

4 Characteristics of Biblical Fatherhood

Let's take a look at four characteristics of biblical fatherhood:

Best you fear that what's about to follow is an unattainable, self-defeating list of impossible characteristics no human father can possess, let's begin with this statement: **Fathers are imperfect men raising imperfect children in an imperfect world.** All fathers sin, mess up, and serve as poor examples at times. With great self-awareness and careful application of biblical principles, however, fathers *can* protect, provide, correct and guide their children into healthy adulthood.

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A FATHER PROTECTS.

A child should feel protected by his or her father, both in the home and from the forces outside it. A good father, though, is also a man who knows the potential he has to abuse, abandon, neglect and ignore his children because of his own sin nature. A good father is a man of self-awareness who submits to God so he can resist these tendencies in himself and keep his children safe.

An un-protected son will seek to protect himself, either from his father, from outside bullies, or both. He feels alone and afraid and will put up walls and a tough outer shell that can take a lifetime to penetrate. Unprotected children are often the ones who join gangs seeking the protection they didn't receive from their fathers.

A FATHER PROVIDES.

To provide literally means to "see ahead" and thus make arrangements to meet anticipated future needs. Our culture has defined fathers largely as material and financial providers. Provision, however, is much more.

Fathers are to provide emotionally, psychologically, and above all, spiritually for their children, turning their hearts to them (See Mal. 4:4), and tenderly and caring for them. God sets the example with his own son, the nation of Israel, saying, "when Israel was a child, I loved him, . . . taught [him] to walk, taking [him] by [the] arms. . . I drew [him] with gentle cords, with bands of love. . . I stooped and fed [him]" (Hos. 11:3-4).

Stooping down to our children's level to care for and communicate with them provides for their emotional and psychological well-being as it affirms love in a tangible way.

Fathers must also bless their children all their lives. As an adult, Jesus heard his Father say, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased; hear Him" (Mat. 3:17).

We can use his words as an example, because it affirms three vital things that all children need to hear from a father: 1. "I love you," 2. "I am proud of/pleased with you" and 3. "You are gifted and have something important to offer the world."

God says, "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred" (Pro. 15:16-17). It's not wrong to have great wealth, but a man who provides materially for his family must not do so at the expense of the spiritual. Of utmost importance is his family's relationship with the Lord ("the fear of the Lord") and cultivating a loving atmosphere in the home ("where love is").

Ironically, the un-provided-for son may have a roof over his head, food in his belly, and clothes on his back, yet lack what he needs most. Children need emotional, psychological and spiritual provision, without which a father is not anticipating their full future needs.

A FATHER CORRECTS.

While mothers and fathers are to collaborate in their children's discipline, in today's culture, mothers do most of the correcting. The primary responsibility described in Scripture, however, is the opposite of what we normally see. "Fathers, . . . bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

The Lord is the one who disciplines us out of His love, "just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Pro. 3:10-11). Discipline is an act of love and should be loving, not abusive. When the only correction a son receives is angry verbal and/or physical abuse coming from a fed-up father who explodes, this does nothing but drive a son further away from both his father and his Heavenly Father.

In Ephesians 6:4 the word *nurture* indicates the entire process of educating, training, and disciplin-

ing children to give them strong minds and morals. The Greek word for *admonition* means "placing in the mind" or appealing to the child's reason. Not just telling a child, especially an older one, to do it because "I said so," a father seeks to teach his children how to reason by explaining why they should or shouldn't do something.

The uncorrected child tends to become resentful, especially when they find themselves in all kinds of trouble due to their poor choices. Knowing that their fathers did nothing to correct them, they may come to hate their fathers for their passivity, lack of structure, and unwillingness to redirect them. The uncorrected son feels free, but uncared for. Children would rather have limits and boundaries lovingly and consistently communicated and enforced more than an un-involved father who lets them live recklessly.

A FATHER GUIDES.

Most people take "the way he should go" in Proverbs 22:6 as guiding children into God's way. There are plenty of verses that encourage this kind of guidance, but this verse in Proverbs does not. It literally translates as, "Dedicate a young man (a lad, youth) in his way." This is a very insightful principle of parenting. "His way" has to do with the child's individuality and uniqueness.

A good father, to the best of his ability, learns how God has uniquely gifted each of his children and uses this insight to guide them into a future that befits that giftedness. Practically speaking, if his son is more interested in music than athletics, a father encourages his son down the music track. This can be difficult if a man was a star athlete himself and would love for his son to follow in his steps. He may then try to force his son into loving sports,

while the son wants to excel in music, or *vice versa*.

Many fathers make the mistake of trying to force their children into careers (medicine, military, law, etc.) in which they have no interest. This error is usually motivated by the father's wish to fulfill his goals though his children or make his family look good to his peers. Fathers must guard against this temptation.

The unguided child feels misunderstood, unappreciated, frustrated, and forced to be someone he or she is not. Such children may spend their whole life living according to an ideal not their own, but one forced upon them by a father who seems impossible to please.

A Redemptive Narrative

It is difficult to find good examples of fathers in the Bible. More often we see moments of good fathering by men who largely fail to be the godly examples their children need. The truth is, none of us will be perfect fathers, so the biblical narrative is our narrative.

Instead of being discouraged, we can take heart, because despite our own sin and failures, God can use us to bless the world. Let's not use our human frailties as an excuse for sin. When we do this, as we see in the biblical narrative, we bring suffering and loss to our and our families' lives. By heeding these biblical principles for protecting, providing, correcting and guiding, we can improve our likelihood of raising children to be godly, responsible adults. **ROC**



By Will Honeycutt

Will Honeycutt taught Contemporary Issues and Apologetics for 21 years at a Christian university. He is a freelance writer and teaches young adults at his church. He resides in Virginia with his wife of 30 years.