## Raising Children in Loving Instruction and Discipline

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Bible Text: Ephesians 6:4

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Faith Church

Website: http://www.faithlafayette.org/church

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\*transition from *He Is Worthy*…

Recalling our 60th anniversary as a church family, we’re continuing to **Building on Our Heritage**

Not only is it an appropriate theme for us as a church family, it’s also fitting for the Book we’re studying

There are a number of “building” illustrations seen throughout the Book of Ephesians

In chapter 1, we see God building His family, by adopting sons and daughters into the Kingdom through the blood of His Son

Chapter 2 ended by showing us that the church is a structure, “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” – Eph 2:22

Similarly, chapter 3 closes with an encouragement that God is building up those who are His, “…being rooted and grounded in love, [they] may have strength to comprehend with all the Saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God…” – Eph 3:17b-19

Chapter 4 describes the leaders placed over the body of Christ, calling them “to equip the Saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...” -Eph 4:12-13

We recently came out of chapter 5, where we’re given the foundation upon which we are to build our (1) Christian fellowship and (2) marriages

If you recall last week, the beginning of the passage asserted that parents are not to provoke their children to anger – another way of saying that would be “don’t tear them down…”

The passage we’re gonna to be focusing on today gives us the positive side of the equation: **Raising Children in Loving Instruction and Discipline**

Which is to say, this morning we’re going to be talking about how to build them up

Please turn with me once more to Eph 6 (\*1173)

The name “Wesley” might not mean too much to most people, but it means a whole lot to our family

For most Americans in my generation, it probably brings to mind *The Princess Bride*, where our hero named “Wesley” fights villains, danger, and death itself in order to win back Princess Buttercup—his true love

But to the fans of church history, you likely know that the name “Wesley” traces back to two brothers: John and Charles Wesley

John is best known for his dynamic itinerate preaching and theological prowess, making him the foremost leader in the Methodist movement in the mid-1700’s

This sparked a variety of whole denominations that are around today, including Methodists, Nazarenes, Episcopalians, Wesleyans, and more

John’s younger brother, Charles, is often forgotten in the mix of things

Along with his own pastoral abilities and evangelistic zeal, Charles was a very accomplished songwriter

I’m sure you’d recognize several of his hymns: And Can It Be That I Should Gain? | Christ the Lord Is Risen Today | Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus | Hark! The Herald Angels Sing | Jesus, Lover of My Soul | O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing | Soldiers of Christ, Arise…

Growing up in the Lutheran church, we sang a great deal of his creations

So, what made for such a powerful duo in John and Charles Wesley?

Biographies of both men point to one source: their mother, Susanna Wesley

Susanna was an impactful influence in the lives of each of her surviving children—though only about two-thirds would make it to adulthood

Our own family is thankful for the survival of most of these children, because my wife, Alexandra, is a direct descendant of Susanna Wesley, prompting us to name our daughter after her great (X’s 10) grandmother

Our nickname for our daughter even comes from Susanna Wesley, because she was known to most often respond to the name “Sookie”

So, what drove Susanna to be such a force in the lives of her children?

John MacArthur points this out in his commentary over the very passage we’re discussing today:

**Susannah Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, raised seventeen children and had these words to say about raising children: “The parent who studies to subdue [self-will] in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil’s work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body forever” – MacArthur, *MNTC: Ephesians*, 320.**

…to say Susanna Wesley believed in “bringing up her children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” would be a vast understatement…

So let’s read the text that’s believed to have inspired such a high level of conviction…

Text

*Ephesians 6:1-4 – Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.****2****Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),****3****so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.* ***4****Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Again, last week, we focused on the first half of verse 4 and its prohibition

Today, we’re taking a closer look at the second half of the verse where we’ll take away **Three commands for parents raising children in the Lord**

The first two commands are quite obvious from the text, but the third is more implicit

First, parents need to…

## I. Instruct Your Child in the Lord

The first half of the verse was a warning to us as parents, and the second half gives us a twofold charge

(1) To *instruct* implies that we’re called to show our child, “*this* is the way to go…”

(2) To *discipline* implies that we’re called to show our child, “*this* is the way you *ought not* go…”

Looking at the first portion, we see that God’s Word calls us to…

**Ephesians 6:4b – …bring [your children] up in the… instruction of the Lord.**

Before we get practical, we need to get a little bit technical

You’ll notice that our text ends with the phrase “of the Lord”

The question stands: What does that imply?

Is that clause (of the Lord) modifying how we are to *discipline* our children, *instruct* our children, or *BOTH*?

And what does discipline and instruction *of the Lord* mean?

The genitive case of the clause (κυρίου) would indicate that it ought to modify both preceding nouns—discipline (παιδείᾳ) and instruction (νουθεσίᾳ)

So it looks as though *both* are in mind—we are to raise them in the discipline of the Lord, and instruction of the Lord

But to help us better understand the meaning of this phrase, commentator Peter O’Brien highlights two possibilities: this phrase could be a (1) *subjective genitive* or a *genitive of quality*

If “of the Lord” is a *subjective genitive*, then…

**“…behind those who teach and discipline their children stands the Lord himself. Ultimately, the concern of parents is not simply that their sons and daughters will be obedient to their authority, but that through this godly training and admonition their children will come to know and obey the Lord himself.” – O’Brien, *PNTC: Ephesians*, 447.**

However, if “of the Lord” is a *genitive of quality*, then…

**“… the training and instruction is in the sphere of the Lord or has him as its reference point. In other words, it is truly Christian instruction. This interpretation fits with the earlier mention of learning Christ and being taught in him (4:20–21). Accordingly, learning Christ and being instructed in the truth that is in Jesus occur not only within the Christian community as a whole, but also and particularly within the family, coming from fathers whose lives are being shaped by this Christ-centred apostolic tradition.” – O’Brien, *PNTC: Ephesians*, 447.**

For our purposes this morning, will be presuming that either could be the case, because there are vast implications for both understandings

First, that the family is the initial and most fundamental training ground for obedience to Christ

Second, that parents who are *themselves* seeking to live a life pleasing to God are a living illustration of how one is to be instructed in the Lord!

But one thing is certainly true…

### A. If you’re not teaching them, someone else is

But it’s also true that you’re teaching your child at all times—whether actively or passively

Let me provide a positive illustration…

My parents *insisted* that our family be at church on Sunday

It didn’t matter how late we were out the night prior, it didn’t matter who was or wasn’t preaching, and it didn’t even matter if we were on vacation! (yes, my parents would find a church in the area…)

My family was BIG into music and sports, but if there was something that would potentially conflict with being in the church house on Sunday, guess what… we’re not doing that thing

Bear in mind—my father was an environmental engineer and my mother was a teacher—we were not a ministry-family

In other words, our presence wasn’t required in the church house, from a human perspective

But what did all of this teach us kiddos?

Christ and His people take the *highest priority* in our lives—everything is built around HIM

Is the opposite the case as well?

In other words, if there is a higher priority in the family—something that would prevent them from being with God’s people on a consistent basis—even something as innocuous as sleep—will that provide its own instruction to the children? (absolutely!)

Whatever the family *prioritizes* will establish itself as the *focal point* of that family: academic success, sports, rest, vacation, professional advancement, etc.

But more to our point, children do not remain conviction-less

If you, as the parent, are not guiding them in how they ought to live, some*one* or some*thing* else is happy to do so

That may be a well-meaning teacher or coach, but they may also (God forbid) be left to the tender mercies of the World Wide Web…

And how are their peers on social media going to be instructing them?

Probably not in the discipline and instruction of the Lord!

So parents—it’s up to us to take the reins of our children’s hearts and steer them in the direction they must go!

And we see that…

### B. Biblical instruction takes many forms

Let’s take a quick look at six ways we are to instruct our children, though many more could be on this list

First…

**i. teach them to love truth**

When you open up a systematic theology, what is (almost *always*) the first theological topic that the author addresses? (bibliology, or the theology of God’s Word)

Why? Because what you hold to be *true* will affect all aspects of your life—it will be your source of authority, it will be the lens through which you look at life, and it will paint your reality

When Jesus is asked about the greatest of all commandments, what does He say? (“You shall love the Lord…”)

But where did He *get* that? Scripture!! When asked a question, what would He continually ask in return: “what do the Scriptures say?” or “have you not read…”

And brothers and sisters—how did Jesus know the Word of God?

Apart from the obvious advantage of Him *being* the Word made flesh, Jesus was constantly pouring over the Scriptures—his parents even lost Him one time due to this fact

Do you do the same for your children (read God’s Word)? And if they can read, do you encourage them to be in God’s Word for themselves?

In the same way, we need to hold the Word to be more precious than gold…

**Psalm 119:97-104 – O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.**

Can your children say the same?

Now, on to the greatest commandment…

**ii. teach them to love the Lord**

They learn *who* God is through His Word, but they learn about Him so that they would *love* Him…

**Deuteronomy 6:5 – You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**

Primarily, you need to ensure they *know* the gospel and it’s being shared to them in such a way that they could meaningfully accept Christ’s free gift of salvation

Romans 10 makes the path to salvation incredibly simple (\*rehearse + explain + invite)

We can’t expect children to love God if they don’t have a saving relationship with Him—and we can’t save our children, so a firm point of application for each of us parents is: PRAY

But if God decides to extend His saving grace to your child, then he or she will develop a loving relationship with Him

And this love is far more than a warm fuzzy feeling—there is fruit that will be produced from a man, woman, or child who loves the Lord

Jesus said it this way in John 14…

**John 14:15 – If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**

Which is to say, we must…

**iii. teach them to live like Christ**

This must be the case, whether your children would claim Christ or not!

I remember going through premarital counseling with a couple about six years ago

The wife-to-be came from a really solid Christian family

When I asked about her testimony, she said (and I’m paraphrasing)…

“I accepted Christ at a pretty early age. I remember that it was really easy to live as a Christian at that time, because my family was already oriented around living to please Him”

I remember thinking: that’s what I want each of my children’s testimony to be

My wife and I joke that we want our children’s testimonies to be really boring, and we want to make it as easy as possible on our end for them to see Christ

Strive to say alongside Paul…

**1 Corinthians 11:1 – Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.**

Additionally…

**iv. teach them to glorify God**

What is your family’s ultimate goal?

What would your answer have been before I advanced the PowerPoint?

I hope it would have been grounded in…

1 Corinthains 10:31 – Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

\*explain if time (eating & drinking most basic)

Next…

**v. teach them how to teach others**

Listen to this haunting passage found in Judges…

**Judges 2:10 – All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.**

Who had failed? The children for not knowing the Lord?

Certainly the parents for not teaching them

But it’s not enough to simply teach our children truth, we need to teach them to teach others

This couldn’t be more plain than in the great commission…

**Matt 28:19a-20a – Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations… teaching them to observe all that I commanded you…**

Notice, Jesus *doesn’t* say we are to make *converts*—he’s calling us to make *disciples*

And the implication of a disciple is that disciples *make* disciples

And though there are MANY others we could look at, make sure you…

**vi. teach them to trust in God rather than themselves**

The passage most of you were thinking about here is found in…

**Proverbs 3:5-7 – Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.**

Our modus operandi is to trust in ourselves

It takes concerted effort to remove that confidence off ourselves, and place it in the Lord

As the cliché goes, no one has failed you more than you have failed you

And you think you’d have learned that by now…

But who has never failed you, and who *will* never fail you?

Teach that to your children—do so by sharing positive or negative examples of this

In other words, times where God has come through, or times when you chose to trust in yourself and how that went for ya…

Which is to say…

### C. Take every opportunity to instruct your children

A family that is oriented around Christ will find this to be most natural

The most normal of circumstances will turn into an opportunity to point to our great God—like stepping outside on a beautiful Fall day and verbally praising God for His marvelous creation

As parents, we are to…

**i. take advantage of unplanned opportunities**

Again, the best way to ensure this happens is if YOU are constantly thinking about God—if YOU have allowed Him to be the delight of your heart and the meditation of your thoughts

If you don’t ever allow those unplanned moments to direct your family’s attention to Christ, what does that say about the disposition of your heart?

As you “set your mind on things above,” point your family to do the same:

This could be on special occasions like birthdays, times where you’re disciplining a child, or even when your family experiences a loss of some sort

But also…

**ii. plan times to instruct your children**

If it’s not already a practice of yours, make sure you hold some form of Family Worship

If you don’t know what that could look like, I’d be happy to point you towards some helpful resources

But also, make sure you pray together as a family on a regular basis—this can be before meals, on car rides, etc.

Plan to regularly attend corporate worship, and even consider learning opportunities outside of that like WNKoF or taking an FCI class together

The point is this: you need to be actively instructing your children in the Lord—the only way to ensure they’re learning about Him is if you’re doing it yourself

But let’s not forget the other side of this coin…

## II. Discipline Your Child in the Lord

Remember: *instruction* shows your child “*this* is the way to go…” whereas *discipline* shows your child “*this* is the way you *ought not* go…”

Thus, we are to also…

**Ephesians 6:4b – …bring [your children] up in the discipline… of the Lord.**

What would prevent a parent from disciplining their child?

I would argue that the primary inhibitor would be a misunderstanding of discipline—both in its function and its purpose

As such, we need to…

### A. Understand discipline biblically

I hope you understand that…

**i. God disciplines us**

It’s actually a scary thing if you see the *absence* of God’s discipline in your life…

**Hebrews 12:5b-11 – My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.” It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**

And if God does this towards those whom He loves, we can assume that…

**ii. discipline is loving**

If you recall last week, we spent a brief amount of time in 1 Kings talking about Adonijah—David’s insurrection-sparking son

Remember what we called him? Adonijah the BRAT

And do you recall how he got that way?

A lack of discipline or correction…

**Proverbs 13:24 – He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.**

We’ll talk about how to do this is a God-glorifying way in a bit, but in terms of *purpose*…

**iii. discipline redirects a child’s path**

This assumes you as the parent know the correct path

For instance, what’s one base requirement I have for anyone who wants to teach my kid how to swim?

They *themselves* know how to swim!

You can’t teach what you don’t know—we as parents need to be growing in our love and knowledge of Christ and His way

But when our children stray, discipline will (Lord willing) place them back on the straight and narrow path

And there’s not a single child who is above the need for discipline…

**Proverbs 22:15 – Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.**

And the next chapter takes it to a whole other level…

**Proverbs 23:13-14 – Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol.**

Brent Aucoin, one of our pastors, talks about how discipline simply gives the child a *sampling* of the road they are choosing to walk down

If Proverbs 23 is correct (and I would argue that it is), then where are they heading when they choose to disobey? (Sheol—destruction/hell)

Discipline provides a taste of the end of the road before they are too far along that path, in hopes that they’ll repent and turn towards Christ

No wonder the parent who withholds this from their child is described elsewhere as “unloving”

We want to be pointing out children to follow Jesus, and careful to correct them when they go another way

But make sure you…

### B. Practice discipline biblically

The first temptation we as parents often encounter is giving ourselves over to anger in the midst of discipline scenarios

That’s why we must…

**i. utilize self-control**

And who gives self-control?

It’s a fruit of the Spirit—so we must ask Him to provide for us, especially when we’re most tempted to lose control

Remember that…

**James 1:20 – …the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.**

We will be undermining ourselves if we discipline in the heat of anger

That’s usually when we’re closest to the source of heat—namely a disobedient child

It may be a helpful practice (when possible) to remove yourself or your child from a heated situation, take a moment to pray and ask God for a loving, self-controlled heart, before you engage in any form of discipline

And then…

**ii. carry it out for the right purpose**

Are you grieved that their disobedience has offended a holy God, or are you more upset that they have inconvenienced you?

It will definitely show in your response to your child and the words you choose when carrying out discipline

Ensure you’re pointing them back to their primary obligation to obey Christ

*Included* in that, is their obligation to obey you—but their sin is first and foremost against Him

Understanding this will allow you to carry it out for all the right reasons

So…

**iii. ensure it’s motivated by love**

1 Corinthains 16:14 says…

**1 Corinthians 16:14 – Let all that you do be done in love.**

Should that include discipline?

Absolutely!

Additionally, don’t neglect to…

**iv. pair discipline with instruction**

Don’t forget our passage!

We are to raise up our children in the discipline… and *instruction* of the Lord

I don’t believe it was a mistake that these two were placed alongside one another in verse 4

And then…

**v. maintain consistency**

Be consistent in (1) *how* you discipline, (2) *when* you discipline, and (3) *who* you discipline (\*repeat)

And here are some additional ways to ensure we…

### C. Carry out discipline lovingly

Don’t forget that…

**i. parents are the primary disciplinarians**

It is not *primarily* the job of Sunday school servants, teachers, coaches or other mentors

Hopefully there are elements of appropriate correction in those arenas, but the onus of discipline falls on the parents

And when you must discipline, be sure to…

**ii. communicate expectations beforehand**

Certainly, you need to do this (when possible) before carrying out any form of discipline, but ideally your children already are aware of discipline-worthy behavior

If your son is surprised that punching his brother in the face out of anger has earned him the rod, that may indicate a failure in communicating expectations

Also…

**iii. help the child see the correlation between cause and effect**

This goes along with instruction—lies may elicit soap in the mouth, stealing a sibling’s dessert may result in loosing dessert the rest of the week, etc.

When possible, make the consequences directly relevant to the offense

But don’t forget to…

**iv. pair discipline with reward**

In Deuteronomy 28, God outlines all the blessing that He would lavish upon His people if they chose to follow Him and obey Him commandments

That lasts for about 14 verses in the chapter

The remaining *54* verses detail the curses that will ensue if they drift away from Him

Which also goes to show: when God is FOUR TIMES more specific about one possible outcome than He is with another, we could probably guess which way it’s going to go…

But in all seriousness, our parenting can’t be all sticks and no carrots

Good behavior and a choice to repent and please Christ should be met with reward

This is all a part of…

## III. Practice Balanced Parenting

Know your own shortcomings, pray that God would enable you to grow, and even set up accountability in your life where necessary

If you don’t know your weak points, invite a wise brother or sister-in-Christ into this area of your life

But you also need to…

### A. Understand the needs of your children

Here’s a helpful chart, outlining the most common trajectory of child-rearing

A big part of balance is avoiding the various pitfalls that we can so easily fall into as parents

If we’re putting them on a spectrum, you have “overbearing” on one side, and “complacent” on the other

We talked a bit about this last week, so I’ll be brief

First…

### B. Avoid the pitfall of “overbearing”

\*Pastor Goode quote: 5 words of encouragement for every instance of correction

Peter O’Brien helps us once again to understand what God’s Word is calling us towards:

**“In contrast to the norms of the day, Paul wants Christian fathers to be gentle, patient educators of their children, whose chief ‘weapon’ is Christian instruction focused on loyalty to Christ as Lord. Christian fathers were to be different from those of their surrounding society... Let them as human fathers, then, ‘care for their families as God the Father cares for his’.” – O’Brien, *PNTC: Ephesians*, 447.**

Remember what we discussed last week: in your discipline, ask yourself: is this how I would want my heavenly Father to treat me?

This will help us stay out of the overbearing ditch, but we must also…

### C. Avoid the pitfall of “complacent”

Don’t let a healthy aversion of *overbearingness* swing you towards complacency or neglecting your responsibility to discipline your child

This can even happen *within* a marriage, where one parent is always “good cop” and the other is always “bad cop”

That will naturally sow roots of bitterness within the marriage as well as the parent-child relationship

Don’t strive to be “good cop”, don’t strive to be “bad cop”—pursue balance as you point your child to Christ—regardless of how they may view you

And don’t be discouraged, brothers and sisters—Christ is gracious to the complacent and overbearing, alike

Even the example that I began our time discussing was not without her shortcomings

Growing up the youngest of *25 kids* to a pair of high-functioning parents and siblings, it’s little wonder Susanna Wesley turned out to be an exceptional woman

But it took her a lifetime to figure out the balance between instruction and discipline:

**“It is difficult to know when Susanna actually came to believe savingly in Christ. At times in her life she talked of the need for faith and a belief in the heart; but at others she seemed to rely on the testimony of her own good works. Her sons, John and Charles, spoke of an experience two years before her death as her conversion – an experience that “ended her long legal night”. More likely, she was a Christian who spent most of her life somewhat confused about the complementary role of faith and the works of obedience; and it is delightful to know that before her life ended, she was given a firmer assurance of faith.” – Sally Davey, *Faith in Focus*, 2002.**

Let’s pray to that same gracious Savior…