

A Father's Job Description



If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time. This platitude applies to many areas of human endeavor, but nowhere is its truth more sobering than in the matter of fathering. If we don't know the purpose for which God has given us children, then how can we ever fulfill that purpose? If we don't know the goal of child raising, how can we ever reach that goal? If we don't know our job description as fathers, how can we ever fulfill that crucial role effectively? Yet many fathers today, even among those who are turning their hearts toward their children, have never grasped the full scope of their fatherly calling. Exactly what is it that God calls us to do as we raise our children "in the training and instruction of the Lord"?

I have read that the ancient Hebrew fathers had a simple three point plan for preparing their sons for adulthood. The job description was this: to teach their sons the Law of God, to train them in a trade, and to find them a spouse. If they did each of these things, they had successfully raised their sons.

It's a pretty good outline, and with that plan in mind I want here to suggest a job description for modern fathers. Stated in summary form a father's job is to lead his children to know God and his Word, to train them to exhibit godly character, to equip them for their life work, and to prepare them to take their God ordained place in family, church and civil society.

Job #1: Teach your children to know God and His Word

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn. 17:3). What will it profit our children if they gain the whole world and lose their souls? Surely our first aim as Christian fathers is to lead our children to know the living God through His Son. This will be accomplished through the scriptures which are able to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 3:15); but God also plans for children to "catch" the faith through a close heart-relationship with their parents (Lk. 1:17; 1 Thess. 2:11,12). As to the Scriptures, there are several specific items that belong in the curriculum plan of every father who would, like the Hebrew fathers of old, teach his children the Word of God.

Bible Content.

Every child "graduating" from a Christian home should have a thorough, first-hand knowledge of the contents of the Bible. This is so obvious that it shouldn't even need to be said, yet it is sadly neglected in our day. The Bible reveals God and His plan for the ages, it is the ordinary vehicle by which God brings salvation to sinners, it is our tool to take dominion over the earth under the authority of Christ. In Psalm 78 fathers are commanded to teach their children the word and works of God (vv. 4-7). Teaching Bible content is the

most basic responsibility of fathers toward their children. If nothing else were taught in the home, this should be.

Every father should have a systematic plan for teaching the whole Bible to his family. This involves actually reading all the books and chapters and reviewing the content chronologically. It involves drill and memorization of basic Bible facts such as the books of the Bible, the major divisions (history, prophecy, etc.) the twelve sons of Israel, the ten plagues on the Egyptians, the ten commandments, the twelve disciples, etc. The goal is that each family member will be familiar with an outline of Bible history, the major characters and themes, the general content of the books. (Some excellent tools are available to help the father. One I recommend is the Bible Study Guide for All Ages, by Dr. Donald and Mary Baker, 37 Delsie St., Clarksville, AR 72830.)

Bible Doctrine.

This is related to knowing Bible content. We are speaking here of the need to have a systematic understanding of the major doctrinal themes of Scripture. Paul wrote Timothy about “the pattern of sound teaching” and “the good deposit that was entrusted to you” to guard and pass on to others (2 Tim. 1:13,14; 2:2). Our children should come to know what the Bible teaches about creation, salvation, the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church and its ordinances, the last things, etc. Much of this can be accomplished by discussing the doctrines as we encounter them in our family reading, but it will be helpful to have some systematic aid to teaching as well.

Many over the centuries have found the catechism method of instruction useful here. We, for example, teach our children the Westminster Shorter Catechism, an excellent question and answer summary of Christian doctrine created during the English Reformation in the mid-Seventeenth Century. As we memorize the answers, I also expand on the doctrine being discussed. Some editions of the catechism also have the “Scripture proofs” for expanded study. Other useful tools we have used include Leading Little Ones to God, by Marian Schoolland (Eerdmans Publishing Co.) which is written for young children, and Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, by R. C. Sproul (Tyndale House Publishers) which is written on a high school level (though I use both books with my whole family, age 4 to 18, and adapt as necessary).

Bible Memorization.

God gave us the Bible not just as a source of information but as a tool for godly living. For this reason it is necessary to carry the Word with us. “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds,” God told the Israelites (Deut. 11:18). The Scriptures are an antidote to sin: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). Engrafting the Word of God into our souls through memorization provides us with a constant supply of fuel for meditation (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2).

Fathers should lead their families in memorizing the Scripture; this means

they should set the example by memorizing themselves and not just telling the others to do so. Anyone can memorize; the key is repetition and review, review, review. Our problems here have more to do with motivation and discipline than with ability. There are many good plans for Scripture memory available, but let's not complicate things. One easy plan is to pick a passage and work on it as a family. (I wrote my own plan for my family and church called The Heritage Scripture Memory Plan which allows the whole family to memorize on the same themes, but with options of difficulty. (See the Patriarch Toolbox)

Biblical Worldview.

God has given us his Word not just to lead us to eternal salvation but also to serve as a guide to godly living in every sphere of life. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105). The purpose of a light is to illuminate the path. We ought to train our children not just to know the Bible itself but to use the Bible to give light to the study of every other subject in the curriculum and every other issue in life. Concerning any question or issue we must teach our children to ask, What has God said?

The issue here is whether we teach our children to use the Bible as God intended. Paul wrote that "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Do we believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, that is, that the Bible is our wholly sufficient guide for how to live our lives in a way that pleases God? If we do, we learn to view all of life through the lens of Scripture, including history, literature, art, law, medicine, citizenship, math, science, ethics, etc. (One excellent resource in developing a biblical worldview is Rus Walton's Biblical Solutions to Contemporary Problems published by Christian Liberty Press, 502 W. Euclid Ave., Arlington Heights, IL 60004.)

Job #2: Train your children to have godly character

One of God's chief goals for our children is that they be Christ-like. Salvation is not just about escaping the wrath of God which we deserve due to the guilt of our sin, it is also about being transformed from sinful, selfish creatures to holy, God-honoring people. In bringing up our children in the Lord one of our most important tasks is character training.

Of course, this process begins with ourselves. Our children will never rise above the level of godliness that we ourselves exhibit in our lives. We must *model* before the family what it is we want them to become. Jesus said, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). For better or for worse, our children will be like us. One of the real benefits of homeschooling is that it forces the parents to develop their own character. They need special measures of patience, wisdom,

orderliness, kindness, etc., and they need to work on their own example since they are constantly with their children.

We must also *teach* our children about godly character. They need to have clear in their own minds exactly what are the fruit of the Spirit, the character qualities that He is working to develop in their lives. To teach these things we need to study Scripture, noting the qualities of character that are shaped by keeping God's commandments. We must also note the examples of godliness presented in Jesus and other positive models (Abraham, Noah, David, Stephen, Ruth, Mary, etc.), as well as the negative examples of behavior which show us what to avoid (Lot, Saul, Eli, Ananias and Sapphira, etc.). Further, we should make liberal use of Christian biographies and stories which illuminate character qualities.

Beyond modeling and teaching, we need to *train* our children in godly character. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6). This training involves discipline and punishment. Scripture is clear that the rod of correction is a tool for driving foolishness and sin from the hearts of our little ones, and the neglect of its use will endanger their souls (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13,14). While the rod is used for rebellion, other forms of discipline are appropriate to reinforce positive behaviors and show the dangers of bad behavior.

One trap we must avoid is punishing only for overt acts of disobedience. We must also be careful to discipline for attitude. The child who obeys, but does so with a huge sigh and rolling of the eyes, is not obeying properly—he is displaying continued rebellion in his heart. If we do not discipline for attitude as well as actions, we will teach our children to be Pharisees: proper conduct on the outside, but rebellion against God within.

In all our training we must bathe the process in daily *prayer*. None of our training of the character can produce positive results without the work of God's Spirit in the heart of the child. We train the character of the outer man, but the Spirit must develop the character of the inner man (Gal. 4:19). Our goal is that Christ be formed in the hearts of all our children. We have to obey and do our part in the process, but it is God's work to transform the heart. And so we pray.

Job #3: Equip your children for their life work

The Hebrew father would train his sons in a trade so that they were able to provide for a family and glorify God through work. God made man to work before his fall into sin (Gen. 2:15). Work is not a curse, although it is cursed in a sinful world (3:17-19). Every man has a calling to take dominion over the earth in some form (1:26,28). A large part of a father's responsibility in bringing up a child is to equip him for his life work, that specific occupation by which he will take dominion over the earth and provide for a family.

Our focus under this heading is upon the preparation of sons since they will become the family providers and since our daughters will become the helpers

of other men's sons as they pursue their life work (Gen. 2:18). However, there is considerable overlap in the preparation of sons and daughters since a man and a woman will need to be compatible in education and will both need to be involved in the teaching of their own children in the future.

Fathers must see to the *general education* of their children, that is, the comprehensive curriculum which is necessary to prepare any young person to take his or her place in the world, whatever their specific occupation. Men are in charge of their homeschool and need to direct the overall program of learning. This will include Bible, history, math, science, reading, language and literature, art, music, etc. While his wife will help substantially with the program, and will probably do the bulk of the day to day work, the husband must recognize that he is the one responsible to equip his children so that they can serve the Lord effectively in their future life and work.

Most fathers have no concept of actually preparing their sons for a *trade or profession*, but that is part of a father's job if he is to ready his young man to take his place in God's world. Most men leave this matter up to the son himself as he experiments with occupations or encounters various possibilities in college. We need to actively supervise the preparation of our sons and guide them toward their life work.

Part of the task will be accomplished as we expose our boys to a variety of occupational experiences as they grow up. We should involve our sons with us as we have opportunities to do work in various fields (or get involved with others who do these things): carpentry, electrical, plumbing, drafting, automotive, farming, sales, accounting, legal, medical, architectural, etc. Our boys need to see the diversity of possible ways to serve God through work.

As they grow we will need to be alert to the particular interests our boys express and to any noticeable inclinations and skills. One boy may be a whiz at math, another is very capable with mechanical projects, still another loves to work with animals, and so forth. Although we should be careful not to limit their possibilities by too quickly drawing conclusions, we should pray for wisdom and seek to discern the type of work God seems to be preparing our boys for. We can hardly go wrong if we emphasize a solid basic education for each child, push them toward as high an academic level as they seem capable of achieving in general education, and guide them toward a trade or profession that is in keeping with their gifts. If God redirects them vocationally in the future nothing will have been lost.

Apprenticeship is an age-old option for training young men in both trades and professions. Ideally, the father can pass on his occupation to his son, but where this is not possible or where the son seems prepared for a different calling, the father can utilize another godly man to train his son. Trade schools and colleges may be part of God's plan for equipping a young man, but the father must be sure that his son is prepared to handle the unique challenges these will present: ungodly peers and teachers, false philosophies, and unsupervised lifestyle (if away from home). There are many schools that

offer degrees completely through correspondence; so a father should consider the advantages of continuing home education into the post-high-school years. (see John Thompson's article, "College At Home to the Glory of God").

Whatever the means, it is our job to see that our sons are ready when they leave our home to support a wife and children and to take dominion through an occupation that makes use of their gifts and brings glory to God.

Job #4: Prepare your children to establish a new home

The most important calling any of our children will have in life is to be a godly husband/father or wife/mother. We have not prepared our sons and daughters adequately until we have thoroughly prepared them for the responsibilities which will be theirs in these roles. Too many young people enter marriage today with little notion of what is involved in being a mate and very little idea of how to raise children.

Our children need to be trained for their future *roles* in the home. Our sons need to understand what it means to be a man. We need to teach them all the elements of our own calling, including what it means to be a husband and this five-fold job description for fathers. Again, modeling is most important here, but teaching biblical principles and practical application is also necessary. Young men must be taught what it means to be a spiritual leader, provider, and protector for their families. Before marriage, they should read books on marriage and child raising, but more than that, we should have talked with them for many hours about these things.

Our daughters, likewise, need to learn what it means to be a woman. Our wives will provide the model here, so it is important that we nurture and cherish our wives so that they will be a radiant example to our daughters (Eph. 5:27,29). As with our sons, our daughters must be taught principles and practicalities so that they are ready to assume the role of helper and companion to a man and mother to his children.

Both boys and girls need to learn basic *life-skills* related to management of the home (though with different levels of emphasis): budgeting and careful purchasing; health and hygiene; food production, preservation, and preparation; basic home maintenance (carpentry, electrical, plumbing); teaching; etc. Especially as our children enter the teen years, we should apprentice them in these essential skills of the home.

As with the Hebrew fathers of old, guiding our children to godly *life mates* is one of our primary concerns. The world's method of turning young people loose to "date" is fraught with dangers. It tempts them to emotional and physical entanglements that ought to be reserved to their future spouse alone, and the common experience of a series of "steadies" only prepares the young people for serial marriages through divorce. Instead of dating, godly fathers should return to the biblical method of betrothal or courtship.

The young man or woman should be taught what to desire in a spouse, but why leave them to their own devices to find one? Who knows better than an experienced father what to look for in a mate? A young woman should be taught to look to her father to locate a husband for her, and any approaches to her by suitors should be made through her father/protector. A young man, likewise, should depend upon his father's aid in locating a godly wife, though the young man may take initiative and act on his own as needed (Gen. 24, 28, 29).

One of the most important legacies a father can give his children is a *vision*—a vision to establish a godly family dynasty. We should train our children to plan to marry and have as many children as God is pleased to give them, to homeschool these children (with our assistance), and to raise these children to themselves raise up yet another godly generation to serve the Lord. The most effective way to spread the gospel and kingdom of the Lord Jesus is through the multiplication of many godly descendants.

Job #5: Prepare your children for church ministry and responsible citizenship

One of the dangers of our current rediscovery of the importance of family is that we may let the pendulum swing too far. Family is our most important responsibility, our primary community in this life, but it is not the only community we live in. God has also placed us in the communities of church and civil society, and Christians have duties there, as well. To neglect any God-given responsibility is sin. Many Christians sin by failing to serve God in the context of the local church and in the context of civil government.

The *church* is the believer's extended spiritual family and can no more be neglected with impunity than can our own natural families. Scripture tells us to "be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10) and to "not give up meeting together" (Heb. 10:25). We are each given spiritual gifts which are "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7) and the ministry of each and every Christian is vital to the welfare of the whole body (Eph. 4:16). Every believer, and every Christian family, belongs in vital connection with a local manifestation of the body of Christ, the local church.

Fathers must raise their children to respect this obligation and joyfully serve Christ in the church. Our sons should be taught to aspire to the spiritual maturity required of church elders and to so lead their own families that they may one day lead the church (1 Tim. 3:1ff.). Our daughters should be trained to offer their gifts in the quiet manner appropriate for women and to support their husband's role of more active participation and leadership in the church. Above all, we should teach the importance of submission to spiritual authority as expressed in our church's leaders (Heb. 13:17). Here, again, our modeling is the best teacher.

Scripture is clear about our obligation to be good *citizens*, to submit to civil authorities and to willingly do our part to sustain the governments He has set in place (Rom. 13:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:13-15). Our status as American citizens offers unique opportunities and obligations in this connection. Ours is a constitutional republic founded on biblical understandings of government. We need to relearn, and teach to our children, the principles that underlie our system of government. We need to do our part, and teach our children to do theirs, to move this country in a God-honoring direction. Keeping informed, contacting legislators, working in election campaigns, running for office—these and more are the duties of a free people in a nation founded “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” In this country, the people are responsible before God for the direction of the nation. We must teach our children to be godly citizens.

A father’s job is much bigger than merely putting bread on the table. His job is nothing less than taking the clay of an infant and sculpting it into the majestic form of a mature man or woman, one who knows God and His Word and exhibits Christ-like character, one who is prepared to serve God in his life work and to take his or her place in family, church, and society. A father’s job, in short, is to lay the foundation of many godly generations, to prepare the next generation of world-changers, to begin a godly family dynasty that will be a powerful manifestation of the kingdom of God in this world. There is no higher calling, none more challenging nor more vital. May God grant us the grace to see it through.
