



Dads' UNI

Understanding, Nurturing, Imparting

BECOMING A GREAT DAD



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GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Great Dads give their children lots of encouragement

Why we give encouragement

Whether we as dads are raising boys or raising girls, we are able to make a positive impact in their young lives by consistently giving them encouragement.

Joshua 1:9 Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

The Definition of “Encouragement”

Encourage:

1. To inspire with hope, courage, or confidence.
2. To give support to
3. To stimulate

‘Encouragement is the act of inspiring, supporting or stimulating others by giving them hope, courage and confidence.’ When we encourage our children, we give them courage for life and play a large part in developing their self-esteem. Self-esteem grows stronger as our children feel loved and accepted and builds within them a strong sense of feeling capable to handle anything in life.

Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

The Definition of “Discouragement”

Discourage:

1. To deprive of confidence, hope, or spirit
2. To dissuade or deter from doing something:
3. To try to prevent by expressing disapproval or raising objections

‘Discouragement is the act of depriving, dissuading or deterring others by taking away their hope, courage or confidence through an expression of disapproval or raised objections’. When we discourage our children, we take courage from them and often damage their self-esteem. Taking from our children their sense of feeling capable in life can have far-reaching detrimental effects upon them.

How we give encouragement

Psalm 45:1 My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

1.Our words as a father are incredibly powerful, they can either build or destroy the inner life of our child. It is vital to realise that as their father we are perhaps their greatest influence in

life. Therefore, we need to speak good things over our children consistently if we want them to grow up as happy, confident and well-adjusted members of society.

Speaking Words: 'You Can Do It Champ!' or 'Just Do Your Best Sweetheart' assists them as they prepare for an upcoming event or challenge in life.

Speaking Words: 'Well Done!', 'Great Job!', 'Congratulations!' will show them they have your approval and acknowledgement after they have succeeded in an area of life.

Speaking Words: 'Never Mind I'm Sure You'll Do Better Next Time', 'Good Try Anyway' or 'Maybe We Can Think Up A Better Way To Do That Together' etc assists them when they may fail in a certain aspect of life or objective and shows them that they still have your support as their father.

2. Our actions as a father such as shaking hands, giving them the thumbs up gesture, patting them on the back or merely placing a gentle hand upon them imparts love and encouragement to a young heart.

3. A smile upon a father's face means much to a child, it says that their actions have made you happy and creates a sense of satisfaction in their heart.

4. Cheering from the sideline as they participate in a game or challenge is a wonderful way to show your support for your child.

5. Boasting a little about your child's achievements within their hearing lets them know how proud you are of them.

When we give encouragement

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:

The timing of giving encouragement to our children is also important if we are to avoid diluting or diminishing its effectiveness to the point where it is no longer believed by our child. "Oh, you always say that Dad!" is a clear sign that we have been a little over zealous with our praise for our child, and in over-doing it may have created an inability within our child to receive praise and encouragement. Remember encouragement must be based in honesty if it is to be accepted. So when should we give them encouragement?

- Good behaviour gives us an excellent opportunity to give encouragement and to reinforce what are the benefits of correct conduct.
- Sporting achievements are often a great time to express words of praise especially if you know that they have trained hard to earn them.
- Academic achievements are very important to celebrate as our interest and encouragement will often inspire your child to continue to apply themselves to furthering their education.
- Personal breakthroughs in a child's life are an occasion to rejoice as a family whether it be a goal reached finally or a bad habit broken a father can show his approval through his joy.

- Milestones like birthdays, graduations and advancements often give us as fathers an opening to honestly speak words of encouragement to our child.

Personally, I believe that even more significant than acquiring the understanding of exactly why, how and when we give encouragement is the importance that as a father that we DO give encouragement. Encouragement flows out of the heart of love we have for our child and our desire to see them get every opportunity in life to be successful. As fathers continue to speak encouraging words and show love through their actions of encouragement their children are strengthened and given the courage they will need to achieve great things.

MEETING CHILDREN AT THEIR LEVEL

Great Dads meet their children at the child's level

It is encouraging to know and understand that even as our children grow a little bigger year after year, even so we as fathers grow in our knowledge and understanding of fatherhood and in wisdom as the time passes. It is also important to understand that as 'the parent' we have to be the instigators of the many procedures that will help to strengthen our long-term relationship with our child. So how do we go about meeting our child at their level?

Playing with them

I have to admit that probably one of the most fun things I enjoyed while raising my children was playing with them. Getting down on the floor and showing my son how cars drive on imaginary roads, making the sounds, changing imaginary gears and beeping imaginary horns was one of the ways that we connected as father and son. With my son it was usually toy cars, knights on horses or the latest Star Wars figurine that kept him entertained, but boys are only restricted by their imagination in how they play.

Playing with my daughter was a little different as expected but still fun, I had to let her lead a lot of the time as I really had no idea how girls play. Many girls seem to focus more on the relational aspects of life at the core of their play, tea parties with imaginary friends, dressing up dolls to go shopping together, doing their hair and nails together with friends etc. Now I know that these examples are clichés, and in truth my own daughter was just as likely to ride into an imaginary battle with a sword drawn as my son. In the end I truly enjoyed playing with her as I learned how she liked to play and joined in with her.

The ways that each child likes to play are different because they are all individuals, and it is important that we as fathers learn what THEY like to do and join in with them.

Reading to them

Probably one of the most beneficial things we can do as a father is to read to our children. Bedtime stories are often a good idea as it can settle a child's mind and prepare them for a peaceful sleep. This can be especially true in situations where your children regularly request a bedtime story. Fathers should not miss this wonderful opportunity to bond with their child over the sharing of stories and adventures that can teach many life lessons.

Sitting in bed with my children surrounding me with a children's story book open was a common occurrence in our home. It's bright pictures and my own pretty awful vocal impersonations of the characters in the book bring back many happy memories to us all. Even now many years later when my children are young adults they still like congregating on 'the big bed' for a chat and a laugh.

Teaching them to use their imagination

One step further than merely reading them stories was actually making up stories for my children. I used to ask them what characters they wanted in the story and then proceed to make up the funniest story I could come up with. Often this involved a hero, a quest of some type, some funny things happening along the way and a successful conclusion with a happy ending.

Eventually we all took turns in making up stories with the characters that the other family members provided. I believe this has been beneficial in my children's mental and emotional development in life as it taught them to think outside of the box. Some of the elements of those stories are still brought up around the dinner table discussions years later.

Talking to them

I often think that some of the more beneficial times I have had with my children are when we have gone on long drives or walks together. I enjoyed telling them about what it was like for me growing up and the things I have seen and done when I travelled as a young man. As we communicate with them we have opportunities to impart knowledge, wisdom and our values to our child.

I began talking to my children while my wife was still pregnant and although they might not have understood what I was saying, yet they certainly came to recognise my voice as I spoke loving and encouraging words to them while they were still in the womb.

Showing them things

It doesn't take much to teach children new things, just head out into the garden or local park and enjoy nature together. Show them how all the leaves of the various trees are shaped differently. Find some insects for them to look at and point out some of the aspects that stand out to you eg. number of legs, wings, antenna's etc. Listen to the sounds of birds and see if you can spot them in a tree together. Look at the different flowers and show them how the colours and shapes differ in each one. Simply sit on a bench and watch the clouds floating across the sky and answer the inevitable questions that arise in young minds.

If you are working on the car or a project in your shed or garage show the children what you are doing and explain to them why you are doing it. Whether it's changing the spark plugs in your car, or building a bookcase to go in their room, invite them to be part of the project and participate in a way that is safe and age appropriate.

In all these areas there is a wonderful opportunity for fathers to connect with their child at the child's level. To meet them where they are and build bridges of love and understanding between you.

COMMITTING YOUR CHILDREN INTO GOD'S CARE

Great Dads commit their children into God's care

The Dad and God

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name...

In all areas of family life men are called to take up the leadership role, and to show by their own life example the way for their children to live. This is a great responsibility for us as men, but thankfully we don't have to carry the weight of this obligation alone. During the process of raising children there are times when many men may feel out of their depth and floundering. It is for this very reason that I have developed a daily relationship with God, our Heavenly Father, so I can ask for and receive His guidance and wisdom for being a dad.

Jesus revealed through what we commonly know as 'The Lord's Prayer' that God is in truth the Father of us all, and cares about every aspect of our lives. It is through the development of a firm abiding trust in God that we are able to access wisdom and knowledge that we can use daily in our role as a father.

It is important to know that God Himself loves our children even more than we do, and His desire is to see their life blessed both now and eternally. With God's help we as fathers do not need to not fall into the trap of fearing the worst in our child's life, but can enjoy the freedom of trusting and hoping for the best.

Baby dedication

Matthew 19:14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

So many children these days are disadvantaged by their parents not allowing or hindering them coming to Jesus for His blessing. A child's precious life is shaped early by the contacts they have or don't have with either good or bad influences. God's great love is available for all and especially for children who are particularly open to His Holy Spirit's guidance and positive influence. When God speaks to a child their whole life can be blessed by His impact upon their heart and life direction, and they can avoid many of the pitfalls that we as men know are out there in the world.

From the moment my children were born and even when they were in the womb, I prayed for God's blessing and protection upon their lives daily. I committed them into His safe-keeping spiritually that they would be spared from the evils of this world and would find an eternal home with Jesus Christ. I dedicated my family and especially my children into God's protection and blessing and enjoy the peace that commitment gives me as a father.

Daily prayer for your child

Numbers 6:22-26 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "The Lord bless you and

keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”

The lives of our children are precious in our sight as fathers, and even more so in the sight of our Loving Heavenly Father. As we stand in our role as their father and pray for them we are building a hedge of protection and God's favour around their young lives. Their innocence and purity must be protected and thankfully we as fathers can go to God daily for His help and wisdom in how to achieve this. Developing a habit of spending time daily thanking God for His blessing and favour upon our children can bring tremendous changes for the better in their future.

Guidance through scriptures

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

A life without faith is a life without hope. Children that are brought up without the comfort and of the scriptures in the Bible are like pieces of driftwood upon the sea of life, they have no choice or ability to change where they are going. The foundations of faith, hope and love that are found in the Bible set up a young life for success, both here on earth and ultimately in eternity. By daily study of the scriptures we as fathers build up a storehouse of wisdom and insight into our role as a parent, and can guide our children in life with confidence.

Releasing the apron strings

As our children continue to grow it is our role as their father to prepare them for life as an adult, and this involves allowing them incrementally more authority in their own life when we believe that they are ready for it. By initially giving them charge over little areas in their life, like choosing what they will wear etc. we are helping them become aware of the benefits and responsibilities of having a free will. When they are adults they will be able to do and say what they choose in life, so now is the time when we have the opportunity to teach them the wisdom that will enable them to make better choices.

'Great Dads' continually entrust their child's life into the hands and protection of the 'Almighty' and let go our own control of their lives one piece at a time. I have never found this easy personally, for as a dad I always want to protect and shelter them from life's storms. But as the wise proverb says "If we give a man a fish we feed him for a day, but if we teach him to fish we will feed him for life". We will not always be there for them, our own lives on this earth will come to an end, and we must ensure that they are ready and trained to continue on when we are gone.

God is better able to protect them than we ever can be, even as a loving dad. By committing our children's lives into His care we are freed from many of the worries and fears that would emotionally restrict us. Our firm abiding trust in God as our Father frees us to be better able to enjoy the experience and honour of being a 'Great Dad'.

BELIEVING IN THE CALLING OF FATHERHOOD

Great Dads believe in the calling of fatherhood

The first time I set eyes on my first-born child I had a personal epiphany, a moment that carried such a depth of clarity and emotion as to be unforgettable. My wife and I were in the delivery room of the Gold Coast Hospital after a long and exhausting labour and then suddenly my son was born. In that moment I went from a young man who had become a husband, to an expectant dad who then became a father. I physically felt my capacity for love grow as my heart swelled with pride at the sound of his first cry.

I know that there are many young fathers who have experienced something similar at the moment of their child's birth, a sense of awe that released a wave of love and pride within their hearts. The power of that moment in our lives as young fathers is important to maintain and to build upon as it is a foundation stone for much of what will follow later.

Non-involved Dads

Now I know that for some men this important life event is merely a blip on the computer monitor of life, and they believe that it is more of a nuisance for them personally rather than a blessing. In many cases these men had no intention of being committed in their relationship with the mother of their child, to them it was just another sexual encounter as they 'sowed their wild oats'. To these men the child that is born is merely a problem and a responsibility that they did not look forward to as a man and now often seek to avoid.

The main obstacle that they face in enjoying the experience of fatherhood is that they have not had that moment of 'connecting' with their child. I personally believe that each man has within him the capacity to 'connect' with their child, but it is an experience that our heart must be open to as men first. This 'connection' can 'potentially' come at any time if we as a man truly desire to be involved in the life of the child we have helped create.

The calling of Fatherhood

Without doubt one of the greatest things that we can ever do upon this earth is to become a father. Ever since Creation men have been experiencing the joy of transforming from being single to becoming a married couple, then transforming from a married couple to a family. This is the pathway through adulthood and maturity that we as men are destined to follow, a road that has been prepared for us by our loving heavenly Father.

There is in a very real sense a 'high calling' to fatherhood that God places upon us as men, it is a timeless vocation to stand in the place of 'leader' and 'protector' of your family. It is important for us as men to understand that as a 'God-given calling' it also comes with an empowerment or ability to perform it. God never asks us to do something without giving us the ability to do what He requires.

The calling into 'fatherhood' is a sign that God trusts you with the most precious items to be found in this world, namely our children. Thankfully God doesn't just leave us to work it all out

ourselves, but has placed His guidance for fathers in His written word 'The Bible'. Many men including myself find daily help and wisdom from God through the lifestyle of being a praying father.

Our heavenly Father knew that each child born would need a protector to watch over them, a carer to love them, a teacher to inform them and a shepherd to guide them in life. These roles have been delegated widely to both parents but are far more effectively accomplished when a father is deeply committed and involved in the life of the child.

'Great Dads' believe in their calling to fatherhood, and because they believe they are also willing to fully invest themselves in the pursuit of becoming the best father they can be. Fatherhood is not merely a responsibility that we have to carry, it is an honourable calling that we have been entrusted with, and it is up to us as fathers to rise to the challenge God has set before us!

HAVING THE RESPECT OF YOUR CHILDREN

Great Dads have the respect of their children

“Respect”

noun

- a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements.

We see from the definition of ‘respect’ that it is a feeling that comes as a result of our actions as a man and father. Respect is built up over a period of time through consistently doing the right things in life, especially in areas that apply to our relationships within the family.

Who is the leader?

Initially it is important to understand what the foundations of family life are. A family unit doesn't just appear magically out of nowhere but is developed through the union/marriage of a man and a woman. Within a marriage there are ‘Roles’ that are clearly defined in scripture, Adam was created first and Eve was given to Adam as a help-mate or partner.

Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

Both Adam and Eve were loved and cherished by God and both have incredible value in the sight of God. Man is not better than woman, or woman better than man, both have equal value within God's sight. Where the difference lies is within the ‘Roles’ that each of them play within the family unit. The Man is called to be the family leader or head and his wife is called to assist him and partner with him in his role.

If a man does not have the respect of his wife it is far more difficult to achieve long-term respect from his children. It is therefore within this relationship with his wife that a man must begin to build the respect required for success. A marriage that is filled with love and mutual respect is a strong foundation for family life and will benefit our children immensely. Alternately, if we lack these elements within our marriage, our family life will suffer and may even struggle to survive as a family unit.

Children need to respect their parents

Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

We see here that one of the ‘Ten Commandments’ that God gave to His people directly identified respecting and honouring parents as a crucial part of family life and a way to maintain the blessing of God over your life. What follows is a short list of areas that influence our ability to achieve and maintain the respect of our family and specifically our children.

How you build respect

Respect is built through shouldering responsibility. As the father and leader of our home we are the primary provider and protector of our family. It therefore falls to us to lead through carrying much of the responsibility for dealing with the difficult issues that sometimes arise in family life. Don't shy away from or attempt to delegate the issues that you alone are able to deal with effectively. Great Dads carry the responsibility of fatherhood.

Respect is built through keeping your word. As a man we need to be known for doing what we say we will do, and as a father this is even more important. It is crucial to think clearly before we make commitments that we may not be able to perform. Don't make promises to your children unless you fully intend to keep them. If for any valid reason you are not able to fulfil your promise apologise and explain to your children the reasons why, but be aware that if you make excuses often your credibility will suffer accordingly. Great Dads are men of their word.

Respect is built by going the extra mile. Don't just do the bare minimum required to lead your family, but always be on the lookout for opportunities to express your love through acts of kindness and generosity. Great Dads do more for their families.

Respect is built by being a kind and supportive leader. As the head of the home we are called to be the shining example of fatherly care and support for our wife and children. If they are struggling with issues in life stand with them and encourage them through it. Great Dads are known for being kind.

Respect is built by listening when your children need to talk. If your children know that they can go to you for advice and guidance without being 'belittled' or 'dismissed as trivial' it will go a long way toward cementing a deep respect within them for you and your role as their father. Great Dads develop the ability to listen.

Respect is built by being humble. If we as the father are not teachable and willing to change when our own faults become apparent, then our children may well struggle to respect us. Our own inadequacies are never more visible than within a family environment, where our conduct is on show 24/7. By admitting your own failures and asking for forgiveness when we need to, a father shows the way for his children to follow. This action of humility helps enable our children to accept and deal with their own shortcomings more easily. Great Dads understand the importance of humility.

Respect is built by giving respect and praise that is due. Respect is a two-way street we must give it to receive it. We must respect our wife as a co-equal within our home and honour her often in front of the children, appreciating her hard work and many personal sacrifices for the family. In the same way we need to understand and respect the fact that our children are unique and important individuals that God has entrusted into our care. As we appreciate them and encourage them in life we make it easy for them to reciprocate by showing us respect as their father. Great Dads show respect to others first.

Respect should be required but cannot be demanded

Because 'respect' is a feeling that comes from the heart it is something that must be real and heart-felt. If respect is to be heart-felt it must come willingly and not merely because it is demanded by an overbearing father.

In the first instance it is a father's responsibility to make sure that their children know that God requires them to respect their parents. Then the challenge we face as fathers is to be the kind of father that is worthy to be respected. The way a man treats his wife and his children will either make it very easy for them to show him respect or very difficult.

'Great Dads' have the respect of their children because they consistently exhibit character traits that are worthy to be admired, they lead the way by their life example and create a path for their children to follow. Good parenting requires us to lay a solid foundation within our family structure, a foundation that is built upon mutual love and respect

MAKING TIME FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Great Dads make time for their children

Some of the best parenting advice for new parents is to realise the difference between “Having Time” and “Making Time”. We all have the same amount of time: twenty-four hours, one thousand four hundred and forty minutes, or eighty-six thousand four hundred seconds each day depending on how you want to look at it. This element of the equation is constant and cannot be changed, but what can be changed is how we allocate the time we have. Once a day is gone it can never be reclaimed, reused or recycled, it is now in our past. In the light of this reality how incredibly important it is to make the most of every day given to us in life.

Most men have very busy lives, it seems that being busy is a standard aspect of life on earth as we rush around doing the things that need to get done. I have rarely met a man who says he has too much free time on his hands and not enough to do, especially those men who have a ‘family’. Whether it is working at our career, spending time with our wife and children, exercising for our health or just socialising with friends, it often seems that each day’s schedule is already full before we even get there!

It is therefore vital as a man that we are pro-active and learn to effectively prioritise our lives. One of the most useful things a man can do is to spend some quality time deciding what is really important to him as an individual, and then establishing clear priorities in his heart and mind. Once these priorities are established he must diligently defend them and not allow the ‘urgent’ aspects of business to overcome the ‘important’ aspects of life.

I would recommend taking time to list every area of your life that takes up your time. It may start with merely a group of words all mixed up like: Work, Wife, Gym, Children, Soccer, Social Life, Parents, House Renovation, Shopping, Holidays, Church Life etc. Then as we progress through our list we begin to decide those areas that mean the most to you in life. By searching our own heart, we begin defining what is most important to us and what is least important, and eventually all those jumbled words will start to become clear in the order of their significance or value to us as an individual.

It may end up looking something like this:

- My relationship with God
- My relationship with my family (Wife and Children)
- My career
- My relationship with my parents/siblings
- My sport/health/gym
- My relationship with my friends
- House Renovations
- Etc, Etc

Only you can decide those things that you want to be your top priorities in life, but one thing I would say is that I have NEVER ministered to a man on his deathbed that wished he'd spent more time at work/making money. Without fail every person I ever ministered to realised that everything besides those you love fades into insignificance at the conclusion of your life. It is my hope that as men and fathers we can grasp this reality at an early age.

Making time for our children

When we go to the effort of spending quality time with our children we are saying to them that they are important to you. It means that at that particular moment they are actually the most important thing in your life. This speaks volumes to young children who are constantly looking for validation and acceptance and goes a long way toward strengthening their self-image.

'Great Dads' purposely position their family relationships within the very highest places of their priority list. When our children are truly our priority we do not allow other seemingly 'urgent' things to take their place in our life, and when other things attempt to intrude upon that relationship we defend against them earnestly. A father who says he wants to spend time with his children but consistently allows the 'urgent' things of life to intrude into that time, may well reach the end of his life alone and abandoned by the children who felt abandoned by him.

If we want to enjoy the benefits of a loving and caring family, we as fathers must invest our time and energy initially so that we can receive those abundant returns later. Being a 'Great Dad' will take a huge level of time and effort from us as fathers, but we will receive back far more than we ever give. It is the heart felt commitment to being a 'Great Dad' that will open up a deep and wonderful relationship with our children that will last a lifetime.

FAIR AND CONSISTENT DISCIPLINE

Great Dads discipline their children fairly and consistently

I think it goes without saying that the area of 'discipline' is probably the most contentious issue of fatherhood and is often confused with being the same as 'child abuse'. It seems that everyone has an opinion on the subject and many roll out their PhD's to justify themselves as 'experts' on the subject and their own particular theory as being correct. In my experience the best way to know if a particular 'theory' actually works or not is to look at the fruit of the teaching in their own children's lives, unfortunately this often does not become apparent for many years.

I however prefer to rely upon the One who created us and His knowledge and wisdom of how we as fathers should go about raising our children. God has raised billions of children over time and knows exactly how we function and react to discipline in life, and He has set the checks and balances for fathers to follow in the application of positive discipline within the home.

Christian parenting requires a form of discipline that is based upon training and equipping our children for a successful life in this world. Here are just a few of the many scriptures relating to the importance of discipline within the home:

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Proverbs 13:24 He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction, for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Proverbs 29:15 The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light, reproofs of instruction are the way of life.

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

How do we go about it?

The short list that follows offers some important insights into how to go about applying Bible based discipline within your home:

The importance of consistency

Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

It is essential that as the 'father' we clearly define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour within the family unit to our children. Once that knowledge has been imparted to our child it is vital that we are consistent in enforcing the rules or boundaries you have chosen to apply in your family. If we discipline wrong actions today and do nothing the next time it sends a message to our child that you are not serious about these rules. Many behaviours will take some time to change in the life of our child and as we show consistency they will understand that they are not able to get away with wrong actions. When punishment seems inevitable for wrong actions then it is much easier for a child to make the right choices in life.

Counting to ten

Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry, and do not sin"

It is also important to know that as a 'father' our own conduct is on show before our children 24/7. Accepting our own weaknesses and failures as men can enable us to treat our children with empathy and understanding when it comes time to discipline them for wrong conduct. Taking the time to ensure that we as the father are not reacting out of anger is paramount if we are to be effective in getting the best result out of training our children up in the way they should go. Sending your child to their bedroom or time out location is a good idea to enable us as men enough time to gain self-control and ensure that we are thinking clearly and not saying or doing something that we may regret later.

Listening to their side of the story

Proverbs 18:13 He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.

I have found that it is vital to give your child an opportunity to tell their side of the story before discipline is applied. Asking them to explain why they did a certain action also gives them an opportunity to retrace their own thought processes and can help bring about the required change in behaviour through self-reflection. Their explanation may result in only a partial requirement or no need for discipline at all if you decide that their actions were justified.

Explaining the reasons for discipline

Matthew 18:15 Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

Positive parenting requires our child to be informed about the reasons that their behaviour was unacceptable, specifically identifying what they did that was wrong! Explaining to your child that you love them and do not want their life to go in a wrong direction is a great way to bring understanding for the need of discipline. It lays a foundation in love and minimises the possibility for your child to be offended by being disciplined.

Disciplining in private

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Needing to be disciplined is difficult enough for a child without the shame of their wrong actions being added to through the humiliation of being rebuked in public view. To save them embarrassment in front of their peers or siblings it is important to apply any discipline required to your child in private. If you are out in public let your child know that they have erred, and they will be disciplined when they get home.

Teaching them to say sorry

James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

A major reason for applying discipline is to ensure that the whole family dynamic is not hindered long-term by the wrong actions of the one. For this reason, it is important as part of the process that you teach your children to apologise for their misdemeanours and especially to other members of the family that may have been affected by them. Saying sorry rebuilds the relational bridges that have been broken down through family conflict.

Hugging afterwards

1 Corinthians 16:14 Let all that you do be done with love.

Disciplining your child can actually be an opportunity for you to connect with them at a deeper and more wonderful level. In light of this it is important to hug and reassure your child after they are disciplined and to verbalise your love and acceptance of them as a valued member of the family.

Discipline that is lovingly applied on a consistent basis trains our child and points them in the right direction for a successful and happy life. In my experience when the correct discipline is applied early in a child's life the need for discipline as they continue to grow is much less, because those lessons have already been learned.

It is encouraging to know that 'Great Dads' are not born that way, but they are just men like us who are transformed by realizing the potential that they have within them, a potential we all share. Being a 'Great Dad' means being respected by your children and this requires both love and discipline.

THE ABILITY TO SAY SORRY

Great Dads are quick to say sorry

It is important to realise that 'fathering' is not an exact science. There are many different parenting styles and no one way is the best. What we need to be looking for as a father is the way that works for you within the family dynamic that you have created. There are however certain 'principles' that must be present if you are to develop and maintain a loving and happy family.

Great Dads protect the family dynamic

"dynamic"

(of a process or system) characterised by constant change, activity, or progress.

Family life does not just stay the same, it is an ever-changing relationship as our children and we as their parents grow and mature. Having said that, there is a relationship dynamic that must be protected if that family is to stay strong and united. Family breakdown is rampant throughout modern society and there are many different reasons for this. However, one of the most common reasons why 'families' breakdown is that the members of that family grow apart through a deterioration of the connections between family members.

The first dynamic that needs to be protected is your relationship with your wife, as the 'parents' everything else flows down from how you treat each other. The following dynamics are how the members of the family treat each other, and it is up to the 'father' to ensure that these relationships stay healthy and loving.

Great Dads are called to lead by example

What we do as fathers will set a standard, a pattern which the whole family will live by. If we are quick to admit our own faults and to ask for forgiveness from other family members when we make errors, then they will find it much easier to do the same. But if we refuse to accept our own failures and limitations then we actually train our family to do the same, and our example will bring calamity rather than peace within the home. A father's life example is perhaps the greatest means available to bring positive change within the family unit.

Even great Dads make mistakes

It is important to realise that all fathers make mistakes, as a father you will probably do things and say things that upon reflection you may well regret. That is because we are all human, not perfect, not infallible but just men, doing the best we can, one day at a time. Understanding our own fallibility is a sign of maturity and not of weakness.

Those who can't admit their failures are destined to repeat them. Great Dads are able to accept their own weaknesses and failures philosophically and move on as they attempt to improve a little each day.

Great Dads have to know what is important

It's not always easy for a man to accept and admit that he was wrong, our human pride wants to make excuses for our every action but that is a pathway that leads to failure. What is more important to you? To seem to be right all the time? Or to have the love and respect of your family?

A respected person in my life once told me that you have to choose your battles wisely within the family environment, and that there are times when it's just 'not that important' for you to be right and to get your own way as the father. Wisdom as a father stems from a heart of service toward our family and understanding what is best for the family is more important than what I want as an individual.

Great Dads are called to bring reconciliation in the family

As the father and leader of our home we are often expected to come up with a positive parenting plan, a pathway for our family to follow. Great fathers help to maintain healthy and happy relationships in the family, whether it is between himself and his wife and children or between the other family members. An understanding of how to bring reconciliation between individual members of the family after arguments is vital as a father.

Reconciliation begins with an understanding that maintaining a loving and healthy family is more important than one family member being right. Requiring family members to say sorry to each other is the first step toward rebuilding the bridges that have been broken down by an argument within the family. It is here that a father's own life example has the greatest impact and influence, as without a lifestyle of forgiveness himself, a father has no credibility to ask family members to say sorry as well.

HAVING FUN WITH YOUR KIDS

Great Dads have lots of fun with their kids

I think it's worth mentioning that we as 'a father' should have an over-all goal pertaining to what we want to achieve as a dad. This should include but not be limited to the type of dad we want to become and most importantly how we want our child's life to eventually turn out. Everything we do as a father should have an over-all motivation of strengthening our relationship with our child and assisting us in raising resilient children. Having fun with our kids regularly is one of the most effective ways to strengthen that bond.

Being known as a fun Dad

If your child could pick just a few words to describe you as a father what would those words be? Some children may say 'my dad is strict', others 'my dad goes to the gym', while still others may say 'my dad travels for work'. None of these areas identified are wrong in themselves and each of them have a place in life, but I put it to you that they should not be the primary way we are identified by our child.

The reason for that is because 'being strict', 'going to the gym' or 'travelling for work' don't actually strengthen your relational bond with your child, as these descriptions can be spoken without a sense of joy and love by your child. These statements can often be perceived as an explanation defining a reason why the relationship between you isn't really very close. These statements are 'impersonal' and there is no emotional attachment that comes with them.

However if your child's response to the question above was 'my dad loves me' or 'my dad reads bedtime stories to me' or 'my dad is lots of fun', then it is easy to understand that these responses describe a relational bond that is strong and growing stronger. 'Great Dads' are known primarily by their children as being fun to be around.

Being spontaneous

In our modern world many men's lives are so structured by work commitments that every aspect of it is written in their diary and every minute accounted for religiously. If this is an accurate description of your life, you should not be surprised if it seems to resemble that of 'a robot' a little more than that of a 'human being' in the eyes of a child. Whatever we as 'the father' choose as being important is being observed by little eyes and registered in little hearts, and they are evaluating where they personally fit into your busy schedule and how important they are to you.

It is for this reason that we must look closely at our own lifestyle choices and be open to make corrections when they are needed. As a father we need to show our children/family that they are our greatest priority in life and not just another scheduled meeting in our diary.

Doing things on the spur of the moment occasionally adds a degree of the unknown and an aspect of adventure to your child's life. Being spontaneous helps avoid

the 'boring' name tag that day-to-day life often wears. Stopping off at a park on the way home, helping someone that you see is in need, dropping into your favourite fast food restaurant occasionally, it all helps keep the enjoyment in family life. 'Great Dads' have an element of unpredictable playfulness in their lives that adds a little excitement into family life.

Sharing your love for life

One of the best things we can do for our child is to impart to them an attitude of loving life, the joy of discovering new things and new places, and enjoying the company of friends and family. Our children follow our lead in many areas of life and when they see you loving life and experiencing joy and happiness it imparts hope into their young hearts that their life will also be filled with joy. But if we are grumpy every day and negative about the challenges we face in life they will often follow our lead in this area and they will have a negative attitude in life as well. 'Great Dads' are mindful that their children develop a love for life.

Going interesting places

I believe it is important to get your children out of the house/apartment regularly to enjoy the many wonderful things that are around us and to experience the beauty of nature. This can be as simple as going to a local beach or dropping into a museum or a music recital, going to a zoo or even going to watch your favourite team play. Taking your children fishing or camping in the woods gives them a wonderful opportunity to experience the wonders of creation first hand, and while you enjoy it together as a family you are strengthening your relational bond. It is important for us as fathers to open up opportunities for our children to experience as many interesting aspects of life as possible so that they have a chance to discover those areas that they themselves are drawn to and will become involved in later in life. 'Great Dads' are constantly thinking up new and interesting places to take their children.

Letting your hair down

I have found personally that by playing with my children often as they were growing I re-awakened my own creativity and love for life. This is just one of the many benefits that you will find through being a fully involved father and parent. I believe that you should let your child see your playful side too as well as your strict side that they might understand that you are fun and approachable and not merely an authoritative parent.

I recently saw a quote that stated "Children go where the fun is, but always return to where the love is", this is an accurate insight into the needs and wishes of a child. However my own take on this quote is that how much better it would be if they found both love and fun within the family environment that you have created as 'the father'. 'Great Dads' are men that have realised the joy and long-term relational benefits of having lots of fun with their children.

BEING INCLUSIVE IN YOUR ROLE

Great Dads are inclusive in their role

The life that we share with 'others' that are not family members is 'an expression of inclusiveness'. When we open up our lives and our homes we are being 'inclusive' and inviting others to share in the 'unique blessing' that our family has to give. 'Exclusive' parenting styles are often based in fear and try to protect themselves by keeping others out, while 'inclusive' parenting styles stem from a confidence in who you are and what you believe as a family, and are open to share their goodness with others. 'Great Dads' have the confidence to be inclusive in their parenting strategy and are willing to share the blessing they have to give with others.

Fathering over the wall

Many children in our modern society are growing up in 'broken' families, with either little or no fatherly contact for the children. There is an overwhelming need for each child born to have the love and guidance of both their mother and father if they are to grow up as strong and productive members of society. Many behavioural issues that arise in children's lives can be traced back to 'family breakdown', and their effects are felt daily in the wider community.

It seems clear that many parents in our generation never received the love and training of a father that they themselves needed, and so lack the skills and parenting methods required to pass on to the next generation. Dysfunctional parents create dysfunctional children, who then become dysfunctional parents, and the process is repeated down throughout the generations.

However if one loving father finds room in his heart to 'encourage' and 'connect' with a young person from one of these dysfunctional families, their whole future can be impacted and changed for the better. A rock dropped into a pool sends ripples out a long way, we as fathers can use the ripple effect to 'father over the wall'. Whether it's being a friend to one of your children's playmates or becoming a coach of a local soccer team, we as fathers have an opportunity to impact not only our own children's lives but those of others in our community. 'Great Dads' are often those who influence their communities positively by 'fathering over the wall'.

Influencing rather than being influenced

In every relationship there is give and take, and that principle remains constant even in a child's friendships. However one person in the relationship is often more dominant or influential than the other and therefore in a position to bring change. As a father we need to ensure that a majority of the influences around our own children are positive and encouraging. In saying that not all of our children may initially be natural leaders or influencers themselves, and may be more susceptible to the influence of others. Some of the influences that come into our child's life may prove to be detrimental in the long-term and it is those relationships that need to be 'identified and removed' as wisely as possible.

Those that stand up for what they believe become the positive 'influencers' in society, while many others simply follow the crowd. We as fathers need to continue to impart wisdom, understanding and acceptance to our own children, giving them the self-

confidence they need to become some of the future leaders within their generation. In every relationship there are those who are being influenced and those who are doing the influencing, and it is important that we position our children as best we can to be a leader within their peer group. 'Great Dads' impart their abilities and strengths to their children so that they too may become a positive 'influence'.

Being proactive and planning

One of the best things a father can do for the future is to create a child/teenager friendly home environment, which is welcoming to those of their age groups. This may include things like pool or ping-pong tables, swimming pools, cubby houses etc. or just a comfortable place where the kids like to 'hang out' together. By providing gaming consoles and large screen TV's we are able to create an environment that is conducive toward making your home the 'hang out' of choice for your own children and their friends.

This often gives us as fathers an opportunity especially in the teenage years to 'screen' our child's friends, and if needed to express any concerns we may have about a particular friendship that may not be in their best interests in the long-term. One of the benefits of having a child-friendly home is that our children remain under our care and watch rather than leaving and going to someone else's place, where we may not be able to influence the environment.

Building a better world

We as one man can't save the whole world, but we can transform the lives of some of those around us by impacting them with love and encouragement. No man is an island and no family is either, we are part of this world whether we like it or not and we all have a part to play in it. Opting out of being part of it is not an option, so we as fathers need to be the best influence in our world that we can be. If we choose to be 'inclusive' in our parenting strategy we can be 'the rock' that sends out ripples in the pool of our local community and touch the lives and futures of many young people. 'Great Dads' become the positive 'influencers' our societies need to build better communities and ultimately a better world.