

Fathers Who Lead
Ephesians 6:1-4

Someone put together a list of 50 Reasons Why It's Good To Be a Man. I won't read all of them but here are 10 of them.

- 10 You know stuff about tanks.
- 9 You can go to the bathroom without a support group.
- 8 If someone forgets to invite you to something he can still be your friend.
- 7 You can drop by to see a friend without bringing a little gift.
- 6 If another guy shows up at the same party in the same outfit, you might become lifelong buddies.
- 5 One wallet, one pair of shoes, one color, all seasons.
- 4 There is always a game on somewhere.
- 3 Your pals can be trusted never to trap you with, "So...notice anything different?"
- 2 If something mechanical doesn't work, you can bash it with a hammer and throw it across the room.
- 1 You can do your nails with a pocketknife.

This morning, I want to focus my attention on one verse: Eph 6:4 *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

This verse begins with the word "Fathers."

A command addressed particularly to fathers because

- they are at the head of the family,
- responsibility of running the family, and it's affairs has been given to him.

This statement is in accordance with what Paul said Eph 5:22-28 of the relationship of husband and wife.

There we read:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

According to this passage,

- it was/is the duty of the wife to submit to or obey
- but it is the corresponding duty of the husband to manifest such character that it would be a joy for her to obey him - to love her so much that "his desire would be her command."

- It is the duty of children to obey a parent;
- but it is the duty of a father to exhibit such character, and to maintain such a household, that it would be the normal thing to do for the child to obey; to command nothing that is unreasonable or improper, but to train up his children in the right ways and in pure faith in God.

So we come back to:

Ephesians 6:4. - Gives our primary responsibilities by which our fathering will be judged

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of

the Lord.”

The Apostle begins by saying: “Fathers.”

- Paul addresses just dads here because he knows that we especially need to hear this.
- He doesn't say “parents” or “moms and dads.”
- He uses the word, “Fathers.” - Today's society, fathers abdicate their role to the moms

Most of us dads are sloppy in our fathering, not giving much thought to what we're called to do. - This verse calls us to some pretty high standards.

Paul's challenge - see the word “fathers” as a verb not just a noun.

- Biologically easy to become a father, but biblically challenging to actually “father” our children.
- The Bible challenges dads to become the point men in their homes because the ultimate responsibility for what a family becomes is the father's.

Fathers are head of household, just as Christ is the head of the church

Love, nurture, guard, protect, direct, discipline, encourage, provide for

In this passage, we're given 4 “Dad Duties.” One - do not do; three - do

(1 – Avoid Exasperation)

The first duty is negative – we are told to “not exasperate our children.”

- A caution/warning to put us on guard against stirring up anger in our kids either deliberately or by carelessly provoking them.
- 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 “exasperate” means “to rouse to anger” or “to enrage.”

The present tense of the verb indicates that we are to stop doing something that is common and continuous.

This warning is calling us dads to avoid anything that will eventually break the spirit of our children.

Colossians 3:21: *“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”*

When we exasperate our kids, they can become bitter and bummed out.

It's harder and harder these days to “not exasperate our kids.”

They're growing up to learn that they can do virtually anything without being called to account.

Today's society is so worried about making kids feel bad that virtually no punishment is allowed.

Teachers don't even want to put red marks on their papers for fear of discouraging them.

Ex: In grade school, my son's teachers went to using “E” to show a failing grade because “F” had become too harsh for their tender egos.

There are times when kids become sinfully angry due to

- their own selfishness or immaturity,
- the way they are being trained by our school systems, society

There are other times when dads are guilty of aggravating their kids to the point of anger.

- by deliberately goading them, (we know the right buttons to push)
- by callously neglecting them
- by being too busy to pay attention to their needs
- by not consistently keeping them in line

This can exasperate them

When that happens, it's we dads who are sinning – and provoking our children to sin as well.

Remember that our children are commanded by God, in the 10 commandments, to honor us.

When we provoke them to wrath, we are causing them to sin against the Fifth Commandment.

We are then guilty before God for disobeying Ephesians 6:4 and also doubly guilty for causing our children to stumble.

A fine line between provoking them, exasperating them and disciplining them (which can cause anger too)

(2 – Provide Nurture)

The word “instead” shows a contrast between what we should not do and what we are to do.

Here's the first thing we are called to do: *provide nurture*.

The NIV translates this verb as “bring them up.” This is the same phrase that's used in 5:29 referring to the husband's role of “feeding and caring” for his wife.

Men, we are called to nourish our wife and children by sharing love and encouragement in the Lord

“Nurturing” - 1. To nourish; feed.; 2. To educate; train.; 3. To help grow or develop; cultivate:

Paul says that 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 of our children.

We need to be an example

Proverbs 29:15 says, “*A child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*” John MacArthur puts it this way: “What ruins most children is not what their parents do to them, but what they do not do for them.”

What strikes me here is that as a dad I'm called to not just raise two daughters and a son;

- I'm called to raise three adults.

- Provide a nurturing environment so that they grow up to become a young man and women of God.

The phrase, “bring them up” also carries with it the idea of “tutoring” and “instructing.”

- I'm a dad, but along with my wife, I also need to be a tutor and teacher for my kids.

- My most important job is to disciple my kids and to leave a legacy of faithfulness for them.

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?

- Are you looking for ways to teach and tutor your kids or are you leaving this for mom to handle?

As someone has said, “One way to correct your children is to correct the example you're setting for them.”

(3 – Provide Discipline)

The next thing Paul challenges us to do is to provide discipline or training for our kids.

This word is translated “admonition” in some translations of the Bible

- the idea of a rebuke or a warning.

Proverbs 13:24 in the New King James Version provides a strong challenge to us dads: “*He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.*”

I like the way the New Living Bible puts it: *"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 that 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 must admonish, rebuke, and discipline them. This is all part of training.

Listen carefully. I'm not advocating that you beat your kids.

- What I am saying is this: children need to be disciplined by their dads. (In love, not anger)

- Our kids not only need correction, they want it. (Guidelines, boundaries)

- If we don't give it to them, we're failing them and may cause them to fall away from the faith.

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."*

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.

Dict: Discipline: "training to act in accordance with rules;"

Sometimes punishment is involved - but for training purposes, not selfishness

Dads, our kids are looking for us to train them and love them by disciplining them.

(4 – Provide Instruction)

There's one last thing that we're called to do in this verse: we're called to provide instruction.

Notice that this instruction is to be "of the Lord."

"Lord" is an extremely exalted title as Paul uses it in the New Testament.

To say that Jesus is Lord means that

- 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 and death and pain and Satan and hell, and

- He will one day establish His kingdom in righteousness.

Dads, we are to bring up our children to hope in the triumph of God.

There are at * least three ways that we can do this:

a. Bring them up to find their place in the triumphant cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why did Christ come? Salvation, defeat Satan, give us authority over sin, to live a victorious life

b. Bring them up to see everything in relation to the victory of Christ.

Because Jesus won the victory, we too can have victory

1Co 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Victory over our emotions - anger, frustration, guilt, depressing, stress

Do whatever it takes to make all of life God-saturated for your kids. - Christ should be #1 in life

c. Bring them up to know that the path of sin is a dead end street because righteousness will prevail in the end. - Scripture is full of examples, our lives are full of examples - teach them.

Our goal 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 lifestyle of kingdom servanthood.

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."*

I know for me it's really a heart issue.

If my heart is fully focused on my God and my kids, then I will do a pretty good job of fathering.

Dads, if you sense that 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.

"Father, turn my heart to my children and turn their hearts to me."

- Ask God to turn your heart to your children and

- ask Him to turn their hearts to you.

- He'll be glad to answer a prayer like this.

So What? - Example from the animal world

Percy (African Grey parrot)- handle gently, slow movements, build trust, feed

Nurture, discipline, train, encourage; don't exasperate!

Example of my dad

My dad - phenomenal example - didn't exasperate, encouraged our strengths, wood working, track, missionary, pastor, a Christ example

(Reminders)

Dads, before you leave this service feeling piled on and discouraged by your own failures and inconsistency, let me remind you of 3 things:

1. There are no perfect fathers, except our Heavenly Father.

He is our example - if we make a mistake, get back up and do better

2. We can all be better dads if we will work at it.

We need to discipline ourselves to work at it - it is work, not easy, tiring, frustrating

3. We do not father alone. That's why we need to pray daily for our kids.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." God is there to help.