

Parenting is Tough!

Ephesians 6:1-4

Greek word used for **children** denotes those who are still dependant on their parents

- They have not yet been recognized as adults or married
- Some of you are parents who are beyond this phase—you may need to repent (to God and children)
- Some of you are not yet parents—you may recognize the source of some of your wounding and need to bring that to Jesus
- None of us had perfect parents—none of us are (I have struggled—just this week)

Paul appeals to the 5th Commandment

- Children obeying their parents is an issue of human flourishing

The child that does not LEARN to obey his parents is not likely to grow up obeying any authority

- **Most importantly God**

If humanity flourishes when children obey, **then** parents must be faithful to consistently teach them to obey

But teaching our children is hard—discipline in a consistent godly manner is tremendously difficult—therefore, many parents do not do it

- The children suffer
- “For the most part children do not **create** problems; they **reveal** them.” -Warren Wiersbe¹

Parents who cannot correctly discipline their children sometimes cannot discipline themselves

- Obedience to authority must be modeled (ouch)
- Children must see it in you—particularly in your obedience to God

“**Do not provoke your children to anger**”

- Cf. Colossians: “**Do not exasperate your children that they may not lose heart**” (Colossians 3:21)
- Tough! We are usually the ones who are provoked to anger and exasperated!
- **Exasperate** = Irritate intensely, infuriate
- **Provoke** = Stimulate or give rise to a reaction or emotion in someone (**anger**)
- I.e. **to seethe with resentment and irritation**

What **provocation** and **exasperation** look like:

- It makes unreasonable demands on the child
- It humiliates a child
- It manifests no loving understanding of a child’s unique personality
- It is marked by constant nagging
- It irritates them by perpetual fault-finding
- See **Psalms 103:8-14** (NLT) for the example of God’s fathering of us

The usual result of provocation is **strife** (angry or bitter conflict)

- And a parent that continually exasperates his/her child will produce a child of strife

The reason that we are forbidden to provoke our children to anger or exasperate them is:

- “... **That they may not lose heart**” (Col. 3:21b) (NASB)
- “... **lest they be discouraged**” (KJV)
- “... **they will become discouraged and quit trying**” (NLT)
- **Discourage:** Cause someone to lose confidence or enthusiasm

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Complete* (Commentary on Colossians), 128.

When our children are young it sometimes seems as if they can do no wrong—when they get older, it sometimes seems as if they cannot do anything right

- Neither are true of course

In the older years we easily **provoke them to anger** or **exasperate** them with... **constant criticism**

The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not **constantly accuse us...** He does not **deal harshly** with us, as we deserve. (Psalm 103:8-10)

"A child learns what he lives. If he lives with constant criticism he does not learn responsibility. He learns to condemn himself and to find fault with others. He learns to doubt his own judgment, to disparage his own ability, and to distrust the intentions of others. And above all, he learns to live with continual expectation of impending doom."²

This is a picture of humanity under the law—apart from the Gospel

- We must learn to let our parenting be shaped by the Gospel
- Which has as its foundation law—but finds its fulfillment in grace
- The same tension that is in the Gospel (law/grace) is in parenting
- There is a balance to be struck

We are all hard working busy people—and we get moody and short and demanding

- We need to be careful with our kids—not to provoke them to anger or exasperate them when we are angry and exasperated!

We need the help of the Holy Spirit in these times

In our moodiness and tiredness we sometimes harm our children by swinging from extreme permissiveness to extreme legalism

- Usually according to mood and/or convenience
- This can happen moment to moment, day to day
- But it usually happens from when they are young to when they are teenagers
 - It is so time consuming to discipline our children when they are young and the consequences seem so minor—we let so much slide
 - Then we see the consequences in very real ways when they get older and we tend to over-correct

Parenting challenge: Have clear standards and do discipline

The example of God as our Father:

- Hebrews 12:5-11 (NLT)

And have you entirely forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his children? He said, "My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when He corrects you. **For the Lord disciplines those He loves**, and He punishes those He accepts as His children."

As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as His own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined?

If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really His children after all... God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

God disciplines his children:

- His discipline is evidence that we are His children
- His discipline proves that He loves us
- His discipline causes us to grow correctly as people and Christians

² Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*, p. 72

When it comes to children:

- God has given them a conscience and they need parameters in which they can begin to exercise that conscience and develop healthy self-esteem

Look at what one study found:³

- Parents of **high-esteem children** were stricter in their approach to discipline. These homes demanded accountability, responsibility and self-control.
- Parents of **low-esteem children**, on the other hand, created insecurity by their permissiveness. These children felt the rules weren't enforced because nobody cared enough to get involved.

**Lack of Standards and the failure to discipline causes children to lose heart.
You are doing your children a huge disservice by refusing to discipline them.**

Prov. 19:18 (NLT)

Discipline your children while there is hope. If you don't, you will ruin their lives.

Prov. 13:24 (NLT)

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.

Prov. 23:13-14 (NLT)

Don't fail to correct your children. They won't die if you spank them. Physical discipline may well save them from death.

Prov. 22:15 (NASB)

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

Prov. 29:15 & 17 (NASB)

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.
Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul.

Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4^b)

Tenderness:

- The words 'bring them up' = 'to nourish or feed'
- The idea is to **cherish and nourish** by speaking to your children with **gentleness and friendliness**
- "He does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve... [He] is tender and compassionate" (Psalm 103:9, 13)
- Isaiah 42:3 (About the ministry of Jesus) "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish..."

Children Need:

To be hugged and kissed and held	(The Heavenly Father's Example: Embracing the Prodigal Son)
To be told 'I love you'	(The Heavenly Father's Example: "This is my beloved Son...")
To be praised	(The Heavenly Father's Example: "...in whom I am well pleased")
To be heard and listened to	(The Heavenly Father's Example: He hears our prayers)
To be invited into our world	(The Heavenly Father's Example: Kingdom inclusion)

Discipline:

- Physical and otherwise

Instruction:

- Verbal instruction and verbal warning
- The word literally means: **To place before the mind**
- Parents responsibility

³ Dr. Stanley Coopersmith, at the University of California-Davis, evaluating more than 1,700 preadolescent boys over several years

See: **Deuteronomy 6:1-7**

- As parents we are divinely charged to teach our children about God and truth

This has to begin when the child is young:

- “The Jesuits used to say that is they could have the commanding influence in the life of a child until that child was seven years old, the child was theirs. By then the child’s character was formed, his convictions were embedded, and his course was set. No amount of contrary teaching would greatly alter the basic bent of that child.”⁴
- Of course Jesus can change everything... but generally speaking... start young!
- *The Jesus Story Book Bible*
- The Christian parent must seek to lay a firm foundation of the Bible in the first 7 years and then build on that in the next 10 years

Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4^b)

This requires that we are present in their lives—to not be is to exasperate and provoke to anger

It has been estimated that fathers spend an average of 37 seconds a day with their infant sons, and one hour a day with their adolescents. These figures are for intact families. After divorce, 50 percent of adolescent children have no contact, 30 percent have sporadic contact and 20 percent see their father once a week or more. Average it all out and fathers spend approximately 10 minutes a day with their children.

Scripture teaches that God is intimately and infinitely concerned with our lives

- “How precious are your thoughts toward me O God. They cannot be numbered! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I awake, you are still with me!” (Psalm 139:18)
- You Father knows when a sparrow falls and you are more precious than man sparrows...
- They need YOU... YOU!
- Be involved in your children's lives... take an interest in what they are interested in (Isaiah)

When we spend time with our kids, we know them and we know their limits and can set realistic goals and boundaries (not **exasperating**)

The Lord is like a Father to His children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him. For He knows how weak we are; He remembers we are only dust. (Psalm 103:14)

We must give them opportunities to succeed and receive approval

- Goals that are realistic and consonant with who God has made them to be (not what you failed to be)
- And have to do with God wants for their life (not what you want)
- “... bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4)
- “A godly parent must warn and teach, but he must make sure that he is communicating the divine will and not merely his own petty convictions.” (Robert Gromacki)

⁴ John Phillips, *Exploring Proverbs*, 168.
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There are 4 areas of the child to be reached in the area of standards and discipline:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind**, and with all your **strength**. –Mark 12:30

1. The Heart

Jesus said about the heart:

- “**Out of the heart** come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile a person...” (Matthew 15:19-20)

"The citadel of the emotions has to be stormed and taken for Christ, for self is firmly enthroned from the very beginning. Every child also comes equipped with the capacity to love, hate, laugh, cry, desire, fear, and hope. He or she is a bundle of emotional contradictions, thanks to the fall. Parents must instill in their children a fear and horror of sin, seek to engage their affections to Christ, and meet their emotional needs. Jesus is the friend of little children and in our efforts to reach their hearts, we have a willing and wondrous ally in the Holy Spirit." –John Philips⁵

2. The Soul (conscience)

Conscience = The innate knowledge of right and wrong supplied to each human by God

- It can be conditioned... it can be sensitized or seared (Cf. 1 Timothy 4:2)
- This is why it is vital that the conscience be bonded to the Word of God and the things of God
- Scripture **trains our senses to discern good and evil** (Cf. Hebrews 5:14)
- Competition with media (where all my wrong images have been appealed to, nurtured and formed)

Scripture conditions the conscience, which the Holy Spirit eventually uses as the instrument for bringing about the conviction of sin—and conviction of sin is the prerequisite for salvation

2. The Mind

Secular education seeks to instill the values and principles and praise of this world in our children and equip them to pursue all this world has to offer

- Dismisses the basic tenets of the historic Christian faith
- We must seek to fix their attention on the world to come and bolster the truths of Christianity and the validity of the Bible
- The world will attack the identity of Jesus and the truth of Scripture for the rest of their years
- So lay a foundation early that no amount of secular influence will undermine
 - **My Story (childhood and UCSB)**

3. The Will (strength)

Much of parenting is a battle of the wills (yours and your child's)

- All of Christianity is a battle of the wills
- This is the essence of our faith
- Christ submitted His will to the Father
- “**Nevertheless, Thy will be done...**” –Jesus

⁵ Philips, 169.
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