



How to Be a Good Father

“Where did I go wrong?” This question tormented Michael,* from South Africa. As hard as he had tried to be a good father, every time he thought about his wayward 19-year-old son, he wondered if he could have been a better parent.

In contrast, Terry, who lives in Spain, seems to have succeeded as a father. His son, Andrew, says: “Many of my earliest memories of my dad are of him reading to me, playing with me, and taking me on trips where he and I could spend time alone. He made learning fun.”

Admittedly, it is not easy to be a good father. But there are basic principles that can help. Many fathers have found that they and their families benefit when they follow the wisdom found in the Bible. Let us consider some of the Bible’s practical advice that can help fathers.

* Some names in this article have been changed.

1. Make Time for Your Family

As a father, how do you show your children that they are important to you? Surely there are many things you do for your children, including the sacrifices you make to feed them and provide them with an adequate home. You would not do such things if your children were not important to you. Yet, if you do not spend significant amounts of time with your children, they might conclude that you care more for other things, such as your job, your friends, or your hobbies, than you do for them.

When should a father begin to spend time with his children? A mother begins to form a bond with her child while it is still in the womb. Some 16 weeks after conception, an unborn baby might begin to hear. At this stage a father too can start to build his unique relationship with his unborn child. He can listen to the baby's heartbeat, feel it kick, talk to it, and sing to it.

Bible Principle: In Bible times men were personally involved in the education of their children. Fathers were encouraged to spend time with their children on a regular basis, as is made evident by the Bible's words at Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, which say: *"These words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must inculcate them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up."*

2. Good Fathers Are Good Communicators

In order to communicate effectively with your children, you must be a careful listener. You need to cultivate the ability to listen without overreacting.

If your children think that you will lose your temper quickly and be judgmental, they will have little incentive to express their inner feelings to you. But if you listen to them calmly, you will show that you are genuinely interested in them. They will in turn be far more likely to share their precious thoughts and feelings with you.

Bible Principle: The practical wisdom found in the Bible has proved to be beneficial in many aspects of daily life. For instance, the Bible says: *"Every man must be swift about hearing, slow about speaking, slow about wrath."* (James 1:19) Fathers who apply this Bible principle are able to communicate better with their children.

Listen calmly without being judgmental



3. Give Loving Discipline and Commendation

Even when you feel frustrated or angry, the discipline you administer should be an expression of loving concern for the long-term welfare of your child. It includes advice, correction, education, and chastisement when needed.

Furthermore, discipline is much more effective when a father commends his children regularly. An ancient proverb says: “As apples of gold in silver carvings is a word spoken at the right time for it.” (Proverbs 25:11) Commendation enriches a child’s character. Children blossom when they are acknowledged and appreciated. A father who looks for opportunities to give commendation will help to build confidence in his children and motivate them not to give up trying to do what is right.

Bible Principle: “You fathers, do not be exasperating your children, so that they do not become downhearted.” —Colossians 3:21.



4. Love and Respect Your Wife

The way a father exercises his role as a husband is certain to affect children. One group of experts on child development explains: “One of the best things a father can do for his children is to respect their mother. . . . A father and mother who respect each other and let their children know it provide a secure environment for them.”—*The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*.*

Bible Principle: “Husbands, continue loving your wives . . . Let each one of you individually so love his wife as he does himself.”—Ephesians 5:25, 33.

* Even if a father is no longer married to his children’s mother, it is good for his children’s relationship with their mother if he treats her in a respectful and dignified manner.



A Good Father Is Not Too Busy

Sylvan, originally from Barbados, is a New York City bus driver who lives with his wife and three teenage sons. Sylvan has an especially challenging schedule, working from midafternoon until three or four o’clock in the morning. He has Thursday and Friday off, but Saturday and Sunday nights he has to work. Yet, he is not too busy for his children.

“It’s tough, but I try,” explains Sylvan. “Each of my boys needs some one-on-one time with me. Thursday afternoon is set aside for the oldest one when he gets home from school. On Friday, I schedule time for the middle boy. For the youngest one, I reserve Sunday morning.”

5. Apply God's Practical Wisdom

Fathers who have heartfelt love for God can give their children a most precious heritage—an intimate relationship with their heavenly Father.

After decades of hard work raising six children, Antonio, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, received the following note from one of his daughters: "Dear Dad, I just wanted to thank you for raising me to love Jehovah God, my neighbor, and myself—that is, to be a well-rounded individual. You showed me that you love Jehovah and that you care about me personally. Thank you, Dad, for putting Jehovah first in your life and for treating your children as gifts from God!"

Bible Principle: *"You must love Jehovah your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your vital force. And these words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart."*
—Deuteronomy 6:5, 6.



It is obvious that there is more involved in fatherhood than these five points and that, realistically, even when you try your best to be a good father, you are not going to be a perfect one. But to the extent that you apply these principles in a loving and balanced way, you really can be a good father.* ■

* For more guidance on family life, see the book *The Secret of Family Happiness*, accessible at the Web site www.jw.org.

Fathers Who Are Appreciated

"He plays with me and reads to me at night."—Sierra, aged 5.

"We can be having tons of fun playing, and he will say, 'OK, it's time to clean up now.' At other times, after we've been working, he'll stop and say, 'Now it's time to do something fun.'" —Michael, aged 10.

"My father has never allowed his secular work or his hobbies to prevent him from helping Mom at home. Even now, after so many years, he cooks at least as often as Mom does, washes the dishes, helps with cleaning the house, and treats her with love and tenderness."—Andrew, aged 32.

