



By Randy Hain

I have had numerous conversations over the years with other Catholic dads about the challenges of raising kids in today's world.

The discussions usually center on the bad cultural influences affecting our children, our hectic schedules, and our well-intentioned desire to be better fathers.

We mean well, but how do we move from conversation to action? The stakes are high, and this generation of children desperately needs fathers to step up to their responsibilities.

I was blessed to grow up with great parents. We didn't have much, but my parents made sure my sister and I had love, discipline, faith, strong values, and a solid work ethic. My mother played a vital role in our family, as all mothers do, but I find as I grow older that I am most like my father.

I pass on to my own children many of the lessons he taught me, and I still look to him for wisdom and advice.

Look back on your own upbringing. What role did your father play? Were there other role models? Just as many of us live out the lessons we learned in our youth, our children will someday emulate us. They are always watching, and we have to decide if we will be their heroic role models who consistently set the right example or relinquish our fatherly responsibilities to a host of bad societal influences. Which will it be?

After recently reflecting on my conversations with other dads, I made a list of the actions I am working on which I learned from my father and my own experiences as a parent. Just making this list was convicting and challenging for me, as I became acutely aware of where I fall short. Yet developing this list has also inspired me, and I try to reflect on these actions during my prayer time each day.

I have a long way to go, but I believe living up to the expectations below will keep me headed in the right direction:

1. **Surrender.** We have to surrender on an ongoing basis to Christ for his will to be done in our lives. Guys, we are not in charge ... as much as we want to be! St. Ignatius of Loyola once said: "Few souls understand what God would accomplish in them if they were to abandon themselves unreservedly to him and if they were to allow his grace to mold them accordingly."
2. **Be a Man of Prayer.** Our children will be much more likely to pray if we do. Work on developing a daily prayer routine with the goal of at least an hour a day devoted to prayer. Sound difficult? Think about how much TV we watch a day or time spent answering email. Consider how much time we spend in our cars each day and how much time we devote to exercise. We have more than enough time for prayer if we schedule it and integrate it into our day. Also, imagine the powerful influence we

can have on our children if they see us on our knees in prayer each night at family prayer time.

3. **Understand Our True Vocation.** For those of us blessed to be married and have children, we must recognize that helping our families get to heaven and being good husbands and fathers—not our business careers—is our real vocation. Ask yourself: “Is my work serving my family? Or is my family serving my work?”
4. **Invest Time.** Our children need our time. Put down the smartphone; turn off the TV; cancel the golf outing. Let’s spend more time with our kids! In the absence of a father’s time with his family, you can bet there are countless bad influences ready to take his place and guide his children in the wrong direction. I paraphrase author-theologian Scott Hahn, who wrote that in our modern age the father or mother who is willing to walk out of the office after forty hours in order to have more time with his/her family is the real hero.
5. **Be Courageous.** Christians are meant to stand out, not blend in. Blending in speaks to conforming so that our faith becomes part of the mainstream ... and we need to fight the culture. These are difficult times, and we have a responsibility to love and defend Christ, be great role models for our families and stand up for our faith.
6. **Practice Detachment.** Are we too focused on acquiring toys, bigger houses, nicer cars, or the next promotion? We need to let go of the things that are in the way of our prayer lives, Mass attendance, charitable giving, volunteering, time with our families, and certainly our relationship with Christ.
7. **Love Our Wives.** Husbands, we must love and cherish our wives, plain and simple. Our children will learn to love others by how they see Mom and Dad love each other. We need to say, “I love you” to our wives and our children as often as possible. Let’s show our wives respect and cherish the critical role they play in our families. “The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.” So said Theodore Hesburgh.

Today's kids face significant challenges and strong fathers, without a doubt, are part of the solution.

Let's take a few minutes to reflect on how we are doing as fathers and a husbands. Take the results of this reflection to prayer and reconciliation. Most importantly, commit to make the necessary changes.

As Catholic men, we have a responsibility to be strong fathers and husbands, leaders in our parishes, good stewards in our communities and humble followers of Christ. Let's look to the inspiring example of St. Joseph, patron saint of fathers, workers and the universal Church, for his obedience, humility, selflessness, courage, and the love he showed to Mary and Jesus.

If we can emulate St. Joseph even a little each day, we will be that much closer to becoming the men and fathers we are called to be.

Editor's Note: This post is adapted from Randy Hain's fifth book, Journey to Heaven: A Road Map for Catholic Men (Emmaus Road Publishing), with permission of the author and Emmaus Road Publishing. The book is available through [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [EmmausRoad.org](https://www.EmmausRoad.org) or found in your local Catholic bookstore. Would you like to learn more about Randy Hain's newest book? His seventh book, Special Children, Blessed Fathers: Encouragement for Fathers of Children with Special Needs (Foreword by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput), is available in both hardcover and paperback.