

## Training Young Disciples

Ephesians 6:1-4

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April 20-21, 2024

I came across some letters children wrote to their pastor.

- *I know God loves everybody, but He never met my sister. Yours Sincerely, Arnold.*
- *“Are there any devils on earth? I think there may be one in my class. Thanks, Carla.”*
- *“I’m sorry I can’t leave more money in the plate, but my father didn’t give me a raise in my allowance. Could you have a sermon about a raise in my allowance? Love, Patty.”*
- *“Please say a prayer for our Little League team. We need God’s help, or a new pitcher. Thank you, Alexander.”*
- *“Please say in your sermon Peter Peterson has been a good boy all week. I am Peter Peterson. Sincerely, Pete.”*

Last weekend our topic was “Marriage Matters.” *If you want your marriage to matter, live out your role and responsibilities.* We concluded with this concise summary from Ephesians 5:33: If you’re a husband, you *must* love your wife. If you’re a wife, you *must* respect your husband.

Today, we move from a manual on marriage to a parenting primer in Ephesians 6:1-4: ***“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”***

If you have children, or grandchildren, what is that you want for them? How you answer that question will influence how you parent them. Here are some common responses.

- *I want my kids to be good.*
- *I want my children to be happy and healthy.*
- *I want my children to have the stuff I didn’t have.*
- *I want my children to be good athletes.*

- *I want my children to have the opportunities I didn't have.*
- *I want my children to get good grades, be financially stable, and successful.*

What if asking the question, “*What do I want for my children?*” is the wrong question to ask? The better question is this, “*How does God want to use me as a parent or grandparent in the life of my child or grandchild?*”

Here's our main idea: *The task of parenting is to train young disciples.*

This passage is made up of two parts – a child's responsibility and a parent's responsibility. First, let's look at what a child is called to do.

### **A Child's Responsibility**

**1. Heed with their actions.** We see this in verse 1: “***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.***” Parents, simply put, our job is to teach our children how to obey. This is not always easy, is it? It's like the little boy who was overheard praying, “*Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am.*” While our children may think they're having a good time disobeying, the fact of the matter is that they will be much happier and more joyful if they can learn the biblical discipline of obedience.

The term “***obey***” comes from two words, “*under*” and “*listen*,” which carries the idea of “*listening under by submitting.*” We're to hear and heed. To obey means to line up under your parent's authority by keeping their rules, by listening carefully to what they have to say, and then doing what they tell you to do.

It's important to point out that according to Romans 1:29-31, disobedience to parents is a sign of depravity: “***They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.***” 2 Timothy 3:2 says not obeying parents is a mark of evil in the last days: “***For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.***”

Children are to obey their parents “***in the Lord.***” They are to obey for the Lord's sake. This doesn't mean they only have to obey Christian parents. Rather, it means children are to obey their parents “because of the Lord,” as if they were obeying the Lord directly.

In a parallel passage, Colossians 3:20 says, “**Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.**” Kids are to obey, not because they like to, or because it’s what their parents want, but because it’s what the Lord wants. It’s part of their responsibility to Christ.

The last phrase in verse 1 answers the question, “*Why?*” Why must I obey my parents? “**For this is right.**” This means it’s “*the correct and proper course.*” It’s a self-evident truth. Since the parents brought the child into the world, and since they have more knowledge and wisdom than the child, it is right that the child should obey his parents.

Beth and I employed a parenting concept called “first-time” obedience by insisting our daughters obeyed right away. Instead of counting to three or using bribes, we expected them to obey instantly, not later on. This helped teach them the importance of obedience. If one was a bit reticent, we would often have them repeat this phrase out loud, “*Yes, daddy, I will obey.*”

**2. Honor with their attitudes.** Children are not only to heed with their actions, but they’re also to honor parents with their attitudes according to verses 2-3: “**Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’**”

The emphasis here is on the attitude, not merely the act, of obedience. A five-year-old girl was having one of those trouble-filled days with her mother as she argued with her mom about everything. The mom told the daughter to sit down on a chair until she could cool down. Jenny finally relented and sat down. In a few minutes she called back, “*Mom, I am sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside!*”

This quotation from the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment describes a heart disposition. Proverbs 20:20 says, “**If one curses his father or mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.**”

The word “**honor**” means, “*to value heavily, prize, and esteem.*” It literally means a “heavy weight” and implies we assign the greatest possible weight to a person in terms of respect by holding them in “high regard.” To honor someone is to measure his or her value on a scale and concluding that it is “heavy.” On the other hand, to “*dishonor*” means to treat someone as if they were “light or insignificant” like a cotton ball.

In general, things go better for those who heed and honor according to verse 3: ***“That it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”*** There are blessings and benefits when we obey.

- Quality of Life: ***“That it may go well with you.”***
- Quantity of Life: ***“And that you may live long in the land.”***

I’m reminded of Deuteronomy 4:40: ***“Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”***

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### **A Parent’s Responsibility**

As we come to verse 4, we see what parents are called to do. Specifically, Paul singles out fathers, though in context, this applies to both parents: ***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”***

Before we unpack this verse, it’s helpful to know the cultural setting in which this Scripture was written. Rome had a law called *patria potestas*, which meant “the father’s power.” Men who were Roman citizens were given absolute authority over their families. By law, his children and wife were regarded as the patriarch’s personal property, and he could do with them what he wished. A displeased dad could disown his kids, sell them into slavery, or even kill them if he wished.

When a child was born, the newborn was placed between the father’s feet. If the father picked up the baby, the child stayed in the home. If he turned and walked away, the child was either left to die or sold at auction.

Things are not much better today, are they? Are you aware that more than 65 million children have been aborted since 1973? Children have become a disposable commodity in our society, just as they were in ancient Rome.

Roland Warren, the CEO of Care Net, which is a network of over 1,100 pregnancy resource centers, was the keynote speaker at the Pregnancy Resource Center banquet last month. He asserted that the person with the greatest power to prevent an abortion is the father of the child. If dad steps up, mom will choose life more

often than not. Roland shared a lot about the collapse of Fatherhood and the impact this has had upon our society: *“As pro-abundant life people, we will celebrate and encourage father involvement during pregnancy decisions and throughout the lives of the children who need them.”* BTW, there’s a Dad’s Workshop coming up at Pregnancy Resources.

The Bible calls Christian fathers to a different standard. Just as it was revolutionary for dads to lovingly lead their kids in the first century, we are in desperate need of faithful fathers who will love and lead well today. Our kids are not property to own but image bearers of God who need to be managed and trained. Dads, we are called to provide a proper nurturing environment where our kids can grow up to love and serve Christ.

In essence, Paul is challenging us to see the word *“fathers”* as a verb, not just a noun. It’s biologically easy to become a father, but biblically challenging to actually *“father”* our children.

**1. Avoid exasperating.** The first duty of a dad is stated negatively: *“Do not provoke your children to anger.”* The Holman Christian Standard Bible puts it this way: *“Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children...”* Another version says, *“Do not exasperate your children.”* Dads, we’re not to stir up anger in our kids either deliberately or through careless provocations. I think Paul started with a negative command because he knows that fathers, who are fallen creatures, are prone to abuse their authority in the home.

The Greek word translated *“provoke”* means *“to rouse to anger, to enrage, irritate or embitter.”* The present tense of the verb indicates we are to stop doing something that is common and continuous. The word *“anger”* refers to *“wrath and resentment.”*

This warning is calling us dads to avoid anything that will eventually break the spirit of our children. Colossians 3:21 expands this caution: *“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”* When we exasperate our kids, they can become bitter and bummed out.

While there are times when kids become sinfully angry due to their own selfishness or immaturity, there are other times when dads are guilty of aggravating their kids. We can provoke them by deliberately goading them, by callously neglecting them, or by any number of other intentional or careless acts or attitudes which exasperate them.

I think of how David pampered his son Absalom, leading to tragic results. Eli failed to discipline his sons and they brought disgrace to his name and defeat to the nation of Israel. Isaac favored Esau and his wife showed favoritism to Jacob, leading to a divided home.

Here are some common ways that fathers can exasperate their children:

- Overprotection.
- Overindulgence.
- Favoritism.
- Unrealistic expectations.
- Fault-finding.
- Discouragement.
- Neglect.
- Inconsistent discipline.
- Excessive discipline.
- Constant nagging.
- Hypocrisy.
- Anger.
- Emotional or physical abuse.

Remember, our children are commanded by God to honor us. When we provoke them to wrath, we are causing them to break the Fifth Commandment. In such cases we are guilty before God for disobeying Ephesians 6:4 *and* also doubly guilty for causing our children to stumble.

I remember hearing about a father in Georgia who jumped on a moving SUV to save his son during a carjacking. I found myself riveted to the story because it showed a dad engaged for action on behalf of his son. I love what the boy said afterword about his dad, *“I would say it’s cool and brave for my dad to jump on a car and get his arm broken for me.”* This dad understood how important it is not to be passive in his parenting: *“I was beating on the window...just holding on. The thought never crossed my mind to just let him go.”*

The word **“but”** shows a contrast between what we should not do and what we are to do: ***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”***

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**2. Cherish your children.** The phrase, “**bring them up**” means to “*nourish or feed*” and is used in Ephesians 5:29 referring to the husband’s role of “**cherishing**” his wife. It’s the idea of “*kindly cherishing.*” We are to tend to our kids like we would a fragile plant. Kent Hughes writes: “*Men are never more true men than when they are tender with their children.*”

Notice also we are to “bring them **up.**” We are to bring our children up because they will not get there by themselves. Dads, we are to take an active role in shaping the character and conduct of our children. One pastor puts it this way: “*What ruins most children is not what their parents **do to them**, but what they **do not do for them.***”

According to a 50-year study of Christian and non-Christian families, most young adults who follow Christ either come from non-Christian homes or from homes where they grew up in love with Jesus because mom and dad were in love with Jesus. Their parent’s passion for Christ permeated their lives and passed through their pores to their kids. Sadly, very few believers came from homes where the parents were indifferent and apathetic toward Christ. This study suggests the chances are better for a child growing up in a non-Christian home to become a sold-out believer than for a child growing up in a spiritually lukewarm environment.

Dads, how are you doing on this one? Are you modeling authentic faith? Are you providing a nurturing atmosphere in your home in which your children can grow up to love and serve Christ? As someone has said, “*One way to correct your children is to correct the example you’re setting for them.*” If you need help in this regard, I recommend our new Better Man session which will begin this Thursday night.

**3. Discipline and direct.** Notice the next phrase, “**in the discipline...**” This word is translated “**admonition**” in some of your Bibles and carries with it the idea of a rebuke or a warning.

Unfortunately, many parents today are practicing laissez-faire parenting, which refers to letting things take their course without any intervention. This approach can be traced to best-selling author Benjamin Spock, who later admitted he was wrong to tell parents not to discipline their children. Listen to what he said, “*We have reared a generation of brats. Parents aren’t firm enough with their children*

*for fear of losing their love or incurring their resentment. This is a cruel deprivation that we professionals have imposed on mothers and fathers.”*

This is not new as we see in Proverbs 29:15: **“Rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”** I came across this quote: *“Kids who never have accountability for their actions will continue through life thinking nothing is their fault and everything is owed to them.”*

The New Living Translation of Proverbs 13:24 is helpful: **“If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves you don’t love them; if you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them.”** You may hesitate to discipline because you think you’re being unkind to your kids. Actually, when you *don’t* discipline, you’re being more than unkind – you’re not loving them. If we love our kids, then we will admonish, rebuke, and discipline them as Hebrews 12:6 says, **“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”**

Hebrews 12:11 speaks of God’s loving discipline in our lives by showing how beneficial it really is: **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”**

The main reason we’re called to discipline our children is because of depravity, or the sinfulness of sin. And the main goal is to help our children see that the gospel is the solution to selfish sinfulness so that they become lifelong disciples.

Proverbs 19:18 says, **“Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.”** Proverbs 29:17 adds, **“Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.”**

It’s important to understand the difference between discipline and punishment. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty and focuses on the past. The purpose of discipline is to promote growth by looking to the future. Dads, our kids are looking for us to train them and love them by disciplining them because Proverbs 22:15 is true: **“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”** At the core of discipleship is discipline.

This week, I read sections of a very helpful book called, *“For the Love of Discipline”* by Sara Wallace. The subtitle is very creative: *“When the Gospel Meets Tantrums and Time-Outs.”* We posted a link on Sermon Extras if you’d like to order a copy. Here are some excerpts.

*“Discipline prompts them to do what’s right and prevents them from doing what’s wrong...discipline is not something we do to our kids, but something we do for them...the first step in disciplining our kids is disciplining ourselves...instead of saying, ‘I’m going to punish you,’ we can say, ‘Your sin has consequences.’ Consequences show our kids that sin goes against God’s plan. When we choose our own way instead of God’s way, bad things happen...requiring our kids to obey starts with requiring ourselves to do something about their disobedience.”*

About 10 years ago, I read an article called, “Require Obedience of Your Children.” Here are five observations made by John Piper.

- Requiring obedience of children is implicit in the biblical requirement that children obey their parents.
- Requiring obedience should be practiced at home on inconsequential things so that it is possible in public on consequential things.
- It takes effort to require obedience, and it’s worth it.
- Children whose parents require obedience are happier.
- Requiring obedience is not the same as requiring perfection.

We’re to avoid exasperating our children as we cherish and discipline them. Next, we must make sure we’re instructing them.

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**4. Intentionally instruct.** We see this in the next phrase of verse 4: “...**and instruction.**” Parents are entrusted with the instruction of their children. We’re to discipline and disciple. This literally means, “*to place before the mind.*”

Let’s review what we learned last fall from Deuteronomy 6:7.

- **Teach truth intentionally.** We see this in the first part of verse 7: “**You shall teach them diligently to your children.**” The phrase “**teach diligently**” means “*to sharpen*” or to “*teach incisively.*” It’s the idea of going over and over until the knife is razor sharp. It also means to use gentle pressure so as to leave a mark in the mind or memory. We are to teach truth

so intentionally that we look for ways to precisely pass along what we are learning, how we are living, and who we are loving.

Would you notice whose responsibility this is? Look at this clause again: ***“teach them diligently to your children.”*** This task is not for the church to fulfill but for the parent to faithfully do. The church is meant to supplement what is done in the home. BTW, one way we assist parents in the discipleship process is through our Awana ministry. Our Awana Awards night is this Wednesday. It would be great if you could come and celebrate what God is doing in the lives of our youngest disciples.

- **Talk truth relationally.** Look at the last part of verse 7: ***“...and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”*** Notice this is more than just getting your kids up for church once a week, but it certainly includes that. We are to make an impression upon our children by talking about God when we’re sitting at home, when we’re out and about, at bedtime and at breakfast. What was instinctive in Hebrew homes must become intentional in families today. We are to show our kids who God is, not just in formal spiritual settings, but also in the casual classroom of everyday life.

**5. Evangelize and disciple.** Everything we do in parenting should be to move young sinners to trust the gospel. Let’s put the last three words of verse 4 in our minds: ***“...in the Lord.”*** This phrase is a bookend to verse 1: ***“in the Lord.”*** Children are called to obey in the Lord and to be instructed in the Lord. The goal of parenting is for our kids to embrace the grace of the gospel and to follow Christ for the rest of their lives.

**“Lord”** is an extremely exalted title as Paul uses it in the New Testament. To say that Jesus is Lord means He is the rightful king of the universe, He is ruler over the entire world, He is commander of all the armies of Heaven, He is triumphant over sin, death, pain, the devil, and our own depravity, and He will one day establish His kingdom in righteousness.

Martin Lloyd-Jones said it like this, *“The goal is to make Christianity so attractive that children will desire it.”* Our homes must be saturated with the Scriptures if we hope to see our children saved as we see in 2 Timothy 3:15: ***“And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”***

We're to bring up our children to hope in the triumph of God. Here are some ways we can do this:

- Bring them up to know the gospel of grace and do whatever you can to help them embrace it.
- Bring them up to find their place in the triumphant cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Bring them up to see everything in relation to the victory of God. Do whatever it takes to live God-saturated lives for your kids.
- Bring them up to know that the path of sin is a dead-end street because righteousness will prevail in the end.

Dad, you are the point man in your home. You are the coach of your team. You are the captain, and your barracks is a boot camp for training young soldiers for the greatest combat in the world. Your residence is a launching pad for missiles of missionary zeal aimed at the unreached peoples of the world.

Speaking of unreached people groups and missionary zeal, Edgewood members Aaron and Amanda Langworthy and their family are preparing to serve as missionaries in Uganda and are hosting a dinner next Sunday night at 6:30 p.m. Aaron recently returned from a ministry trip to Uganda and will be sharing what he learned. To register, send an email to [amanda.langworthy@abwe.cc](mailto:amanda.langworthy@abwe.cc).

The goal of parenting is not merely to get our kids to outwardly conform to a list of rules. Our mandate is to develop children who seek to glorify God with their lives. It is not enough to teach them to do good things; our job is to teach our children how to develop a godly lifestyle of gathering, growing, giving, and going with the gospel. Dads, you're the leader. Lead on! Your kids are waiting for you to step up to the plate!

You don't have to make all these changes on your own. In the very last verse of the Old Testament, in [Malachi 4:6](#), the prophet looks ahead to the ministry of John the Baptist and writes this: ***“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”***

Dad, if your heart is not really into parenting, and you sense that your kids don't have much to do with you, then make this verse your personal prayer. Ask God to turn your heart to your children and ask Him to turn their hearts to you. He will be glad to answer a prayer like this.

Let's summarize what we've learned.

A child's responsibility is to...

1. Heed with their actions.
2. Honor with their attitudes.

A parent's responsibility is to...

1. Avoid exasperating your children.
2. Cherish your children.
3. Discipline and direct them.
4. Intentionally instruct them.
5. Evangelize and disciple them.

Parents, what you want for your children must move to what God wants for your parenting. *The task of parenting is to train young disciples.*

- You have limited time. How will you use it?
- You have tremendous influence. How will you steward it?
- You have a huge God-given responsibility. Don't waste it.

I close with one more letter written by a child to a pastor: *"I liked your sermon on Sunday. Especially when it was finished. My name is Ralph."*

Actually, the sermon isn't finished until we live it out. Let's pray to that end now.