

The Fruit of (Good) Fatherhood

Why being a better dad is more important today than ever—and how you can be one

Good fatherhood is a cornerstone of any happy family, and happy families are the cornerstone of our civilization. But fatherhood is under attack. Radicals call it outmoded and unneeded, while countless dads have put fatherhood on autopilot to pursue bigger paychecks and other idols. Yet virtually all research tells us that a good father is vital to the future success of his children. Conversely, fatherhood failure makes children (when grown) much more likely to be convicted of a felony, commit suicide, suffer from severe mental illness, drop out of high school, become a drug addict, etc. In fact, the U.S. government today—at all levels—spends tens of billions of dollars a year treating the symptoms of fatherhood failure. And the problem is getting worse.

Whether you're the president of the United States, the CEO of a Fortune 500 company or the guy picking up the garbage, your job as the father of your children is the most important job you'll ever have. Think about it: Being a dad is the only job that you'll never lose—unless you quit. It's the only job that promises lifelong benefits, as well as eternal blessings. And it's the only job for which you're uniquely qualified. No one else in the world has the emotional, spiritual and physical qualifications you bring to your job as the father of your children. The research is clear: Children whose grandfathers and even great-grandfathers were men of commitment, competence and character (i.e., good fathers) are more likely to succeed.

So dads, how can we become better fathers, better husbands and, yes, better men? It starts by recognizing that fatherhood is a lifetime journey—perhaps the most important journey we'll

ever take. And like any journey, we need to be equipped and prepared to be successful. I believe every dad needs three essentials on this journey:

1) A good map. I call this map a Noble Family Vision. It's a vision of where we want our families to be in 10, 20 and even 30 years—and how we, as the leaders of our families, will help them get there. It's something we need to share with our wives and children, to get their suggestions, input and buy-in. As with all good maps, a good Noble Family Vision is most helpful when written down, especially when you're lost, confused or challenged.

2) Reliable tools. There are 10 tools that good fathers all over the world use, though we each use them differently. I've never met a father who had perfected his use of all 10, so each of us has room for improvement. Here are the first six tools, which spell out "FATHER"—the rest can be found at :

- The F Tool is for "Family First/Family Fun," and it helps us prioritize our family *and* have fun with them (critical assets for every dad).
- The A is for "All-in Marriage," because a strong marriage is the best gift you can give your children.
- The T Tool is for "True Moral Compass," because passing it on is more important than any financial inheritance they may get.
- The H is for "Heaven's Help," because we all need our heavenly Father's help to be the father, the husband and the man we were always meant to be.
- The E tool is for "Empowering Servant Leadership," because you're called to be the servant leader of your family.
- The R tool is for "Relationship Tools That Work," because, let's face it guys, virtually all of us could

improve our relationships with our wife and children.

3) A few good allies. When times get tough, we'll need people to stand by us. Your first and most important ally is the mother of your children. I hope that fine lady is your wife—if so, you have a head start on our fatherhood journey. But you need other allies too—men who can hold you accountable and help you get back up when you stumble (because we all stumble).

Yes, the fatherhood journey is the journey of a lifetime. It's filled with (many) ups and (at least a few) downs. But it's the most important journey any dad can ever take. For on it, we not only grow to be better fathers and better husbands, we grow to be the men God always intended us to be.

***The Honorable Gregory W. Slayton** has been a Silicon Valley venture capitalist, the U.S. Chief of Mission to Bermuda, an Ivy League Professor and a U.S. Fulbright Scholar to Asia. But the role he's learned the most in—and enjoyed the best—is being the husband of his wife, Marina, and father to their four wonderful kids. Slayton's new book, *Be a Better Dad Today (Regal)*, released in May.*