
Your Child's Nurture

Ephesians 6:1-4²

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What do you think of when you hear the word *nurture*?

We usually think exclusively in what is positive – nurture = all that is done to provide for, to promote and to praise the child's well-being.

Nurture is defined almost everywhere as: to promote and sustain the growth and development of a person or aptitude through teaching, training, and reinforcement.

Older translations of Ephesians 6 say, "Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Newer translations say, "in the discipline and instruction..." Is this a good shift? Have the translators missed something? Or are they capturing something that is lost *because the word has shifted in meaning*?

It seems to me that it is both. We ought to nurture our children in the old sense of the word and in the newer use of the word.

Parents should nurture their children's growth, maturity, competency, aptitude and personhood. We should do so through careful, loving, supportive parenting.

Parents should nurture their children through the means the Bible commands and commends.

The Spirit has established an emphasis for us in these texts. The world has other concerns and misplaced priorities. So we want to listen to how the Lord directs us in nurturing our children.

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God's Words for Children

(v. 1-3)

This begins with what God expects of children and what God requires parents to teach and train them to do.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. (Colossians 3:20, ESV)

Whom the Bible Speaking To

(v. 1-2)

This command is spoken to you children. You are hearing God's Word. The Apostle Paul has called for your attention. Listen to him. He is going to tell you what God says to you. This command is addressed to all sons and daughters who live in their parent's home or are primarily dependent on them for support. Biblical parenting will move primarily from commanding to counseling. Children are to hear and heed both.

What the Bible Commands

Children, what is required of you? What does God tell you to do? Fathers, what does God tell you to expect of your children?

Fathers are to train children to obey

(v. 1)

Fathers, this has to do with your child's actions. You tell them to do something, they should do it. You tell them to stop doing something, they should stop. You should train your children to do what you tell them as soon as they can. As they get older, allow them to talk to you about what you have told them and be willing to listen. Children, when you obey, your parents are more likely to listen to you than when you don't obey them.

The reason they are to obey is just simply that it is right to do. Do you see it here in the Bible? Obey your parents *in the Lord for this is right*. This is worded so that everyone understands something very, very clearly. Here it is; are you listening?

*When you disobey your parents, you are disobeying God!
When you obey your parents, you are obeying God.*

Fathers are to train children to be respectful

(v. 2)

Fathers, this has to do with your child's attitudes. They are to honor and respect their parents. This command is generally used in the positive sense. You should be training them to respect, to look up to, to highly regard you as their parents. Children, what is your attitude towards your parents. Do you look up to them? Or do you speak disrespectfully to them? Do you criticize them to your friends?

Why must you do this? Why must fathers train their children to obey and to honor their parents?

It is right.

God has said it is the right thing, so it is the right thing. Grace has commands too. Being under grace does not make us without requirements. If you do not train your children to obey, you are not doing what is right. You are not living under grace. Ephesians and Colossians are, after all, New Covenant books.

It is best.

What God is saying that not only is it right, but it is best for your children to obey and honor their parents. This was the first of the Ten Commandments that has a promise attached to it. Obey the command and things will go better for you in your home and in your life.

It is important.

It is very, very important that children are trained to respect their parents. It is very important that children respect all authority. Why do I say that it is *important*? Because this is the first commandment that had a promise connected to it. Paul does **not** quote this commandment to establish *that* children ought to honor their parents. He points to this text *to show how important honoring parents is*. This is not used as proof but that it is a priority that sons and daughters ought to honor parents.

What is the promise? You will live a long time. In the Old Testament, this had to do with physical life. But it is a promise that is pointing to something greater. It is pointing to having eternal life. It is pointing to the new creation. Those who honor their parents are living the new creation life.

Children, when you obey and honor your parents, you please God. He is happy with you. When you disobey or dishonor your parents, you sin. Sin is wrong. Sin brings God's judgment. Now you may say, "I cannot do this. This is too hard for me. I don't want to obey my parents." This is when you need Jesus. You need to surrender first to Him and then to your parents. When you disobey, God offers his forgiveness.

This text is not addressed directly to parents. It is addressed to children. However, fathers, you must train your children to obey and honor you. The next sentences in the text and this month of sermons will help you with that. But, you cannot make your children obey or honor you. Yes, you should teach them what they need to do. You should discipline them when they don't. But you cannot force a child to obey. You can call for it, command in it but you cannot cause it to happen. That is God's work in that child at that time. You have to trust God that He will use your godly parenting as a means of grace in your children's lives.

Who is the Example

The ultimate example of this is the Lord Jesus Christ. He so honored His heavenly Father in His heart that He obeyed the Father at all times. He is the son who always pleased His Father. He always did His Father's will. He honored His Father. When He was on earth, He obeyed and honored His earthly parents. Because He did you can.

God's Will for Fathers

(v. 4)

Now, I want to speak to parents and fathers in particular. We are going to be spending the whole month unpacking Ephesians 5:4 and Colossians 3:21. We will be looking at both the underlying reasons for these commands as well as giving much application.

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21, ESV)

Who is Responsible

While many attempts have been made to make this addressed to both parents, it seems to me that Paul is speaking to... well, fathers. He has used the common term for parents in the sentences before. Now he uses the term for a father. Now this does not mean that mothers then are allowed to provoke their children. It does not mean that mothers are not required to bring them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. But we must give attention to the fact that fathers are being addressed.

Why is this so? Several reasons come to mind from the Bible.

FATHERS ARE THE HEAD OF THEIR HOMES. They are the ones responsible to ensure that the Bible is implemented in the day-to-day living in the home.

FATHERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. The Bible views fathers as being instrumental in the rearing of children. Failure on the part of a father to carry out his responsibility has disastrous effects on his children.

FATHERS ARE MORE PRONE TO BE LESS CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN. Many fathers believe the false notion that children are a mother's responsibility until they reach a certain age. Then he, the father, will take over. The problems with that are obvious. He will have no relationship with his children. He has had little influence on this his children. He will not have earned their respect.

But most importantly, GOD IS PRIMARILY PORTRAYED IN THE BIBLE AS A FATHER. This is the great reality of which we earthly fathers are but a dim (and often, dim-witted) reflection. This is addressed to fathers because God is a Father.

So, past, present and potential fathers, this is to you and for you.

The Marks of a Respected Father

There is an important connection between what is required of children and the character of their father. God's character shapes the way He deals with us. The way we deal with our children reflects our character as fathers. As we parent our children in a way that is pleasing to God, we will be giving them grace. The grace of God will flow through our godly parenting.

Briefly, let me just highlight some characteristics we will be developing through this series this month. Grace giving, godly parenting will:

Expect obedience in a godly way...

Correct disobedience in a Biblical way...

Reflect the kind of father your children can honor and respect...

Now, the Bible has more to say about the marks of a godly man. These are reflected in the requirements for elders. Manage your household well (*Elder qualifications*)

Note what is required of mature men who are qualified to lead the church.

1 Timothy 3:4–5 —

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

Titus 1:7–9 —

⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give **instruction** in sound doctrine and also **to rebuke** those who contradict it.

Notice what is expected of any godly man and thus is required of all elders. In their homes, godly men are marked by:

Intentional managing (not ruling, by-the-way) of the household...

Leading and parenting with dignity that earns respect...

Keeping his children submissive - how?

So a Christian father was to be a self-controlled, consistent, nurturing, disciplining and teaching parent. This is addressed to fathers who have the primary responsibility for child rearing. The actual implementation is to be shared by both parents, but the responsibility for Biblical child-rearing is placed on the father's shoulders. You may delegate to your wife, to tutors, to schools – but you must not surrender it and you had better be engaged with what is going on and ensuring that your children are Biblically reared.

Negative: Do not provoke...

How does a father provoke his children to wrath? By doing the opposite of nurturing discipline and instruction or failing to do it at all. You must do what the Bible says the way the Bible says to do it. This means consistent discipline in counsel, correction and chastening with the rod and other Biblical means. This means instruction so that children know what is expected, know how to do what is expected with teaching, retraining and reinforcement.

Fathers, you must not exasperate or provoke your children to anger. Don't do things to your children that stir up long-term anger in them. Do not embitter them. This is a single word in the original making it difficult. Do not treat your children in such a way that they become an angry, bitter person. Fathers provoke their children by being unjust, unfaithful, unkind, unreasonable, unloving, inattentive, inconsistent. Go home today and make a list of all the things that your employer does that exasperate, anger and frustrate you. Now, do you do any of those things to you children? Why would you do to your children what you loathe having done to you?

Positive: Do bring them up...

Notice the little word, "but". How do you not provoke your children? You do what is required. You bring them up, you rear your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Fathers, you are responsible for the rearing of your children. Yes, you may delegate some of its implementation to your wife, school, baby-sitters, children's workers and so on. But you cannot give away your responsibly. You will still be held accountable for the kind of rearing your children receive regardless of who is doing it.

Now let's consider those two important spheres in which you must rear your children.

In the discipline of the Lord

Discipline is everything you do to help your children become pleasing to God. It is both preventative and corrective. It is not only about what they do wrong, but it is to help them develop life skills as well as pleasing God.

Biblical discipline requires clarity. Children must clearly know what is expected of them. It requires you to connect choices to consequences. It requires chastening that is framed by the Scripture. It will move over time from imposed chastening to natural consequences.

Biblical discipline is not punishment. Punishment is what happens in the legal realm. You are their father not their judge. Chastening and discipline are what are done by fathers.

God is the perfect father who, for the love of His children, chastens them regularly (Hebrews 12).

In the instruction of the Lord

Fathers, you are not only responsible for the discipline of your children, but also for their instruction. You are to ensure that your children are given all the instruction they need to live in God's world with God's people God's way. Now, others may do that actual instruction, but you are responsible for it.

You see your responsibility. Having family devotions may be in view here. But it can be a pitiful and small substitute for a holistic teaching of your children where the Word of God is the basic tapestry woven into the fabric of life.

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Of the Lord

From the Lord's example...

By the Lord's instruction...

With the Lord's people...

Reflect and Respond

Now, to many of you younger parents this sounds too much like all law and not much grace. This is a deep misunderstanding of our life in Christ and under grace.

Grace is an attitude towards others that reflects God's attitude towards us...

Grace enables others to do what is required of them just as God gives us grace to do what He requires of us.

Grace transforms others just as God's grace transforms our lives.

Grace comes through means. God grants you grace through the means of grace. Think how a wire conducts electricity or a pipe carries water. So the Word, prayer, fellowship, worship, etc. all are conduits of grace. And so is discipline and instruction.

So the Bible is calling you to the grace and duty of Biblical parenting.

Children, to obey and honor your parents because it is right and because it is best.

Parents, to rear your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord lest you provoke your children to anger and exasperate them.

Some of you simply need the grace of repentance and change. You know that you need to grow and change in this area. You need to confess failure to the Lord and possibly even your children. Then you need to walk in grace and obedience.

Many of you can rejoice and be grateful. God has given you much grace and wisdom in this area. May you be strong to carry on. May you grow in wisdom. May you pass on what you have learned to younger parents and especially to younger men.

May God be pleased to raise up many wonderful fathers among us. May he grant that our children will be obedient and respectful. All by grace. All for His glory.