

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers Raise Them Up in the Lord

So over the last month or so I've been making the case from here in Ephesians that God has a design, a plan, for what Christian families and marriages and businesses and even civic society are all to look like.

A lot of times when someone becomes a Christian or maybe have been a Christian for a long time they can think that their understanding of God begins and ends at the cross. And that's not a bad instinct. Paul says I have determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. The heart of the gospel is that by faith in Jesus dying on the cross in our place for our sin, rising 3 days later or sins are forgiven. They are atoned for. We're children of God, heirs of eternal life, counted righteous in Christ through no work of our own.

We can never forget the gospel, it should inform and guide all that we do. But the heart of the gospel in substitutionary atonement isn't the only thing we find that God has done for us in salvation.

When God saved you, he also had a blue print for every aspect of your life. We've seen that blueprint for marriage. And now we're in the blueprint for relationships between fathers and children. And the deal is that if you follow them, God will bless your efforts. Not necessarily make life super easy, but it will be a blessed life because it's a life lived in obedience to the Lord.

And this command this morning is pretty simple. God's requirement for raising children isn't super difficult but I think we need to unpack it so we understand clearly where we're at.

Dads, you need to know what God requires of you.
Moms you need to know what God is calling your husband to.
Kids, you need to know why your dad is doing what he's doing.

Big Picture: Fathers are primarily responsible for godly child rearing.

And I think this morning we even see elements of the gospel in this section because earthly fathers are to be a reflection of God the Father in how they raise their children.

Prov. 3:11-12: My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, nor be weary of his reproof for the Lord reproves him whom he loves. How? As a father the son in whom he delights.

Fathers, your faithful, godly discipline will reflect the heart of God himself to your child.

Matt. 7:7-11: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

What's he saying? If you want to know God's heart, just look to any dad worth his salt and imagine someone infinitely more kind and gracious.

So just like husband and wife are displaying the love of Christ and the church through their marriage, dads are displaying the love of God the Father through their role in the lives of their children. So, gentlemen, this is a high calling.

1) The Responsibility of Fathers. **Read 4**

It should be no surprise here that the command is addressed to the fathers in the home. I laid out the case several weeks ago that God has designed men to lead in various aspects of life: civics, church life, and the home. That's God's design in every area of life and we see that here as well.

The parallel passage in Colossians says the same:

Col. 3:21: Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged.

Why does Paul address fathers here and not mothers? Aren't mothers important in the raising of children?

Of course they are. Arguably mothers will spend more time with children than fathers will. If your family homeschools there is more direct interaction in teaching.

So why address fathers here? Because fathers lead the home. All the activity that happens with your children falls under your authority, and your accountability. Obviously you can delegate much of the child-rearing to your wife, maybe even some of it to older children. But at the end of the day, fathers, the upbringing of the children in your home rests on your shoulders.

We know this from Scripture, we know this intrinsically, and we see this of course from statistics. You know I'm not a huge fan of statistics when it comes to issues of morality but I think they are helpful here because they show the obvious link.

Pew Research:

- If both parents are Protestant -> 80% chance kids will be protestant
- If both talk about protestant religion a lot -> 89% chance kids are protestant
- If religion is important to both parents -> 85% chance kids find it important

Life way Research: Arm of the Southern Baptist Convention: <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/want-your-church-to-grow-then-bring-in-the-men/>

*** **NOTE:** This Baptist Press research is likely inaccurate. It is preserved in the sermon notes here only for consistency to the sermon audio***

- If a father doesn't go to church, even if his wife does, only 1 child in 50 will continue in the faith into adulthood.
- If a father goes to church regularly, even if the mom does not, 66-75% of kids will continue in the faith.
- If a child is the first to become a Christian, there's a 3.5% chance everyone else in the household will follow.
- If mom is the first to become a Christian, there's a 17% chance the household will follow.
- If dad is the first to become a Christian, there's a 93% chance the family will follow.

Now, all that talk about chance and probability chafes at my doctrine of the sovereignty of God more than just a little. God chose Jacob over Easu so that his purpose of election might stand - it wasn't a statistical issue. God can obviously do whatever he wants and will save anyone he wants.

But I think we need to understand that there is a normal course of activity that God uses and blesses. And God blesses men who are faithful to lead their families to Jesus.

And maybe you say: well, can we really trust those stats? Let's imagine they're half wrong - it's still a massive correlation between fathers and the outcome of their children. That's the point: fathers have a massively outsized role in the spiritual lives of their children.

Certainly as Christian fathers we don't just sit back and assume our kids are going to be Christians but, men, know your impact in your kids life is huge. They see what you do, they hear what you say, they imitate your way of life.

And in the family it falls on men. Moms, obviously you need to be engaged as well. You need to be training your kids as well. But gentlemen, this really starts with you.

And grandfathers and great grand fathers - you need to ensure that you are faithfully training your grand kids and great grandkids.

So fathers, the responsibility to model faithfulness is on you. And the responsibility to train your children is on you.

Let's talk about what fathers should not be doing. **Read 4**

2) So there's one prohibition here: Do not provoke your children to anger.

Don't make your kids mad. I'll add one caveat - don't make them mad *unnecessarily*. Their emotions aren't completely on you. If you tell your kids it's time to go to bed and they get mad, that's on them. If you tell your kids to take a shower and they're mad, that's on them.

But as much as we can help it, we don't want to provoke our kids to anger. Why? Because God doesn't want angry kids. He doesn't want kids that are frustrated or burdened or beat down. He wants our kids to be happy and glad and filled with joy.

Fathers, this means we want to make sure we're not doing things that might cause unnecessary offense. We want our children to be glad to be under our care and authority.

What are some things that provoke? Every commentary and sermon on this subject gives lists of things and so I want to flesh some things out too. I jotted down a list of things that can anger kids unnecessarily. This isn't exhaustive. But this is what I see commonly, or have learned from doing it wrong.

A. Never give them freedom. Kids are curious and want to explore, we need to be okay with that.

In Germany they did a study of playground equipment for little kids. They found that playground companies were making "safe" playgrounds for fear of lawsuits. But what actually happened was that the kids got bored and didn't go to the playgrounds. Or, they would simply use the playground equipment wrongly - they'd climb on the outside of the toys. And there was a total reversal in Germany and now we'd probably feel uncomfortable with how unsafe playgrounds are in Germany. But they've found that "unsafe" playgrounds actually make for more vigilant children.

There's a certain amount of danger that kids need to experience in order to learn the real world. I don't think they need to climb the highest tree when they're 3 or 4, but they do need to experience danger to gauge how to understand it.

If we never give them freedom they don't understand how to manage real concerns or dangers. This is the "helicopter parenting" we hear so much about - parents who have to hover around their kids all the time. It's not good.

B. Criticize when they make a bad decision. Kids make a million decisions all the time, many of them are bad. Not every bad decision needs a rebuke or even a talk. It's okay for them to learn some lessons on their own.

I went to baseball meeting last week and a coach was talking about his mistakes with his own kids. When his kids made a mistake in the game, he'd be yelling at them from the dugout, have another conversation in the dugout, talk on the way home, and bring it up at the next practice. His kid finally told him: don't talk to me about baseball again unless I ask for your opinion.

The very thing he loved doing with his kid became off limits because he was always critical with bad decisions. He's an unbeliever but he was pleading with us to not criticize our kids. No, when our kids make bad decisions we should encourage them, comfort them.

C. There's more yelling than laughter. Your home should be a refuge for everyone if your family. It should be the place you desire to come home to and relax and recharge and a shelter from the world. That's how it should be for your kids as well.

No one wants the home to be filled with harsh words and anger. No one wants to get dressed down all the time and criticized.

There should be laughter and playing.

Eccles. 9:7: Go, eat your bread and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

That should define your home. I mean, Jesus has saved you from sin and death and hell it's okay to be happy in life. Your home should be filled with laughter and merriment.

Prov. 17:1: Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

Maybe you've got all the money and all the cars and all the vacations but if you're always arguing and at each other, it's better to have nothing and happiness.

There should be fun and laughter in your home. Wrestling and jokes and times of silliness and play.

What else can provoke our kids to anger?

D. Unreasonable expectations. Are the expectations you have for your 4 year old unreasonable? Or your 14 year old? Or your 24 year old? Is what you demand in your home perfection, or so close to perfection that no one can attain it?

Unreasonable expectations for behavior, for education, work ethic, direction in life.

We need to make sure that what we're asking of our kids and what we're demanding of our kids isn't so impossible that they can never attain it.

I had 2 different physics teachers in my high school experience. The first would criticize the class when our average test score was 50. They'd rail at the class because no one got questions 9-11 correct. Well, maybe that's a you problem, a teaching problem, not a learning problem.

I had another physics teacher - same basic scenario - and he would just throw out the questions where most of the class got the answer wrong. His conclusion was that apparently he didn't teach the material well enough. You can't expect kids to learn if you don't teach it well.

If your kid is struggling with something it may be that you haven't done your part. Or maybe they're just in a different place and that's okay.

Kids walk at different ages, go to the potty at different ages, read at different ages, ride their bikes at different ages, comprehend the world at different ages, understand jobs and skills and marriage and finance at different ages.

E. Changing Course Quickly. Another way to frustrate and anger kids is to change your plans quickly and often. Unless you're kind of crazy, you thrive on consistency as well.

But if it's common in your home to make decisions, then change them quickly that can cause anger. I don't know what they call it now but when I was a kid that was an Indian giver. Someone who gave something then took it right back. I'm sure that's racist to say now, I don't really care.

"We're going to go here" nah, we're going to do this thing now." "We're planning this trip, no it's cancelled."
"We're going to eat this for dinner - oh awesome - nah, we're changing course."

Men, just imagine your boss told you to start working on a project, then 10 minutes later told you to stop that one and begin another one. Then 10 minutes after that said go back to the original one. Then 2 hours later said stop both of those and help this guy over here complete his task.

F. Jumping to conclusions without information. It's easy to assume things about our kids or situations without gathering all the data. And maybe even feel righteous about doing so, but our kids know when we've judged fairly.

I was reading a book about criminal justice last year from a Christian lawyer and he was talking about due process and how it's actually a biblical concept. 2 or 3 witnesses, confirming evidence before determining guilt. And I realized I often skipped due process for my own kids. I made assumptions or took the word of just one witness without any evidence. And maybe I got the call right sometimes, but I got it wrong too. Why is that bad? Because if I'm teaching them who God the Father is through my acts of justice, I need to reflect what God wants.

There's many other things. Maybe you nag your kids. Maybe you humiliate them in front of others either by teasing them or rebuking them in public. Maybe you don't take their thoughts and desires into account.

Maybe you don't say no to them. You allow influences into their life that shouldn't be there. I've seen kids who are angry because their parents won't say no to sports or video games or church activities, and their child is just burned out all the time.

These are just a few ways we can provoke our children to anger. There are many other ways we can do that as well. I would really encourage you, men, to reflect on your past mistakes and consider how you might need to correct course with your kids. You might ask your wife, you might even ask your kids.

And again, my list is not exhaustive but I think these are common to most men and I'm sure I've had my hand in a fair share of them.

So fathers are responsible, fathers don't provoke.

3) Fathers Need to Teach. Read 4

The next 2 commands are related to teaching. Paul says to bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. What does that mean?

KJV: nurture and admonition

NIV: training and instruction

So what does this mean? I think it's as simple as it is profound.

You teach them what Jesus wants them to do.

You teach them what Jesus does not want them to do.

That's it. That's all this means. We teach them commands to obey but we also teach them sins to avoid.

The first word here is paideia. And it usually it refers to the positive instruction and training of a child. That word paideia is part where our presbyterian friends get "paedobaptism." Paedo or paideia - refers to the positive training of children. It encompasses education in a formal sense. It includes discipline in the sense of instilling practices that that will aid in the growth of a child. Learning and instruction.

So we bring them up in the positive things of the Lord. We train them proactively.

Turn to 2 Tim 3:10-17 for a minute. This is important because it shows the importance of this principle. This is Paul writing to Timothy and his own upbringing. If you remember, Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. For Timothy to follow Paul on his missionary journeys he needed to be circumcised so he could enter synagogues to preach Christ. And it appears he didn't have hardly any positive Christian instruction from his father, but whatever his father lacked, his mother and grandmother made up for. But this is the power of godly paideia - godly instruction. **Read 10-17**

What made Timothy so effective as a pastor and evangelist was the teaching from childhood about the ways of the Lord. He was acquainted with the sacred writings - the OT - from a very early age. And those OT writings led him to salvation. They led him to love and follow the Lord Jesus Christ because they all pointed to him and his atoning sacrifice.

And then Paul turns around and says: all those writings you are familiar with that saved you, gouse those to teach, reprove, correct and train.

Training isn't just so your child knows what to do, it's so they can teach the next generation what to do. And this training in the Scripture is all they need to live a life that pleases Jesus. **Read 17**

We call this the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible is all you need to know how to live life pleasing to God. You don't need a bunch of psychological nonsense, you don't need your counselor to label you with something to pigeon hole you, you don't need the latest pop trend of parenting or financial whatever to please God. You have everything you need to be complete for every good work. You just have to pass it along.

Fathers, that's primarily on you to pass it along. **Turn to Deuteronomy 6:4-9.** This is the John 3:16 of the OT. Every Israelite would have memorized this passage before they were potty trained. And your family should know this as well. Because this is the household code for the saints in the OT. **Read 4-9**

So this is huge theologically - the Lord, Yahweh, is one. There is only one true and living God. You are called to love him with all that you are and to be committed from the heart to his commands.

And you shall teach them to your children. **Read 7**

You shall teach them occasionally? Weekly? Monthly? Rarely? Diligently. How often? All the time.

In fact, Moses describes to Israel just how pervasive the Word of God is to be talked about and taught in our home. When we walk by the way, when we lie down for bed. It's part of the art work around our house. We talk about it everywhere.

In other words, you talk about God when you're eating pancakes in the morning, when you're going to Costco, walking through the forest, teaching them math, playing outside, going to bed. It's all the time.

They need positive instruction. They also need warnings. They also need to hear warnings. It's not enough to just tell your kids what to do, you also need to have the courage to tell them what not to do. It has to be both.

Prov. 3:11-12 Do not despise the Lord's discipline, nor be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father the son in whom he delights.

Fathers, if you love your children, you will reprove them. You will correct them. **Turn to Heb 12:5-11.** Again, as children of God we understand how discipline works from God because we've experienced it in our own homes. The author assumes we have. **Read 5-11**

What's his point. When God disciplines you don't get down. Why? Because your dad did that too. Dad's discipline the best we can - we're not perfect - but how does a child view a dad who does their best to discipline? With respect.

We have to teach our kids what is right and good and honoring and encourage that and reward that.

But we also have to teach them what is bad and discipline for those things.

And I want to end that I think this instruction should really happen almost every day during family devotions in your home. We do family devotions after dinner because that's the one time we're all sitting down together. We read the Bible, memorize some passages, and go around the table and say one thing we're thankful for. We probably do this 6-7 times a week. It takes 5-10 minutes, maybe longer if discussion is good. You can do it in the morning. But whatever you do you need to be diligent to train your children, regularly, systematically. Or it won't happen.

Mark Chanski: "When do your children learn from you? Are you a flowing river [of the Word of God] or a dry stream bed? I'm willing to wager that if you haven't carved out a pattern of consistent and habitual family devotions, your family suffers from negligence, and exists in a spiritually drought-stricken condition. Could it be your 'I teach them whenever' policy in actuality amounts to a 'I teach them never' reality?" (Chanski, Manly Dominion, pg. 140-142)

Chanski's point is if you don't have a plan for teaching them the Bible regularly you're most likely never doing it. It's like if you don't have a plan for exercise or reading you're not doing it.

Chanski: "A child born into your family has approximately twenty years to live under your roof. That translates into 7300 potential days for pouring into his thirsty mind the waters of biblical instruction. Let's liken his soul capacity to an Olympic-size swimming pool. If each day, you poured a large pail of water into the pool, by the end of the twenty years, you'd have some real depth. It would be nearly full to the brim. On the other hand, if you forgot to pour on half the days, the pool would hardly be swimmable. If you neglected pouring on most of the days, the pool would only be wadeable. Do we want our children to have spiritual depth? Or are we content for them to be spiritually shallow?" (Ibid.)

Men, by God's grace and design, the training of your children is on you. You need a plan, you need persistence, and you need to get going. Fill the pool of your kids' heart with grace and truth and love of the Lord their God.

Pray