

**A Godly Father**  
*The Godly Family*  
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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 6:4  
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Let us read again in Ephesians 6. Ephesians 6 and we'll read together in verse 4.

4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The biggest crisis facing our culture is a failure of fatherhood. That's not just a view of Christian analysts and commentators but increasingly of secular analysts and commentators. One of those commentators, Blake Wilson, has called this "daddy deprivation," and we would put it something like this: a failure of men to be the fathers that God has created them and called them to be.

It's a sad fact that 40% of children in America will go to bed this evening in a house where the father is absent, 40% of American children. In fact, before an American child reaches the age of 18, 50% of them will spend significant times without any father in the home and sociologists who have studied this are increasingly linking this failure of fatherhood to many of the indicators of childhood deprivation. It's been linked to child abuse. It's been linked to teenage pregnancy. It's been linked to drug abuse. It's been connected, really, to just a general failure to thrive, this failure of fatherhood. And yet our political leaders, on the whole, or media on the whole, largely ignores this. It's really an unspoken problem because, of course, it contradicts the general media, political, judicial aim of, really if not removing the family structure from our society, then at least weakening it or normalizing it with all other abnormal patterns or structures of living but we can't do that. We have to look at the Bible and we have to build a pattern of fatherhood for not just our young boys and teenagers growing up, but also for existing fathers to also correct and change.

So this, really, is the second in our series looking at family life, "A Godly Family." We looked at last time a godly mother and gave a general outline of that with some topics that we'd like to come back to and deal with in more detail and this is similar here, we'd like to sketch an outline of a godly father, covering the main basis, the main structure of godly fatherhood, again, with some topics that we'll touch on but that we'd like to come back to and deal with in far more detail. Again just a note, we're dealing here today with fathering. It's the father's relationship to his children, not with the father's relationship to

his wife. That, again, will be a separate subject. So we're dealing specifically with fathering.

We're also trying to get all our data, all our information, all our doctrine, from the Bible. Probably none of us realize how much we have absorbed our models and methods of fathering from outside the Bible. We are influenced by our upbringing, for a start. Our model of fatherhood may be taken largely from a cultural, a national view of fathering. It differs in different countries. The Scottish fatherhood is different to the Dutch, which is different to the American, but we must try and put aside our cultural, national, background preferences and not take on board any kind of stereotype but focus on Bible type to try and use the Bible to shape and model our fathering entirely.

Of course we also have media influences which tend to portray fathers in two extremes: either as this macho, independent person who doesn't need or want anyone in their lives, or you have the very weak and almost effeminate character who's really good for nothing and, again, trying to drive these image, power, influential images, out of our minds and get all our influence from the Bible. Bible types, not stereotypes.

Also, no father can really be the father God calls him to be unless he is in relationship with God as his Father and that's the foundation. We're looking here at a kind of secondary relationship, very important, father to children, but there is a primary relationship above that, that's a father to God. And yes, we can get lots of practical instruction and so on and do's and don'ts but really without that contact, that communion, that connection with God the Father, then all these do's and don'ts are eventually going to be weakened and disappear. So this is a call to enter into relationship with God as Father which can only be done through his Son, Jesus Christ, and it's also a call to deepen that relationship with God as Father if, indeed, you have it, that you make that even more important and central because that's bound to have a blessed effect on your own fathering of your own children.

This, of course, brings us to the source of our power as well. As we go through the Bible's teaching on this today, I'm sure every father will want to crawl under the pew or run out the door because you'll feel your failure, you'll feel your inability, you'll feel your powerlessness. You can say, "Well, who can do this?" Well, none of us can in and of ourselves but the amazing thing is that God not only gives us himself as a model but also gives us of his power. His fatherly spirit is sent into our hearts to fuel our fatherhood. We are not alone in this. We are not left to our own efforts and energies.

So with that said, what is a godly father? What are the characteristics? I'd like to look at this verse in Ephesians 6:4 but we'll be referring to other verses as well. The first thing is really this: a father leads his children. He leads his children. Children should be in no doubt as to who is the ultimate authority in the home. They shouldn't have a question over this, "Dad's in charge." It's not mother and it's not themselves. The father takes the lead. He does this by directing the home, by leading it, by setting its direction in every area of life.

Now, he doesn't do this as a dictator, he does it as a servant, and that's the big difference between some of the worldly models of fatherhood and the Bible's. Yes, the Bible sets up the man as the head of his home, as the leader, as the authority, but as a servant, not as a ruler. He is given this authority and he is given this leadership but it's to be exercised in the service of his family and of his children and that means he will consult his wife and his children. He will listen to their opinions. He will seek to explain himself and his decisions. He'll seek to persuade. That's what God does throughout the pages of the Bible in his own fathering. He doesn't just give us, "Do it!" he gives us lots of, "Here's why," as well and he enters into conversation. Ultimately, of course, we have to do it. Ultimately, there is authority but it's not dictatorial. There is setting of direction. This word here, "bring them up," it's literally "carry them along." There is a picture of a father, as it were, picking up his children and setting the direction of their lives and of the whole family structure.

That's what's involved in leading but also he doesn't just set the direction of the home, he sets the whole tone of the home. Fathers probably don't realize how important this is, the tone that they set; the kind of spirit; the atmosphere of the home is largely determined by the father. The spiritual tone, of course, first and foremost. What kind of spiritual tone does a father set? Does he make clear that spiritual things are the most important thing in the world to him and for him and his children too? Does he make clear that education, sporting achievements, friendships, marriages, future marriages, and so on, important as they are, are all secondary to the great question of his children's salvation? That's the primary spiritual tone that must be set in a home; that we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. All other things, they can come along in the train of that but first and foremost it's kingdom. "Children, are you going to the kingdom? Are you in the kingdom? Are you under the King?" The father sets an evangelistic tone in the home, pressing the Gospel upon his children; making clear to them that whatever else they accomplish in life, that they must be saved.

A father also sets, of course, the emotional tone, the sense of whether this is a happy home or a miserable home. When we are around, what kind of atmosphere do we bring with us when we walk in the door from work or wherever? What tone do we set? Is it upbeat? Is it cheerful? Is it happy? Or is it miserable? Downbeat? Grumpy?

One of the best books that you'll find on manhood and masculinity, covering fatherhood as well as many other topics such as marriage and work and friendships and church, is called "The Masculine Mandate," by Richard Philips. The Masculine Mandate. Very easy read. Wonderful book. And he wrote this, "A sense of humor is a huge help in wielding authority and exercising discipline. To the extent there is a heaviness in the air, our authority seems harsh and impersonal, but if the overall environment is lighthearted and happy, children recognize the contrast when it comes to punishment and their sense of their parents' overall good-will is thereby enhanced."

So he sets direction; he sets tone; of course, the most important thing in all of that is worship, family worship and Sunday worship. It's not easy for men to be at home for family worship in the morning and evening but huge and massive attempts should be

made to be home for at least one time of family worship each day. Wherever it's found in the diary of the day, that great effort be made if work and circumstances permit. And if it doesn't daily, then every effort made to at least do that as many days as possible. But also, of course, Sunday worship, that the father arrange the home so that the whole week begins with this day, looks forward to this day, and grows out of this day, and that the family is brought to church for worship.

This is what's involved, at least, in leading our children: setting direction, setting tone, leading in worship. He leads his children. Secondly, he teaches his children. That's really bound up in this verse. "You fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." And the word "nurture" there is a very wide word but it includes at least instruction. Teaching. There is the negative admonition, as it were, the chastisement, we'll look at that, but there's also this positive input into his children's lives. It's not just coming in with a heavy hand of correction but there is this instruction, there is this edification, there is this nourishing of his children.

It's interesting how here and in the Old Testament God gives this responsibility to fathers. Fathers may choose to delegate that work, they may choose how and when and who and where this education, this nourishment takes place, at least some of it. It may be in the home, it may be in a school, but the father retains responsibility. It's not, "Oh well, mom will do that. Or, oh well, school will do that." No, the father here is given this huge responsibility and it's not a delegation that removes the father from the process.

And what is the single criteria for this kind of education? Well, it's brought before us here: the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Whatever else is true, this has got to be true. Wherever the education takes place, whoever does the educating, this has to characterize it, the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Now, I'd like to preach another sermon the whole subject of Christian education, also in family worship, but let me just say these four things about the kind of education that we should be seeking for our children and measuring our education by these four standards. The first is this: that the Bible is the foundation of it all. Whether it's in the home or in a school, the Bible is the foundation. Not tradition, the way it's always been done. Not personal preference, what I like and prefer. Not the majority practice, what everyone else is doing. Never we do it thoughtlessly, as well, but this: the Bible. The Bible is to be the content of at least some of the education, some of the courses. The Bible should be threaded throughout every course and referred to frequently in every course. And the Bible should be the measure of every course. In other words, nothing taught that is against the Bible. The Bible is to be our foundation.

But secondly, the Gospel is to be our priority. The Gospel is to be our priority. Now as parents whether we're homeschoolers or we give that out to educators in schools, we want our children to be taught some do's and don'ts. We want them to be trained in morals and manners. We want them to be taught the law of God because we know this is not only what pleases God but what's good for our children too. But do's and don'ts, manners and morals, are not the priority. The Gospel is the priority. We don't want to just churn out

children who are living in outward conformity to the law of God and just be a kind of production line, a conveyor belt of Pharisees. No, we want our children's hearts changed and only the Gospel can do that. Only the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, only the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit can do this for our children.

So whatever, sometimes whether we're teaching in a school or at home, you get so taken up with physics and math and history and geography and all the rules and regulations and the structures and the systems, but what about the Gospel? The core of it all, it's so easy just to neglect it, to ignore it, to sideline it, to forget about it. The Gospel should be the priority and so we want to ask whoever is doing the teaching, are they preaching the Gospel as opportunity arises? Are they pressing home in our children the need to be born again, to be saved, to know Jesus Christ personally? Are they calling our children to faith and repentance? Are they pointing them to Jesus Christ? Are they making clear the willingness of God to save all who come to him through Christ? Is that Gospel modeled by the teacher? In the home or in the school, is it lived out in the school's administration? Does it flavor everything?

The Bible is our foundation, the Gospel is our priority, thirdly, is there a balanced view of the world? We want our children to be warned about the world. We want them to be warned about worldliness and that doesn't just mean length of hair and length of skirt. It means heart worldliness, the kind of sins within. It's not so easy to detect and much easier to hide and usually much more respectable, the kind of worldliness which is so damaging to the soul: idolatry, self-love, vanity, gossip, bringing down people, slashing with our tongues. That kind of worldliness, lust within which can live very well with long skirts and long hair and boys in three piece suits. It's heart worldliness especially that we want our children warned against.

But we also want our children prepared for the world. This is part of the balance. We want our children trained and educated with the kinds of knowledge and arguments that they're going to need to interact with the world views they're going to come into contact with out there. They need to know about the false religions and the false philosophies and ideologies. They need to be able to defend from the Bible our faith and be able to show the error of all the false ways of thinking and living in the world.

We also want our children to embrace the world, the world of God's goodness, the evidence of God's work in the world in common grace. We don't just want our children to have a totally negative view of this world. No, it's full of God's mercy and full of God's goodness and full of God's beauty as well, so we want our children to have that kind of balanced view of the world. Yes, warned against worldliness but also prepared for the world and also embracing God's work in the world in different spheres and realms.

Then the fourth area as a holistic view of human flourishing. We want our children to have a holistic view of human flourishing and that really involves three areas: the head, the heart and the hand. We don't want to just focus on the head. That's often what we do: intellect, academia, grades, GPAs, as if that's the be-all and the end-all of human flourishing, and unless you have that 4.0 or straight A's, really you're something

secondary if anything at all. It's wonderful to celebrate intellectual and academic gifts, for sure, but that's just one part of human flourishing.

We also want to cultivate the heart in terms of caring, thoughtfulness, sympathy. We want our children to be trained to not just be independent geeks who have all the grades and letters after their names, we want them to be caring and loving and looking out for one another, sensitive to the needs of others, able to relate and enter into people's weakness and suffering with sympathy, with humility.

But we also want to celebrate the hand, the practical skills that God has given to so many people, that we celebrate these manual gifts and manual abilities, the strengths and talents and skills that he has bestowed upon so many.

So we want our education, again whether homeschool or day school, to really exalt all three realms of human flourishing so that each flourishes and has a sense of worth and value of God's gifting and calling and that one is not degraded and downgraded at the expense of others. Fathers, this is your responsibility. You're not probably to be that teacher doing it day by day, but you're the one to decide who is to be that teacher and how that teaching is to be done and this is all included in this, "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

He leads his children. He teaches his children. I want to give you two points very briefly here. He provides for his children. We're going to cover this verse in our series on 1 Timothy but in 1 Timothy 5:8 we read, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." These are very serious words, very solemn words. We want to look at them in more detail but this is obviously part of the father's calling to provide for the physical needs of his children as well.

Fourthly, again very briefly: he protects his children. Again, this is all bound up in this whole idea of carrying. It's a protective carrying. In Psalm 101, the Psalmist also speaks there of the way he defends his home and he defends his family. The man is to be that shield and that's not just physical either. No, it's much more than that and perhaps especially today, the area of most vulnerability of most frequent attack is through the media. So the father is to be the media guardian of his home; to be the shield and utilize every means possible to defend and protect his children from all the various filthy sources that are trying to fill their children's minds and hearts. The man, the father, is to be like a man not just with his hand on the plow but with a hand on the sword, fending off attacks, warning of attacks: internet, television, smartphones, computer games, whatever they may be. Fathers, do you know what your children are watching? Using? Doing? It's your responsibility.

Lead. Teach. Provide. Protect. But also discipline. Here we come to the more, you might say, negative side of this but as with all biblical discipline, it's with a positive aim. It's to bring about correction. That's really the meaning of the word here "admonition." It's not just a finger wagging, a telling off, admonition means to correct. It's not so much of a

punishment but a chastisement that turns a child around. He's going in that direction but the aim is to get him to go in that direction.

But discipline is not an end in itself but a means to an end and that's one of the focuses of this verse because notice it says, "Ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath." Discipline can often do that, especially a father's discipline. It can exasperate children. It can weary them. It can make them give up and give in. It can actually destroy children.

I want to give you a number of ways in which you can provoke your children to wrath. I didn't say you may, but this is how we sometimes do it. How to provoke your children to wrath, first of all, with excessive discipline. Too often or too hard when we do it.

Excessive discipline.

Secondly, by disproportionate discipline. The discipline way out of scale to the offense.

Thirdly, by inconsistent discipline. A child is doing this, for so many weeks nothing happens and one week he does it and bang, down comes the hammer on him. And then next week it doesn't matter again. The child doesn't know where he stands, what are the boundaries. Inconsistent discipline.

Fourthly, prejudiced discipline. The father shows partiality. He deals with one child in a completely different way to how he deals with another and there is a growing and building sense of injustice and bitterness in the child that is so mistreated. Prejudiced discipline.

Then there is unexplained discipline where the discipline is given but there is no explanation that accompanies it. The child doesn't really know what's wrong, why it's wrong or even how to put it right. There is no accompanying words.

Sixthly, there is unforgiving discipline. In other words, the father disciplines but the bad atmosphere continues. The father continues to hold the grudge, continues to keep the child under a cloud for days and weeks and months and even longer. Unforgiving discipline.

Then there is imbalanced discipline where there is only discipline, there is only this admonition and there is no nurturing. The father only appears in a child's life to bring down the heavy hand but there's never a caring hand. He only is heard when it's words of critique and condemnation but not when it's words of praise and encouragement and support. Imbalanced discipline.

Then there is humiliating discipline where the aim is not correction but humiliation to make the child feel of little or no worth.

Associated with that is public discipline where the father makes no attempt to hide and shield the child's faults and his discipline of that child's faults from the public or sometimes even from the rest of the family. It's done in public, his sins are public, and

everybody knows about it. Again, if we want to exasperate our children, to drain them of love and affection, this is one sure way to do it.

Bad tempered discipline. Yes, there is appropriate anger to be expressed but not sinful, not bad tempered, not scarily, horrifyingly scary bad temper.

Then there is prayerlessness upon where the father does not pray before he does it. He doesn't pray during it and he doesn't pray after it. It's all done in his own strength and wisdom and flesh.

There is heartless discipline where the only concern is the outward behavior of the child and how to stop that or these actions instead of trying to get into the child's heart. Do you know why you did this? What's making you do this? What's behind this? Do you see the problem here is not just your behavior but you've got a sinful heart that needs to be changed? That you need God's help to sanctify, to regenerate? Heartless discipline is not interested in that.

Then there is unwarned discipline where the child is hit with this one and he's never been warned against the behavior before.

There is selfish discipline where the father just disciplines for his own benefit, for his own conscience, and you think surely that's not possible but the Bible speaks of that in Hebrews when it's comparing God's discipline with a father's discipline. He says when God disciplines you, it's not for his own profit like earthly fathers but for your profit. Fathers can be very selfish. It just makes them feel better, makes them feel they're doing something, maybe, or just it's their own anger from work spilling out onto their children. It's selfish.

Then there is, finally, unrepented discipline.

And as you hear all these kinds of ways to exasperate your children, surely every father here says, "Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. I've done that. I've done that. I've done that. I've done it all. Well, what should we do? We should repent before God, for sure, but also before our children. If our children have never heard us say to them, "I'm sorry. I did that wrong. I got that wrong." There's something wrong because none of us have done this rightly or perfectly. We fail in all these areas and it's something to say sorry to God for, but also to say sorry to our children. We come alongside them humbly, seeking forgiveness, modeling, therefore, for them, future patterns of fatherhood.

It may be that there are fathers here and you look back on your life and you see some of these areas that you definitely went wrong on but you've never admitted it, you've never gone and confessed and sought forgiveness. You think, "Well, I'll just keep this bottled up. We won't talk about it. We won't deal with it. Hopefully the kids will have forgotten it." That is a sin that should be repented of. It would be good for them, it would be good for us.



We discipline our children not in these ways but in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as the Lord would do it. And you know, here's the key: when our children see us fathers, they see God. We are the most powerful image of God in our children's lives that why we are called here to imitate God as God would nurture them, as God would admonish, it's in the Lord. It's crushing, isn't it? It's a high calling as well.

He disciplines his children. Very briefly, just that point, he models for his children. I think we all realize the more and more we go on in life, how much the model of our own father is played out in our own lives. It's not like, "What did my dad do? Oh, I should do it." It just kind of happens. You realize even the way you read a book or you drive the car or sit in a chair, you're seeing yourself more and more like your own father.

So just take that down another generation, try and break the pattern if you have to, and model what it means to love God, to love your wife, to love your children, to love your church, to love your neighbor, to love the weak. Modeling for our children.

Lastly, simply how do we do all this? It can only be done by spending time with our children. By spending time with them listening, talking, playing, watching. None of these things can happen without time, time, time. Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Let me address the children here. If you have such a father, thank God. You thank him. He's not going to be this in perfection. You may be listening and all you're listening for is the faults. You're thinking, "Yeah, that's my day. Yup, he failed there and he failed here. He failed there." But can you find anywhere, can't you find any characteristic? Can you see his striving? His aiming? His longing? Thank God even for that. Encourage him for that. And if your dad is none of these things and he never will be or he never can be, you have a heavenly Father you can go to and that's one of the wonderful things we can offer to this fatherless generation, to this "daddy deprived" generation, a heavenly Father, a perfect, holy, heavenly Father that they can come into relationship with and be fathered by and be saved by and be led by and taught by and protected and provided for and disciplined by and modeled and somebody who wants to spend time with you and enjoy you. He's the Father of the fatherless.

To wives here, encourage your husband in these areas. If you see him doing well and improving, encourage him. Pray for him. Call him also to account. Yes, show him the patterns and say, "Come on. That's what the Bible says you have to do." And if you have such a husband, honor him. Submit to him. Be led by him.

To the young men and women here yet unmarried, young men, this is the kind of father you should aspire to. This should be at least one of your subjects for study whether in high school or college. You want to be the best father you can be. Don't wait until you become a father to start learning. You start learning now. You can prepare for this highest calling on earth.

Young women, here's how to measure the future father of your children. Here are the standards of God's word. Talk with them about these things. Ask him what his view is of discipline, of education, of training, of modeling, protecting, providing. Get these things settled up front before you bring children under such a man's authority.

Fathers, it's a high standard. It's an impossible standard. We look back and we just see perhaps so much failing, so much black on our record, so much fault, but we can have it washed white as snow today. We can. All these convictions that you may have been feeling in the last 40 minutes, all of them can be removed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Start over. Start afresh. You're still alive in this world and you have children, no matter what your age or their age, you can start fathering again in some of these areas, though not all. More than that, we have the power of the Father's Spirit to come into our lives and make us more and more like him.

That's really where I want to end. As we said when looking at the mother, we learn so much theology from this. We're doing a series in connection with the fifth and seventh commandments, the two commandments that are particularly pertinent and looking at family roles, relationships and responsibilities. So we learn a lot about ethics and law but we learn a lot about God as well because the law is a reflection of him and this really brings us right into the heart of our heavenly Father, his leadership, his teaching, his provision, his protection, his discipline, his modeling, his taking time to know us and listen to us and speak to us and be with us, and even, yes, enjoy us. Such pity as a father has unto his children, like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear. Amen.

Let's pray.