

What Makes a Man a Father?

by Charlene Hoffman, Director of CEFC Parenting Ministries

With Father's Day approaching, it seems a good time to ask, "What really makes a man a father?" The answer may not be as obvious as you initially think. I believe there are three levels to fatherhood: the biological level, the material and sustenance level, and the loyalty level. The third and most important level is probably the most elusive because of the demands of work, culture, finances, education and leisure activities. This level comes out of the relational commitment between a father and child.

In any relationship the need for trust is basic. Ultimately, in a healthy relationship, trust must start and end with God. The father's role is a critical aspect in developing a child's trust in God. He is to rightly reflect the truth of God by developing a relationship with his children based on that truth. Here are some ways you, as a father, can build an effective trust relationship:

- **Cultivate a sense of family identity.** Family identity is the mutual acceptance of who you are as a family. It communicates that each one is accepted and belongs. Take time to verbalize your commitment to your family.
- **Regularly demonstrate love to your wife.** The way your children see you loving and nurturing your wife develops a level of trust in you.
- **Respect your child's private world.** This world is made up of his or her inner-most thoughts. Be aware of the "open window" that occurs when your child invites you in and shares that precious world with you.
- **Give your children the freedom to fail.** Vulnerable moments of learning often accompany times of failure. You need to help them find the secret blessings in their failures. In this way, they realize that failures are a natural part of life and that they can accept themselves and others in spite of them. It's important to note the distinction

that failure which occurs out of sincere effort is acceptable; failure that happens because little or no effort was made is not acceptable.

- **Be the encourager in the family.** Build trust by doing things like writing notes, verbally communicating praise and making phone calls to your children. A little effort goes a long way in the life of your child.
- **Guard your tongue and tone.** Learn to measure your response against the excitement on your children's faces. When they share their joys, be careful to not steal those special moments by failing to rejoice with them.
- **Routinely embrace your children.** Children are never too old to be kissed, hugged or held—never. It meets a special emotional need that helps children understand positive expressions of physical love and keeps them from seeking out unhealthy ones.

Remember, trust must be built on God's Word, not on human wisdom. The preservation of your family starts with understanding God's plan of salvation. From salvation comes sanctification—the divine empowerment to minister to your family and others. Build your house on "the Rock" to ensure that the foundation can withstand the pressures and entanglements of life (Matthew 7:24-27).

Having a relationship of trust with your children requires a long-term process and comes the old fashioned way—by earning it. Pray about your relationship with your wife and children. Ask the Lord about which areas you need to work on. This week start with two or three of the suggestions above and see how your children respond. Remember, the quality and quantity of TRUST your children have in you is the only legitimate benchmark measuring your relationship with them. For more information on the role of godly parents, call CEFC Parenting Ministries at **763-971-5106**.