

Gregory Dickow: 8 Ways to Become a Better Father

Parenting is one of the most rewarding—and most challenging—jobs out there.

As an encouragement to fathers, I want to share with you eight ways to become a better father.

Even if you're not a father yet ... or your kids have grown up and moved away, there's something in this list for you.

But don't read these points and tuck them away for another day. Start acting on them right now—it's never too late to become a better father! Your children will thank you!

1. Get to know God as Father. God is the ultimate Father ... loving, wise, encouraging, slow to anger. As a father, you are His representative here on earth, and if you get to know Him better, you can better parent your own children. So spend time in prayer. Spend time in the Word. Spend time building a relationship with your heavenly Father. Understand that He loves you, comforts you, protects you, provides for you ALL THE TIME ... and you'll be better able to do the same for your own children.

2. Give your children a sense of belonging, acceptance and identity. Remember how much God the Father loved His Son. He loved Jesus from day one—before Jesus accomplished anything, before He laid hands on one person or preached one sermon. So don't treat your children as an interruption. Don't make them feel that they're in the way. You're a parent and your job is to do the parenting!

Make sure your children feel that they hold a unique place in your special family. They belong there, and what matters to them should matter to you. If they bring you a problem—a bully

at school or a tough test ahead—talk to them. Listen to them. You may have faced the same predicament as a child and know that it's not a big deal. But to them right now, that problem is a big deal—maybe the biggest one they've faced so far in their lives.

3. Embrace your children. One of the best ways to give your children that sense of belonging is to hug them—even when they wiggle out of your arms. Hugs are therapeutic and give children acceptance, love and warmth. Studies even say that they reduce the risk of sickness and disease!

4. Love and respect their mother. A sense of security comes to children who see their father respect their mother, whether they are married or divorced. If married, Ephesians 5:25 says, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church...”* Christ loved the Church unconditionally, uncompromisingly, sacrificially, continuously. Love your wife like that, and your marriage will blossom ... your children will blossom too.

If you are divorced, you still have an awesome responsibility for your children. Respecting their mother and treating her with dignity is a must. Put your personal grievances aside and, because of your love for your children, treat their mother with honor. This will comfort and stabilize your children.

5. Respect your child's thoughts, feelings and dreams. Please, guard your tongue. Don't let the words, “That's a dumb idea” or “That's stupid,” ever come out of your mouth. If you had come up with that idea, maybe it would have been dumb. But since your child did, it's the best one you've ever heard!

6. Keep your promises. Be careful of the promises you make. Love says, “I will never break my promise.” So, again, you have to watch your tongue. Get it under control, and don't commit to something you can't make good on. When you say you'll do something, do it!

Keeping promises also builds trust. When your children have grown up and are no longer under your care, they'll be able to trust God because you paved the way. Your behavior can offer them a glimpse of their heavenly Father!

7. Encourage your children. The first part of Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, don't exasperate your children" (NIV). In other words, encourage them! You can do that through kind words—like, "You're so smart." "You're a thoughtful child." "I'm proud to be your father." You can also do that through your actions. So, smile at them! Give them more hugs!

Sometimes it's easy for us as parents to forget that our kids aren't little adults—they're children. They don't have all the skills grown-ups do. So, when your daughter knocks over the lamp in the living room, for example, show her understanding. Don't discourage her, and don't rebuke her for being uncoordinated or clumsy—her body just isn't done growing.

8. Teach them the Word. The second part of Ephesians 6:4 says, "Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (NIV). So teach them the Word; encourage them to build their lives on it. And let them see you following the Word yourself. They'll thank you for this for the rest of your life.

God bless all of you as parents.

Gregory Dickow is the founder and pastor of Life Changers International Church, one of the largest churches in the Chicagoland area. He also is the host of *The Power to Change Today*—an international television ministry that reaches a potential audience of more than 900 million households weekly.