

Fathers Who Father Ephesians 6:4

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Happy Fathers Day. Now, I recognize that for some of you your father is no longer here or had dropped the ball somehow. The U.S. Census Bureau has even stated that we've become a fatherless nation.

Seven years ago, 33% of the children in America went to bed without their biological father in the home. That has risen to 43% today.

So today, I want to draw our attention to a verse that is only 22 words long. As we unpack it, we'll see that fathers who are intentional make the greatest impact.

Ephesians 6:4, *"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."*

It's helpful to know the cultural setting in which this Scripture was written. Rome had a law called *patria potestas*, which means "the father's power."

By law, a father's children and wife were regarded as his personal property. He could do with them what he wished.

A displeased father could disown his kids, sell them into slavery, or even kill them with no consequences.

When a child was born, the newborn was placed between the father's feet. If the father picked up the baby, the child stayed in the home.

If he turned and walked away, the child was either left to die or sold at auction.

Things are not much better today! Are you aware that more than 57 million babies have been aborted since abortion was legalized in 1973?

Children have become a disposable commodity in our society, just as they were in ancient Rome.

Now, notice how this verse begins: “*And you, fathers.*” Paul laid out the Biblical roles of husbands and wives in chapter 5.

Then, in the first three verses of chapter 6, he spells out the importance of children obeying and honoring their parents.

Now, here in verse 4, he moves to fathers. That word “*you*” is emphatic, as if he’s calling out fathers in order get their attention.

Paul’s just addressing fathers here because he knows that we need to hear this. In essence we’re being challenged to see the word “*fathers*” as a verb, not just a noun.

It’s biologically easy to become a father, but Biblically challenging to actually “father” our children.

Here in verse 4, we’re given one caution and four commands which causes us to discover that fathers who are intentional make the greatest impact.

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The first command is negative – “*Do not provoke your children to wrath.*” Another version says, “*Do not exasperate your children.*”

God starts with a negative command because He knows that all fathers are fallen creatures. They are prone to abuse their authority in the home.

The Greek word translated “*provoke*” means “*to rouse to anger, to enrage, irritate or embitter.*” The present tense of the verb indicates that we’re to stop doing something that’s continuous.

This warning is calling all fathers to avoid anything that’ll eventually break the spirit of our children.

Colossians 3:21 expands this caution: “*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*” When we exasperate our children, they can become bitter and bummed out.

Remember, our children are commanded by God to honor us. When we provoke them to wrath, we’re causing them to break the Fifth Commandment.

In such cases we’re guilty before God for disobeying Ephesians 6:4 and also doubly guilty for causing our children to stumble. So, how do we do this?

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Here are some common ways that fathers exasperate their children:

First, fathers can be overprotective. Laban, an Old Testament father, was an overprotective and domineering parent.

He dealt dishonestly with Jacob in order to get him to marry his daughter Leah instead of Rachel.

Ironically, despite Laban’s overprotective interfering, the daughters’ assessment was that their father didn’t really care for them.

Listen to what they say about their father in Genesis 31:15, “*Does he not regard us as foreigners?*”

Then the flip side of overprotection is overindulgence. Excessively indulgent parents are as likely to provoke their children to wrath as much as those who stifle them.

Studies show that children given too much freedom begin to feel insecure and unloved.

Guard against commitments that take your children away from gathering with God's people. You don't want them to grow up thinking that sports or other activities are more important than church.

Because our society has fostered increasingly permissive attitudes toward children, we're now reaping the harvest of a whole generation of angry young people who end up resenting their parents.

A third way to exasperate children is by showing favoritism. Isaac favored Esau over Jacob while Rebecca preferred Jacob. As a result, that family fractured and two brothers became bitter rivals.

Fathers can also provoke their children to wrath by constantly pushing perfection; setting unrealistic Goals.

1 Thessalonians 2:11 reveals this in Paul's fatherly concern for the church: *"We exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children."*

While it's true that we're called to exhort and charge our children, we're also to encourage them.

A fifth way to provoke our children is through discouragement; cut out criticism and sarcasm. Look for ways to celebrate and affirm.

Give approval spontaneously so our children don't have to earn it, or look for it elsewhere. Let's catch our children doing things right instead of always lashing out at them for everything they do wrong.

Here's a simple rule of thumb: For every time you have to correct, equalize it with a word of encouragement.

Another way to exasperate your children is by neglecting them. When we fail to show affection or act indifferently toward our kids, we can cause them to burn with anger.

We neglect our children by never being home; or by being home yet absent from their lives.

Then there is excessive discipline. Too much punishment is a sure way to provoke a child to anger.

Fathers, don't ride your kids constantly. The father who throws his weight around, whether physically or verbally, can be devastating to a child's spirit.

Being a hypocrite is another way to provoke your child to anger. We must be a man of integrity. Let me tell you, children have a hypocrisy meter. They can tell when we're faking our faith.

Finally, if you don't want angry offspring then make sure you are not an angry man. John Piper said, *"Fathers cause their children's souls to shrivel into small, hard, angry shells mainly by being like that themselves."*

Slide 4

Then Paul inserts that little word "but" here in verse 4. Paul is showing a contrast between what we shouldn't do and what we are to do.

The first thing fathers are called to do is to *"bring them up."* This is the same phrase that's used in Ephesians 5:29 where Paul refers to the husband's role of *"nourishing and cherishing"* his wife.

Calvin wrote that children are to “*be fondly cherished.*” So, underline that phrase “*bring them up.*”

We’re to bring our children up because they’ll not get there by themselves. Proverbs 29:15 says, “*A child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*”

Fathers, how are you doing on this one? Are you providing a nurturing atmosphere in your home in which your children can grow up to love and serve Christ?

Now notice the next expectation: “*in the training.*” This word “*training*” carries with it the idea of a rebuke or a warning.

I like the way the *New Living Translation* renders Proverbs 13:24, “*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 it’s unkind, but actually, when you don’t discipline, you’re not loving them.

In most families, mothers discipline the children, but children need to be disciplined by their fathers.

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; at the core of discipline is discipleship.

There is joy in correction even though it hurts. Job 5:17, “Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.”

Besides enriching and educating, we’re also to exhort. The word “*admonition*” has been equated with “to catechize,” to instruct someone in the principles of Christian religion by means of questions and answers.

But it’s more than just tossing information at our children. One Greek lexicon defines it this way: “*to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct.*” We can admonish only after we’re living it out in our own lives.

Deuteronomy 4:9, “*Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*”

Fathers, make sure you’re enriching, educating and exhorting. Then there’s one more expectation: Evangelize.

Notice that all of this is to be “*of the Lord.*” “*Lord*” is an extremely exalted title in the New Testament.

To say that Jesus is Lord means that He’s the rightful king of the universe, ruler over the entire world, commander of all the armies of heaven

He’s triumphant over sin and death and pain and Satan and Hell, and one day He’ll establish His kingdom in righteousness.

Therefore, bring your children up to know that the path of sin is a dead-end street and the only way to be saved and satisfied is through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Bring them up to see everything in relation to the victory of God. Do whatever it takes to make all of life God-saturated so they can find their place in the triumphant cause of Christ.

Fathers, you are the point man in your home. You're the coach of your team. You're the captain and your barracks is boot camp for training young soldiers for the greatest combat ever.

Your residence is a launching pad for missiles of missionary zeal aimed at the unreached peoples of the world.

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Conclusion

Our goal is not merely to get our children to outwardly conform to a list of rules, our mandate is to develop children who seek to glorify God with their lives.

It's not enough to teach them to do good things; our job is to teach our children to live on mission by gathering, growing, giving and going.

But there's something even more critical. In order to be a father who leads his children well, you must be a father who has placed his faith in Jesus Christ.

If you want to be a good father, you must be a growing disciple. There's no way to father in your own strength.

The only way to fulfill the family responsibilities found in Ephesians 5 and 6 is by obeying the command of Ephesians 5:18: *"Be filled with the Spirit."*

Ephesians 6:10 says that we're to *"be strong in the Lord,"* and in 6:11 we're called to put on our *"spiritual armor"* because we are in a spiritual battle.

Satan is at war with our families and he'll do all he can to take you down, and your family with you.

Therefore, let me remind you of 3 things:

- There are no perfect fathers, except our Heavenly Father.
- You will be a better father if you fully surrender to Christ and allow Him to work through you, and...
- You do not father alone.

Fathers, you are not alone. Your heavenly Father is standing right next to you, urging you on, cautioning you to not provoke your children to wrath but also urging you to enrich, educate, exhort and evangelize.

We have the privilege of standing guard over our children. We can do it, because fathers who are intentional make a great impact.