? The same goes with your kids. One doctor I know says the key to getting your kid to do anything is to do it yourself. Want your kids to eat healthy? Eat healthy. Want them to lead a life of faith? Show them. Start by living it in your own life so your kids can see it in action. Demonstrate your commitment and the value you place in an ongoing relationship with God.

3. Set the stage. Throughout your child's life, your parenting will go through phases, morphing according their age and stage in life. These are the parenting stages and associated roles:

- **Infant = Servant.** Your primary role is to be a servant while your children grow from infant through young childhood.
- **Youth = Trainers.** You will teach and train your child from a young age through adolescents about how life works, the family system, biblical and academics.
- **Teenager = Coach.** You become more of a coach around the teenage years, mentoring instead of force-feeding.

- **Adult = Friend.** If all goes well, after your child leaves the home, they will look to you as a friend, and capable advisor.

4. Build relational capital. If you invest *time, talk, and touch* throughout your parenting, you will make deposits into a relational bank account with your children. This relational capital gives children the freedom to communicate openly about issues, be honest about problems and trust your parenting.

- **Time**—Make time to spend with your kids.
- **Talk**—Talking often involves the practice of listening more than speaking.
- **Touch**—Your kids need to “feel your presence.”

5. How should you teach? Do you punish or parent? I suggest parenting through explaining your experience with consequences. With proper warning, discipline when appropriate. But don't be the heavy hand that dishes out punishment. Discipline guides and corrects. Punishment penalizes and rejects.

- “Fathers, do not provoke your **children** to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:3)
- “Fathers, do not exasperate your **children**, so that they will not lose heart.” – (Col. 3:21)

6. What should you teach them?

- **The Bible.** You need to know the scriptures that apply to daily living, and so do your kids. 2 Timothy 3:16 says “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...”
- **What's important.** The most important commandment is found in Deuteronomy 6: 5-7, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today

are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children."

7. When and where should you teach them? The Bible specifically tells us to teach our kids about God during four times and locations: when you wake up, when you go to sleep, when you're at home, and when you're traveling. These are four times when we are not busy with work or school, play time or with friends.

"Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."(Deut. 6:7-8)