

The Difference a Father Can Make

✖ You may struggle with feelings of inadequacy regarding your fathering

abilities, but you have a God-given role to protect and provide for your family.

And you have great impact on developing character in your sons.

Fathering is at the heart of masculinity, of what it means to be a man. Godly fathers put others' needs before their own. If you're like me, you spend the majority of your conscious thought and effort on satisfying your own wants and needs. It's almost an unconscious response to life. But if we are to be authentic men and fathers, we need to rethink that attitude and consciously make sacrifices so others can benefit and prosper.

When fathers neglect this duty or are absent from the home, predators attack families. Young men, such as gang members, who are raised without the influence of older men often become marauding wolves themselves—predators preying on women and children for their own self-gratification.

Families are like flocks of sheep. Children, like lambs, are naive and simple in their understanding of the world. Fathers are like sheepdogs, guarding the flock from marauding wolves. We protect our families from human predators and from corrupt television programs, movies, music, books, friends and other people or influences that enter into a child's life. By the way, sheepdogs come from the wolf genus, so they are no stranger to wolves' traits and habits. Fitting, isn't it?

Fatherhood: A Privilege Given by God

Fathering is a modeled behavior that is becoming an

increasingly rare commodity today. Because of the high divorce rate in our culture, we have a generation of fathers who grew up without fathers of their own. Men have become fathers without ever having seen how a father acts and what his role entails.

Let me say this: You are the man God chose to be the father of your children! God could have picked anyone on earth for this task, but in His infinite wisdom, He chose you. Even if you don't have confidence in your fathering skills, God says you fit the bill perfectly for His plan for your family. He knows all your strengths and weaknesses, and He determined before time began that you would be the father of your children.

Fatherhood is a privilege given by God, and with that privilege comes the power to impact lives. Exercised responsibly for good can lead to God's blessing on you and your family. Privilege, power, responsibility, sacrifice. They're all part of the same package. They all belong to a father.

'Father Power'

Are fathers really all that important? Dr. James Dobson believes that our very survival as a people will depend on the presence or absence of masculine leadership in millions of homes nationwide.

But being a good father isn't about what kind of parent you are as much as it is about what kind of person you are. What kind of character do you have? How do you approach life and your responsibilities as a father?

Fathers have an innate ability to influence their children and the community around them. I call it "Father Power" in my workshops for men. It's not the physical power of being bigger and stronger than their wives and kids but the generational power with which God has endowed them—the power that allows fathers to affect people's lives positively or negatively, for

good or evil, for hundreds of years. A father will impact people he doesn't even know and will never meet.

For instance, if a man molests or abuses his son or daughter, the abuse will adversely affect that child's whole life. In all likelihood, it will also affect that child's children's lives as he or she exhibits the same abusive behavior. Conversely, men who father intentionally and put their children's needs ahead of their own start a legacy that snowballs with positive ramifications down through the centuries.

Another power that God has endowed us with is the power to create life. No man should plant his seed in a woman, impregnating her, if he is not willing to accept lifelong responsibility for the child he created. With the power to create comes accountability. God holds you responsible and accountable for the welfare of your family. Maturity in a man begins not with age but with the acceptance of that responsibility. As fathers, we have the power to positively impact generations of lives.

Passing On a Spiritual Foundation

Were you blessed to have had a father who prayed faithfully for you when you were growing up? Only a small percentage of men I ask answer yes. How do you think your life might have been different if you had had a father who did that?

Try this experiment: Go into your kids' room at night, kneel down, lay hands on their heads or backs and petition God's blessings upon them. You'll find it a powerful moment. Your kids will stay very still under the blankets because, big or small, they recognize the significance of that act.

A pastor also once told me to pray not only for my own children's purity but for their future spouses' purity as well. And he said to pray for their future spouses' parents, that they would have wisdom to raise their children within

God's laws. I've never forgotten that advice.

When your children know you are praying for them, for their sexual purity and for the purity of their future spouses, this knowledge gives them a guidepost to hang on to. It also provides a form of accountability more powerful than bare parental authority.

The purpose of drawing close to God is not only to discern our destiny but also to lead our family and those closest to us to salvation. Part of our role as leaders of our families is to be spiritual mentors for our wives and children.'

Fathers also play a significant role in passing on a spiritual foundation to their children—especially sons. When only mom takes her sons to church while they're growing up, approximately 15 percent of boys remain churchgoers after they become adults.

However, if dad takes an active role with mom in leading the family to church, the number who continue their spiritual journey increases to somewhere around 75 percent.

Father: A Title God Claimed for Himself

What does God say about fathers? God could have had any role He wanted, but He chose to be our heavenly Father. He could have called Himself any name He wanted. In several passages in the New Testament, Jesus prays to God, calling Him Abba, and urges others to do so as well. Abba, literally translated, means "Daddy"; it was the term of endearment used by a young child. Think of the implications behind that. Quite frankly, it scares me to think that I have been bestowed with a title that God claimed for Himself.

According to my keyword search, the term "father" is used 1,488 times in the NIV Bible. Do you think God was trying to tell us that He considers fathering to be important?

God has granted men power as leaders in the family. But with

that power comes responsibility to influence for blessing our families with unselfish and sacrificial leadership.

I don't think it's a coincidence that the last words God spoke to His people at the end of the Old Testament—His last words for 400 years—were on the importance of fathering: “And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:6, NKJV).

God could have used any sign of societal revival to fulfill that prophecy. He could have said, “when people return to church” or “when there is no more hunger or war.” But He chose to highlight the restoration of fathers to their children in connection with the return of the Lord.

The Hebrew word for curse in this verse is one of the harshest in Scripture, suggesting complete annihilation. That means only when men stop abdicating their God-mandated role as leaders in their families and communities will we be able to survive and thrive as a nation once again and not risk complete annihilation.

Here's the good news, though: God has a plan for you as a father and as a man. God chose you to lead your son, to make him a noble man. He didn't choose you and then leave you on your own to fail. Trust that God will help you if you seek His wisdom and discernment.

This article was adapted from Rick Johnson's book, *Better Dads, Stronger Sons: How Fathers Can Guide Boys to Become Men of Character* (Revell). He is the founder of Better Dads, a fathering skills program designed to equip men to be more engaged in the lives of their children.