

seeking to transform the attitude that led to the disobedience and defiance.

3. Be Honest and Vulnerable.

Sometimes men want to parent by reputation rather than reality. They don't want their children to think that there are any "chinks in their armor".

But if we want our children to learn to depend on God, we need to be open and honest with our children about our own failures and weaknesses. We need to let them see that we are not self-sufficient, that we can't make it on our own. They need to see us living a life of dependence on God.

When we fail to love our children the way we should, or when we discipline them in an unrighteous way, we need to ask for their forgiveness. If we sin against our wives or others in the presence of our children, we need to let them know that we have asked for forgiveness and restored the relationship. Our kids already realize that we are not perfect, we may as well go ahead and admit it. They need to know that although we will not always meet their needs, God will.

CONCLUSION

When we love our children unconditionally, we teach them that they are valuable and that God has created them to live in a relationship of dependence on Him. When we discipline our children, we help them see the limits of their own "self-righteousness" and their desperate need for the righteousness of Christ. When we are vulnerable with our children, we model for them a life of dependence and faith in God.

As fathers, we cannot afford to be distracted by the multitude of choices and options that confront us each day. We have a limited amount of time to impact our children, and we need to make each day count. Commit today to lift your eyes and focus on the goal that God has for you -- helping your children live a life of obedience and dependence on God.

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The Goal of a Father

David Delk

When I was 8 years old, my father thought that my brothers and I should learn to do some "real work". Since we lived in the suburbs, "real work" meant that we were going to the farm to plant 5000 pine tree seedlings -- by hand, in the dead of winter.

My two brothers and I were each outfitted with a bucket of seedlings and a "dibble" (a metal tool about 3 feet long with a "t-bar" handle and a wedge shaped blade). We were assigned rows in the large open field, and told to take 4 steps between each seedling so they would be adequately spaced. But that still left the problem of veering off to either side.

My dad solved this by erecting two straight poles at the end of each row, one about fifteen feet behind the other. He told us that when we were ready to plant a tree, we should stop and look up toward the end of the row. As long as the two poles lined up one behind the other, then we knew that we were right on track.

As fathers, each day we face a tremendous number of choices about how to invest our time, how to interact with our kids, how to discipline, how to get time alone with our wives, what leisure activities to engage in, and on and on. In the midst of this bewildering array of options, we need something to help us stay on track. Just like when I planted those trees many years ago, we need a goal that we can look toward to be sure that our fathering is not veering off course.

THE GOAL OF A FATHER

There are many different goals that parents have for their children. Some of the goals prevalent in our society are a good education, proper behavior and manners, high self-esteem, social or economic success, and happiness.

While these are good goals, they each fall short of our ultimate purpose as parents, because they miss the heart of the matter our children's relationship with God. ***Our ultimate goal should be God's ultimate goal, to help our children live a life of faith and dependence on Him.***

The primary purpose of parenting is to create an environment that helps our children be transformed into the image of Christ. The Bible shows time and

again how God changes men's and women's hearts so that they can have a renewed relationship with Him. As parents, we cannot change our children's hearts -- only God can do that. But we can be His instruments by helping our children learn that they desperately need to depend on Christ. As the psalmist wrote, "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. 146:5).

Our ultimate goal should be to help our children live a life of faith and dependence on God.

3 KEYS TO REACHING YOUR GOAL

How do we create an environment that helps our children learn to depend on God? We do this by showing unconditional love, administering discipline, and being honest and vulnerable.

1. Show Unconditional Love

By loving our children unconditionally, we model God's love (Psalm 103:13). During the times of stress in our families, when waves of crisis come crashing over the walls, our children should never doubt that we have a deep and abiding love for them. They learn to depend on our love in much the same way we want them to learn to depend on God's love.

Our children have an emotional bank account, just like our spouses. Often, disobedient attitudes and actions come when their bank account is empty. Make daily deposits into the emotional bank accounts of your children by reading stories, playing wrestle, taking a walk, shooting baskets, or catching a movie. Keeping the bank account full lays a solid foundation for a life of dependence on the love of God.

Here are some more ideas for showing unconditional love:

Eyes -- Don't look your children in the eye only when you are angry with them, but communicate "I Love You" with your eyes at times when they have done nothing special to deserve it.

Focused attention -- Concentrated time with your children communicates "you're important" and "I'd rather be with you than do something else." Many of us need to put down the paper, turn off the TV or computer, and focus on our children. If we establish a pattern of really listening to our children about "unimportant" things, they will feel the freedom to approach us with more serious matters.

Look for Open Doors -- Keep an eye out for the times when your children are especially open to expressions of love: 1) When they find something funny; 2) When they have accomplished something; 3) When they are ill and want your love; 4) When they are hurt emotionally; and 5) During times of pleasant experience (camping, athletics, etc.)

2. Administer Discipline

God disciplines us to help us return to a right relationship with Him (Hebrews 12:7-11).

In the same way, when we discipline our children, we help shape their attitude and character. As Christian parents, we cannot be satisfied with children who simply act moral. The heart governs the actions, and God will judge our children's hearts. We don't want them to grow up thinking they can be self-sufficient and righteous in their own strength; rather we want them to realize that only God can change their hearts and give them the righteousness of Christ.

Here are some keys to effective discipline:

• **Remember that your goal is to shape the attitudes of your child's heart.**

Discipline your child's attitude, not just the action. Continue the discipline until your child shows that his/her attitudes have changed. Don't stop short just because he is willing to stop the offending action. Appeal to his conscience so that he will see his sinful heart and know that he needs God. Always affirm your love for your child as you discipline.

Discipline your child's attitude, not just the action.

• **Require "First Time" Obedience.**

At the heart of many disobedient actions is an attitude of defiance. If we do not require obedience the first time we ask, we simply encourage our children to creatively develop this defiant attitude toward us, and, by extension, toward God. Once your children know that you will discipline them the first time, they will obey the first time. This prepares them to live a life of obedience and dependence on God.

• **Praising positive attitudes helps prevent discipline problems.**

When you praise your child, he will gain an appropriate self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Make sure that you praise for attitudes as well as behavior ("Johnny, you had such a kind and helpful spirit when you put those blocks in the basket."). Be sure that your praise includes focused attention, affirmation, physical contact and eye contact. All of these things help to shape your child's heart.

• **Discipline is for the child, not the parent.**

There is a tendency to use discipline as a way for the parent to stop unwanted behaviors and get a few minutes of peace. Then the child returns to normal activity without ever being confronted with his sinful attitudes. But discipline should primarily be focused on helping the child, not the parent. Make sure that you follow-up discipline with an appeal to your child's conscience,