

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Ephesians 6:4

Introduction:

About this time every year, our nation decides to honor fathers. Aside from just sitting back and accepting the praise and gifts that are being lavished upon us, we need to look at ourselves and our role in the family. What is all this about? We have brought kids into the world, but what does that mean for us? It means more than just coming up with money to put food on the table. It means we are responsible for people other than ourselves. But what is that responsibility? What is a father's job? **Ephesians 6:4** provides the answer.

Discussion:

- I. Our job is to avoid provoking our children to wrath.
 - A. **Ephesians 6:4** says we fathers must not provoke our kids to wrath. We must not exasperate or embitter them. Frankly, I believe this command is given because it is all too easy to do exactly that. We can easily get so caught up in our own lives that we forget our duty to our kids.
 - B. Do not misunderstand. This passage does not say if our children ever get angry, we have failed. This passage says we should not provoke them. Sometimes, when we do our job properly our children will become angry. They might even say things like, “I hate you!” and “I never want to see you again.” That is our children choosing to be angry without provocation. By the way, these responses are direct violations of **Ephesians 6:2** and must not be allowed to go unaddressed.
 - C. How can a father provoke his children to wrath? In much the same way anyone can be provoked to wrath. Consider the following 20 steps to provoking your children and reasons for using each one of them. Some of them will immediately provoke your children to anger. Others will only do so when your kids are out on their own and finally figure out what you did to them.
 1. Lie to them (after all, they are too young to know the difference).
 2. Break your promises and commitments (They will never remember).
 3. Do not admit it when you are wrong and never apologize (They are just kids, a big man like you should not have to apologize to them).
 4. Always expect too much of them (They ought to be able to do what you can do).
 5. Or always expect too little (They are only little kids and challenging them to grow, improve or mature might be too much for their psyche and self-esteem).
 6. Do not clearly explain your expectations and then punish your kids when they fall short (They ought to be able to read your mind and always know exactly what you meant).
 7. The only expectation you should make clear is that you expect your child to mess everything up and do it all wrong. Make sure your kids know this before they try anything (They are kids and they have messed up in the past, why should this time be any different?).
 8. When they finally do remember to do something properly, do not encourage them, instead tell them, “It's about time you did something right” (It is about time isn't it?).
 9. Do not correct them when they do something wrong (Kids love getting out on their own, starting a family and then finding out that the way they act has ruined their lives).
 10. Demean them and degrade them by hollering and yelling at them a lot (Your kids are surely hard of hearing and must not have heard you the first time you spoke to them).
 11. Constantly threaten them with punishments, but never follow through until you are really, really mad at them (Kids like to know that their parents instructions do not mean anything unless they are angry).
 12. Vent your frustration, anger and embarrassment on them when you punish them (If you are not frustrated, angry or embarrassed there is really no reason to discipline them).
 13. Be inconsistent with them, especially in discipline (Kids like to get away with things and this provides them the perfect opportunity to try).
 14. Never let them know where they stand with you (Kids like guessing games).

15. Constantly remind them of how immature, childlike, ignorant, stupid and worthless they are. Especially do this in front of their friends (Kids are amazingly resilient, will probably forget the bad things you called them and will surely enjoy the challenge of proving you wrong).
16. Do not forgive them when they repent, instead hold grudges against them, keep bringing up their past behavior and generally just act like you are always mad at them (That will make it more meaningful when you tell them you love them in their birthday cards).
17. Never explain how life really works to your children (They will enjoy the challenge of figuring it out on their own when they get to work and learn that their boss doesn't care about their self-esteem, expects them to do their job right the first time, clean up their own messes and actually earn the money he gives them by working for it).
18. Do not spend time with them in meaningful interaction and conversation, instead spend all your time working so you can room them in a nice house, feed them in the nicest restaurants and buy them all the neatest toys and gadgets (They know that you want all these things you didn't get to have when you were a kid. I'm sorry. I meant they know that you want them to have all the things you didn't get to have when you were a kid. And besides, when you die, they won't really want to remember anything about you anyway, they will just want to know who gets the house).
19. Do not teach your children how to work or handle the money they earn from it (It makes them feel responsible, mature and successful when they have to come ask you to support their kids because they do not know how).
20. Finally, dads, if you want to provoke your children to wrath, treat their mother like dirt (They love to see examples of strength, power and authority and they especially like to see the person who is most dear to them getting abused).

II. Our job is to bring our children up.

- A. The regrettable fact of modern fatherhood, is that few dads have ever sat down and determined what their goal as a parent should be. Our goal as fathers is not to simply make it through today. Our goal is not to provide our children with pleasures, entertainments or enjoyments. Our goal is not to give them everything we did not have as children. Our goal is to "bring them up." This phrase translates the Greek word "*ektrepho*," which means "to nourish up to maturity." Our goal is to produce maturity in our children. What we do every day needs to be focused toward that end. The way we interact, the experiences we provide, the way we discipline needs to push them toward the goal of maturity.
- B. A second regrettable fact of modern fatherhood, is that most dads do not measure their success by whether or not their children are becoming more and more mature. Rather, they measure their success based on whether or not their kids are having a good time. Therefore, we have a generation of young adults who do not behave responsibly. Rather, they act based on their feelings and pleasures. Keep in mind that maturity is the goal for our kids, not happiness and pleasure. I am not saying you should raise your kids to be miserable. Here we find one of the amazing paradoxes of life. True happiness does not come to us by doing that which gives us pleasure at the moment. True happiness comes as a result of doing what is right, responsible and mature—which actions are not always pleasurable in the moment. Consider **Hebrews 12:11** to see this paradox in action. Chastisement is not pleasurable at the moment for anyone, but true happiness and contentment will come out of it in the long run.
- C. One final point to note is that the maturity here is not limited to physical maturity. No doubt, fathers, we are to raise our children to physical maturity. But, physical maturity will happen with little help from us. Rather, this maturity is "in the Lord." This maturity does not happen altogether naturally. Our goal is to bring our children up to mental, emotional and spiritual maturity. Too often parents try to provide an entertaining and pleasurable childhood, their top goals for raising their kids is to get them a car and put them through college. They send the kids to school to produce mental maturity; experience will give them emotional maturity; and spiritual maturity ... "Well, that's why we go to church." Thus, we have a great outcry in denominations, and even among brethren, for youth ministers and youth groups. But these responsibilities do not belong to the government or the church—they belong to us dads. Fathers, the government and the

church may help us in many ways to produce maturity in our kids, but they will not stand before God in judgment to give account for how our kids were raised. We will.

- D. Have you considered what steps you will take to produce maturity in your children? Or are you simply trying to make it from day to day without killing one of them?

III. Our job is to bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

- A. One difficulty in examining this verse is that modern translations use several interchangeable English words to describe these terms. In the NASB, the translators chose “discipline” and “instruction.” Interestingly, in the Greek, the two terms “*paideia*” (discipline) and “*nouthesia*” (instruction) are also somewhat interchangeable. Both deal with training children. However, according to Vine and Zodhiates, in their respective dictionaries, the first emphasizes training by action, the second emphasizes training with words. Both aspects of training must be used in conjunction with one another. Do not try to simply train with words. It will not work. But do not try to simply train with actions. That will not work in the long run either.
- B. The training with action (*paideia*) can consist of several facets.
1. **Hebrews 12:5-6** demonstrates that chastening with “the rod” is part of the training of children. Do not be deceived, spanking done properly will not provoke your children to wrath. In fact, in **Ephesians 6:4**, God sets this in contrast with provoking your children to wrath. However, please follow some common sense guidelines to using the rod. Use it as a tool to produce maturity, not vent your anger. Use it consistently not sporadically. Use it with the future results in mind, not the present moment. Use it quickly, not only when a lot of yelling and counting has failed. Finally, when you are done using it, make sure you tell the child why you used it and reaffirm your love for the child (do not mistake this for gushing over the child in an effort to soften the chastisement and win back their love).
 2. We must understand that chastening with the rod is not the only action used in training children. Making children face natural consequences of their actions is also used to train children. It is the same action that wisdom takes according to **Proverbs 1:24-29**. If they break a window, have them pay for it and repair it. If they misuse one of their possessions, take it away (temporarily or permanently).
 3. Practicing good behavior is training. Every year sports teams go to their training camps. What do they do? Sit around and listen to a lot of talk? Do they get chastened with the rod? No, they get trained. They are made to perform drills over and over again so that they can perform their duty on the team naturally and with little thought. We can do the same thing. A child who is old enough to walk, can be quickly trained to come when you say “Come here.” Practice it with them. When you are first working with them you may have to use “the rod” to chastise disobedience, but after a few times of “Come here,” getting a swat for not coming and then being shown the proper response, your child will learn. Then you can practice having them obey. It will become so natural, that the next time your child is running toward the street, you won’t have to break your neck trying to catch them, you can say, “Come here,” and they will do what they have been trained to do, they will come here.
- C. The admonition (*nouthesia*) can consist of several facets.
1. Straightforward teaching is a direct way to train by your words. **Deuteronomy 6:7** demonstrates a good model for when to do this teaching. When you sit in your house (how about meal times or shutting off the TV for a night and just talking). When you walk in the way (travel time—shut off the radio sometimes and teach your children). When you lie down (bedtime) and when you rise up (first thing in the morning).
 2. Jesus demonstrated a great way to train with words--using parables. Tell your kids stories. Read the Bible stories to them. Read stories of people that demonstrated great characteristics of maturity that you want them to develop. Tell them stories about you as a child. Tell them stories about their grandparents. Make up stories, using them as characters.
 3. Reprove and rebuke your child when they have done something wrong. Don’t be hateful or cruel when you do so and make sure to reaffirm your love to them when they acknowledge their wrong and repent. Do not apologize for rebuking them. Rather, let them know that even though they did wrong, you still love them.

4. Take time to praise and encourage them in word when they do things the way they should. Take time to praise and encourage them even if they are not doing it exactly right, but are making improvement. Make an effort to catch your kids doing things right and tell them when you have caught them. Far too often, the only time we comment on our kids behavior is when they did something wrong.

Conclusion:

Have you been doing your job as a father? I have no doubt that most of you are like me, you could stand some improvement. The key reason for this study is we have to know the goal and the standards, otherwise none of us would ever know where to begin improving. Look to your child's future and start doing today the things it will take to bring them to maturity. There will be lots of good times. There will be lots of tough times. In the end, your work will pay off for you as your children experience the peaceful fruit of righteousness (**Hebrews 12:11**) and you can be glad because your children have been trained to be wise (**Proverbs 10:1**).