

Those Crazy Kids – Parenting Well

Grace for The Family

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If I asked you this morning to write out the greatest gifts you've ever received in descending order of value and importance, what would you put on your list? Well, if there's been a definite time in your life where you have admitted your sin and placed your faith and trust in Christ, I'm quite certain that you would start by talking about your salvation. You might even quote a verse like Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift," we're going to talk about gifts, there's one, "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." You could probably even talk about times this week where you were challenged or you were encouraged or you were comforted by simply reflecting on the amazing grace that was necessary to make that kind of a gift possible for you. You still can't get over the beauty of the Gospel and the gift of a personal relationship with a risen, living Savior so you find yourself in your heart and you find yourself in your words saying with the Apostle Paul, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift." And you would also say, "If that's all I had, that would be enough," huh? What a gift.

If you're married this morning, undoubtedly next on your list would be your spouse. For example, husbands would agree with King Lemuel who said in Proverbs 31:10, "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels." What a gift, huh? What's the question that we ask at the beginning of a wedding ceremony? "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" And that perspiring groom-to-be just stares at his soon-to-be father-in-law and hopes to hear the desired response, "Her mother and I." The gift has been given. I won't speculate, by the way, on why we don't ask the same question of the groom's parents. My dad would have said something like, "He ain't much of a gift, Chris, you might want to reconsider." But undoubtedly your spouse if we're talking about listing gifts, your spouse would be high on the list and isn't it amazing we have married couples at Faith celebrating 40 years of marriage, 50 years of marriage, 60 years of marriage and many of those persons would testify that these first 2 gifts I mentioned have an important interplay in the sense that what sustained and guided the stewardship of their second gift was the power and efficacy of the first. So it's not just celebrating a wedding anniversary but it's celebrating a Christian wedding anniversary.

Well, what's next on the list? If God has chosen to bless you in this way, your next answer is going to be your children and isn't it interesting, by the way, we're moving

pretty far down the list and we haven't even thought about talking about any material possession yet. There might be a lesson or 2 there but you would answer that way and if you would, you would be in good company because the psalmist said this, "Behold children are a gift of the Lord." There it is. Do you agree with that? "A gift of God, the fruit of the womb is his reward." It's that gift we'd like to talk about this morning as part of this series we're doing on Grace for The Family. We're talking this morning about those crazy kids. We say that with a smile on our face, of course. God bless them. Biblical truth for parenting well.

With that in mind, open your Bible, please, to Ephesians 6. That's on page 153 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. While you're finding your place in God's word, let me just offer a few opening salvos here regarding this subject. What would be to parenting certainly is one of the most important but also challenging, huh? On challenging and potentially fulfilling roles you'll ever attempt. And I do realize this morning that as soon as I raise the subject I'm going to be talking to some persons who are hurting, parents and children because the curse of sin has marred every relationship and that is going to show up most significantly with the people with whom we spend the most amount of time.

I was speaking to some pastors a couple of weeks ago in California and prayer was requested for a missionary family who had dropped their daughter off at a Christian college here in the US and then went back to their mission field in Europe and a few months later they received word that this girl, their daughter, had converted to Islam and was in the process of becoming an ISIS bride. Ironically, I guess, the pastor that I was just with in Albania started telling me that same story the other morning when he was taking me back to the airport and I thought, "Wait a minute, I've heard this story before. Why do I know about this?" Then I thought, "Because I just heard about it in California from a different group of pastors and as it turns out, the missionary I was with in Albania is good friends with the missionary in Europe for whom this daughter has gone astray."

Well, we're not going to sugarcoat this subject. Every parent in the room can think of a few days when you turn your little darling over to see if there was ever any refund instructions stamped anywhere on this marvelous little gift. So I understand that you might be struggling right now. You might be hurting because of an adult child who has gone astray or maybe you don't have custody of one or more of your children and that brings all sorts of concerns. Or maybe you don't get to see and influence your grandchildren as much as you would like. So are children a gift? Absolutely they are. Are they a challenge free gift? Not on your life. Not on your life.

I also want to say this at the beginning of our time: there is a place in this message for every person here and I realize you might say, "You know, I'm single. How could any of this apply to me? Or my spouse and I have not been able to have children. Or our kids are all grown and out of the house now." What I'm about to say is truer today than perhaps at any other point in our lifetimes and that is, you can apply these principles to working with children in our church and in our community now more than ever before. A significant percentage of children in our community are growing up in single-parent

homes. By the way, if you find yourself in that situation, I'm not suggesting that you're some sort of a second class citizen around here but you'd probably be one of the first to say that you would be glad to have some other adults in your child's life.

So to have another person or another couple or another family come alongside and assist you would be a tremendous blessing to you. That's also true of serving in our children's ministries. I'm very glad for the significant number of men and women willing to work in our nursery or one of our children's ministries on Sunday morning or Wednesday night. And what we are studying today can give motivation and direction for all of that and having just come from a formerly communist country and seeing the effects of what happens in a culture when they officially declare atheism to be their state religion and the impact that has on children and the impact that has on adults, I'm probably more fired up about the importance of a church like ours getting Christian education right at all levels than ever before. Than ever before.

This idea comes into even clearer focus when you consider all of our community ministries. You're glad for them, aren't you? You're glad for that I hope. Well, social service leaders often speak about the 40 developmental assets. How a child having a significant relationship with a caring adult is a crucial component of healthy development. Well, the more we do community-based outreach ministry and we want to do it, huh? Please tell me you've got a passion for that. Please tell me while I was in Albania, you were trying to win everybody in your life to Christ. You weren't just messing with dandelions, were you? I hope you were doing something that's got eternity written on it. Well, the more we do community-based outreach ministry, the more opportunities you will potentially have to use these truths about parenting to working in the lives of young people in our town. So it's for all of us. It's for all of us.

Then when you think about all of that, this subject gives us a great reason to move toward the throne of grace. I mean, think about this great text that we have mentioned week after week as part of our theme this year, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." Let's do that together. Let's do that as parents. Let's do that as individuals who are trying to serve parents. "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy," we need that, "and find grace to help in our time of need." So yes, this is a challenging matter because we live in a sin-cursed world but, "Where sin abounded," here's some news, huh? "Grace did much more abound."

So with that in mind, let's read our passage. Ephesians 6, beginning in verse 1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers," fathers now, "do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." So we're talking this morning about those crazy kids, biblical truth for parenting well and with the time we have remaining, let's look at 3 aspects of the parenting task that especially necessitate God's amazing grace. God's amazing grace.

One is, seek grace so that you don't provoke your children to anger. That's clearly the argument of this text: seek grace so you don't provoke your children to anger. I would recommend 2 books. Both of these, I would encourage every parent to read for sure, maybe even every one of us for the reasons that I already mentioned. But one is, "Shepherding a Child's Heart," by my friend, Ted Tripp. Ted and I were doctoral students together many years ago at Westminster Theological Seminary and I'm so glad to see how God has used Ted. That is a fabulous, fabulous resource. The other one is by Elyse Patrick and her daughter Jessica Thompson, "Give Them Grace: Dazzling your kids with the love of Jesus." That by the way, is one of the blessings of parenting and doing children's ministry in the age in which we live. There is more excellent biblical Gospel centered resources than ever before and I want to encourage these books and I'm going to be quoting from Elyse's a couple of times this morning.

Now, when we think about this well-known family passage in Ephesians 6, I would assume many of us would be able to quote these verses from memory. It's really important to apply the parenting principles of Ephesians 6:4 in light of the context of the Gospel of grace emphasized thus far in the book. It's very important to remember that the Bible is not an encyclopedia. The Bible is not a cookbook. We don't believe in studying verses of Scripture in isolation apart from their context. So it's not like, well, we have a meal we want to cook up, in this case, having good kids, if you want to say it that way, so we turn to page 153 and we read Ephesians 6:4 and if we just mix the ingredients correctly, a good child is going to pop out of the oven each and every time. No, the Bible is less like a cookbook and it's more like a novel. In this case, a novel about the sinfulness of man and the marvelous grace of God who gave his own Son to pay for our sin and is now in the process of redeeming and transforming his people to the praise and the glory of his grace.

So Paul has emphasized grace all throughout this book, leading up to a verse like Ephesians 6:4 on parenting. So we read things like Ephesians 1:2, "Grace to you." That's how Paul started this book. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And then a few verses later, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the," here it is, "the praise of the glory of His grace." I would encourage you to suck on that phrase like a delightful piece of hard candy or like a piece of fresh made Turkish delight if you happen to have a layover in Istanbul recently. I won't rub that in. But "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the," what? You see, everything we are about to read about parenting has to be understood in light of "the riches of His grace." Or in the next chapter, Ephesians 2:7, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Or the next chapter, "if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you." What a marvelous way to summarize the way Paul thought about his ministry and therefore books like Ephesians, the stewardship of God's grace. Or Ephesians 4:7, "But to each one of us grace was given," amen to that, "grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

Well, aren't you glad that the topic of parenting is bathed in the doctrine of grace? Here's a taste of why that matters from Elyse's book. She said, "Grace or the free favor that has been lavished on us through Christ ought to make our parenting radically different from what unbelievers do. That's because the good news of God's grace is meant to permeate and transform every relationship we have including our relationship with our children." Well said, huh? She goes on to say, "All the typical ways we construct to get things done and get others to do our bidding are simply obliterated by a Gospel message that tells us that we are all, parents and children, both radically sinful and radically loved. At the deepest level of what we do as parents, we should hear the heartbeat of a loving, grace giving Father who freely adopts rebels and transforms them into loving sons and daughters. If this is not the message that your children hear from you, if the message that you send them on a daily basis is about being good so that you won't be disappointed as a parent, then the Gospel needs to transform your parenting too." Amen, amen, and amen. Ephesians 6:4 is not a little recipe in a cookbook, it's part of an overarching novel about the Gospel of God's grace.

Now, let's bring that back into the argument of this verse. Provoke means, don't do anything that causes or allows your child to develop a wrathful lifestyle. You fathers, provoke not your children to wrath. Well, there's no question that we live in a very angry culture. Which city on fire in the United States would we want to point to in order to make that case in this particular week? We live in a wrathful, angry culture. Even the music of this generation is often characterized by anger. Anger. The writer of Proverbs describe such a person as being like a city. You don't want a child like this. Here's the point: "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit." You see, the argument of the passage is that parents ought to seek to do everything in their power, now ultimately, children are going to decide before God, but parents want to do everything in their power to prevent a child from living a lifestyle like this.

Well, how do we do that? How do we avoid provoking our children to wrath? One is by avoiding being an angry person yourself. Oh. Oh. Proverbs also says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger or go with a hot tempered man." Some children see sinful anger modeled in their home day after day after day and everybody in the home knows that dad is an angry man. Dad is an angry man. Or mom is an angry woman. And sometimes it's explosive anger. Sometimes it's this low grade internalized anger. It can take many different forms but the reason that little leopards have spots is often because big leopards have spots and those angry children have seen sinful anger modeled for them by mom and/or dad day after day after day. In that sense, they have been provoked. Provoked to live like that.

Let me just unpack one possible way that could manifest itself. We are seeing more examples in counseling where men are using their size and their strength to bully their family members so physically preventing family members from leaving the room and getting to a safe place or stalking family members around the house in some sort of an intimidating way or throwing things like little children or yelling or making threats. And the insidious aspect of this in Christian homes is that sometimes a Christian man or a so-

called Christian man justifies that sort of behavior under the heading of his biblical responsibility to lead the family or his misguided excuse that abuse only occurs if he physically strikes someone. There is no question about the fact that all of that and more falls under this heading of provoking one's children to wrath.

We want to be sure that we've said this morning that if you're in that situation, if you're a wife and you're in that situation or you're a child and you're in that situation and you're part of this church, by all means, get help right away. It's not like, "Well, I wouldn't be submissive to my husband if I brought some other people involved." No, you'd be submissive to God. If you have talked with your husband and he will not repent, you need to get other people involved in that situation right away. So we say it this way around here: if you're feeling physically threatened, call the police and the deacons and your husband better hope and pray the police get there first. But we have never tolerated spousal or child abuse among our church family on the part of mom or dad. Mom or dad.

Now, on the other hand, if you would say, "Well honestly, Pastor Viars, I'm the angry dad." Or, "I'm the angry mom." That's why this command is given in the context of God's amazing, what? God's amazing grace. And we have all sorts of people who are trained and ready not to judge you because we all struggle with anger in various ways from time to time. Could I get an uh-huh on that, lest God strike us for our hypocrisy right here in the church house and ruin the roof? Let's just avoid that. So we would encourage you if you are struggling in this way and can't get over it by yourself to give up and to ask for some help and be connected with some men and women here who can link arms with you and do what? Again, not judge you, not look down their nose at you, but to link arms with you and together let's go with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help and, frankly, in many cases, find grace to change in our time of need.

So, how do you provoke your children to anger? By being a sinfully angry person yourself. What's another answer to that question? Well, by allowing your children to be sinfully angry without consequences. Here's a sad episode from the life of King David. It's 1 Kings 1:5-6, "Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king.'" There's something you don't want your son to say if you're the king. "'I'll be king.' So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him." That's the way they did it. That's called a political campaign, hire 50 guys to run along your chariot. "His father," David, the king, "had never crossed him at any time," note that. That's how you provoke a child to wrath, being overly permissive. "His father had never crossed him at any time by asking, 'Why have you done so?' And he was also a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom."

I learned this lesson when I was a Christian school administrator. I was working on my final degree. I mentioned Ted Tripp and I were actually classmates. I was also at that time serving as a Christian school administrator at a church in Trenton, New Jersey. We had a teacher in 5th grade who decided this first year, she decided she was going to do it differently, she was going to be her students' buddy. So she was very permissive with them. She didn't want to cross them. She had a very undisciplined classroom. It was

amazing to me as a new school administrator how big of a mess that became by Thanksgiving time. It didn't take long at all. The kids were angry. They were fighting with their teacher. They were fighting with one another. Their grades were suffering. There was even a dramatic difference in the number of sick days in that particular class. And the lesson is: this issue of provoking your children to anger, it's both active but it's also passive. That's part of the challenge in Christian parenting, it's not just a matter of avoiding sins of commission, choosing to do what's wrong, being sinfully angry, it's also a matter of avoiding sins of omission, failing to do what you ought to do, namely, to not allow your children to be sinfully angry without consequences.

Now, a third example is trying to help your children avoid sinful anger through rules and moralism instead of the Gospel of grace. I mentioned that the subtitle of Elyse and Jessica's book is "Dazzling your kids with the love of Jesus." Well, what a great subtitle, huh? What a great goal when we think about our privilege and responsibility as parents. Here's one example that they give and this book is filled with examples. This isn't just pontificating, there is a lot of specific examples about how we are to do this. Here's one example that she gave. This is written from Elyse's perspective. "Jessica heard the terrible scream emanating from the play room frantically running out of the bathroom. Every mom knows what that is like. She found her eldest son, Wesley, then 4, seated atop his brother pounding away and she forcefully yanked Wesley off his brother. She pled with them, 'Wesley, you must love your brother.' 'But he makes me so mad! I can't love him,' Wesley replied through angry tears. The Christian response to his cry isn't what I," Elyse, "would have said. 'Oh yes you can and you will. The Bible says you have to so you can.'" There you go. "I feel change coming on right now, mom." "No, the Christian response to a statement like 'I can't love my brother' is something more along these lines, 'Exactly. I'm so glad to hear you say that because it shows me that God is working in you. It's true that God commands you to love your brother, Wesley, but you can't. That's the bad news but that's not all the news there is. The rest of the news is so exciting: you can't love your brother like God is asking you to so you need a Rescuer to help you and the really great news is that God has already sent one. His name is,'" remember what we were singing about earlier today? The wonderful name. "'His name is Jesus. Jesus has perfectly loved you and has perfectly loved his brothers for you, fulfilling the law to love in your place. If you believe in him, he doesn't punish you the way you were punishing and beating up your brother. Instead of punishing you, he took all the punishment you deserved when he died on the cross for you. He knows how angry you are. He knows there are times you are hateful and selfish with your brother but he has loved you in spite of your sin and because of this, Wesley, because of the way you have been lavishly loved, if you believe in him, you will grow to love your brother more and more because of Jesus alone. Because of what he has already done for you. You can learn how to love if you believe that he will be that loving with you but you'll never be able to do this on your own.'"

Now, just to be clear, neither I or Elyse would suggest that every discipline situation should sound exactly like that, okay? I'm not saying you've got your child in your arm up here like this and he's flailing away and you're having that conversation but here's what we are saying: giving rules or expectations or moralism without the Gospel will simply provoke your children to anger because there is no life-giving power to change.

Now, where does this passage take us next? We could also say, just think about the argument of the text: seek grace so that your discipline is purposeful. "Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline of the Lord." A couple of weeks ago when I was last here, we were talking about Ephesians 4 and we saw that great principle of change in the New Testament: putting off and putting on. Putting off and putting on. The principle of replacement in both the inner and the outer man. That's the way God helps us change. Well, you see that right here: provoke not your children to anger the ways we mentioned and a whole lot of others if time allowed that we could articulate. But it's not just don't do that, it's a matter of instead do this: bring them up positively for the goal of becoming more like Jesus Christ in the discipline of the Lord.

Well, let's think about that. What does he even mean to discipline our children? It's a Greek word that means control or train or discipline or correct. In its broadest sense, it's everything that a parent does to set appropriate controls and limits for each child. So children early on need to be taught to pay attention when mom and dad are speaking. In fact, I would suggest that's one of the first things you need to teach your kids, that you are mom, that you are dad and when mom or dad are speaking, it's time for them to stop whatever they are doing and get that little face of theirs facing yours and in love, sometimes you have to help them adjust their face. You do. Sometimes you have to pick them right up, their little feet are going like this, and help them learn that when mom is talking, God gave you a mom to be listened to. God gave you a daddy to be listened to.

That's part of raising your children in the discipline of the Lord. That's the character quality of attentiveness which, by the way, we teach here on Wednesday nights as part of our Wednesday night Kids of Faith program. I hope you have had your kiddies in there. We're going to talk more about that in just a minute. Children need to be taught where they can go in the house. Children need to be taught what they can touch. What they can say. Appropriate bedtimes need to be established. So we all need discipline at every phase of life, is that right? Are you an undisciplined worker? If you're an undisciplined worker, that's a really good way to get fired, right? So we all need discipline at every phase of life and parents who don't begin helping their children live a disciplined, orderly life early on will definitely regret that day and we'll all regret it with you.

But to what end? Discipline to what end? Well, one answer is to awake their understanding of the power of sin that is at work in their own hearts and their need of a Savior. You see, the purpose of that discipline is the same reason that God gave his people the law. "Therefore the law has become our tutor to," what? "To lead us to Christ so that we would be justified by faith." That, by the way, is why bedtime can be such a powerful time for children. I've never heard of a child at bedtime who wouldn't be very happy to stay up a bit later and talk to mom and dad, right? Sometimes they even invent reasons to stay up a little later. Well, that's a marvelous time to review the day. It's also a time when periodically children will be unusually reflective and so you're looking for ways to bring the Gospel into the conversation, right? Think about bedtime. Looking for ways to bring the Gospel into the conversation or to take your children to the cross. For example, if you can bring your child to a point of asking, "Dad, why is it so hard for me

to obey?" That's huge. "Mom, why is it so hard for me to obey?" Now, that's not time for more law. "You'd better believe it's hard for you to obey and that makes daddy very angry and you'd better get your act together right now, young man. Good night. I love you. Gotta get back to my shows." God, deliver us from more of our shows, by the way. You see, can we do better than that?

How about something like, "Did you know that daddy struggles to obey too"? By the way, I'm assuming that would be daddy saying that so, mom, that's not your line, okay? "I know you struggle, child, and so does dad." "Did you know that daddy struggles to obey too," and then say, "But we have someone who has paid the price for our disobedience on the cross who will forgive our sin if we ask him to be our Savior and our Lord." For a child who has trusted Christ, how do you nurture that young faith? "Why is it so hard for me to obey?" What a great opportunity to join hands, your big, adult, godly hand with their little, young, tender hand, and go to the throne of grace together to receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

One of the reasons I really like this book is that there is an entire appendix, appendix chapter 2, that has a whole bunch of different potential parenting scenarios, issues that all of us face. Then it has some suggested conversations if you're talking to a child who does not yet know the Lord or if you're talking to a child of yours who has just trusted Christ as Savior and Lord. So it's very, very practical and so, parents, I want to strongly encourage all of us to read this book and for everybody in our church, I would encourage us to understand more of what it means to bring the Gospel into our parenting.

That's also where wise parents take advantage of our children's ministries. When I think back about all of my parenting failures which were legion, in King James speak. You old folks know what I'm talking about there, right? My parenting failures were legion and then I look to see how well our children are doing. 1. I'm immediately thankful that we serve a God of grace. 2. I'm very thankful for a wife who filled in for all of my weaknesses in all sorts of ways. Thirdly, I'm very thankful for children's workers to whom my wife and I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude.

We received a note from Allen and Cindy Rusk. They have retired now and moved to Florida and so they sent us a note transferring their membership to a great church down in Florida. They just wanted to say a bit about how much they appreciated their 40 years of ministry here in this church and life here in this church. Some of you, when you think about Cindy Rusk, you old timers think, "Well, she taught in the 2-year-old Sunday school class for about 100 years." I mean, it's amazing, well, don't take that to the wrong place but my point is: it's amazing how many of our children were taught in 2 year old Sunday school by Cindy Rusk. We, Chris and me, just came to Lafayette when our oldest daughter Bethany was 2 years old so she had Cindy. Cindy Rusk was her first Sunday school teacher and Bethany was struggling with fear. She was afraid to go into the Sunday school class and so Chris and I were working with her all we could on the fear of man and learning to look outside herself in order to serve others, everything that you would do with a small child who was gripped with fear. But I'm so thankful for the way Cindy Rusk came alongside us and assisted us in our parenting task. We're forever

grateful for that and if you know Bethany today, she wouldn't have a fearful bone in her body. In fact, it was interesting, when they got to be teenagers, my kids wouldn't stop and so it was just amazing how you could be driving along in the car with Bethany and Karis and I'd ask one question and that would get them going for an hour. Sometimes I thought about calling Cindy Rusk, "Did you really have to do your job that well?"

But, you see, some parents are not taking advantage of children's ministries and I want to encourage you to have your child in Sunday school. I want to encourage you to have your child in our Wednesday night Kids of Faith program just to have other godly people come alongside you. That's why I also want to encourage you to sign up for Serve 15 today and the issue has nothing to do with whether it's convenient. Since when does serving God need to be convenient? It doesn't have to mean that it's going to be something that's going to be easy. Who wants a job that's easy? The question is: does it need to get done and do we have a passion for discipleship? Do we have a passion for reaching our kids with the Gospel of Christ? Do we have a passion to assist parents in our church and in our community? And if the answer is yes, then do you know what? We need to get with it and today is the day we just need to get with it because we really believe what it is that we are talking about. So I want to urge you, I'm your pastor, right? Did that change while I was gone? If my job is to lead us then I want to lead every one of us to get involved in our children's ministries, not because somebody made you do it but because you embrace the incredible opportunity to have a positive spiritual impact in the life of some young child and thereby assist their mom or dad.

Now, I realize some parents might say, "You know, establishing a disciplined home is a lot of work and my kids don't seem to like it. They just don't seem to like it." Well, consider the beauty of discipline. You realize, this is a fruit of the Spirit that we're talking about. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fruitfulness, gentleness, self-control," there it is, "discipline. Against such things there is no law." We are helping our children to develop the fruit of the Spirit. It's also the foundation for growth. "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." When we get to the place of our children understanding and valuing discipline, that's going to set them up for growing in all sorts of ways and it's even a producer of maturity. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful but yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Now, there are a couple of questions even that flow out of this point, I think. One is: is it possible that you're trying to raise your children without an appropriate emphasis on biblical discipline? I realize we live in a very permissive society. Are you letting God's word be your guide and your standard or are you listening to other voices? Secondly, is it possible that the discipline is present but not in a grace filled way? That may explain the anger of your child. Thirdly, is it possible that God is calling you to a service opportunity where you can assist parents in this worthy aspect of their task?

Now, what's a third piece of the puzzle? Seek grace also so that your teaching is effective. "Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger but bring them up in both the discipline and the instruction of the Lord." Seek grace so that your teaching is effective as well.

This is the Greek word, *nouthesis*. It's a compound word. Teaching, *nouthesis*, *nous* is the Greek word for mind, *tithemi* is the verb to place or to put. So when we talk about instruction, we talk about teaching, we're talking about placing biblical truth in one's mind or heart which means Christian parenting is anything but behavior modification. The goal is to transfer truth across the generations which is why Proverbs says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence for from it flows the springs of life."

Now, I realize you might say, "But I'm so busy. I'm so busy." Well, this isn't necessarily another something, instead it's something you do during the regular tasks of your day. Deuteronomy 6, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart," and here it is, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house," you already sit in your house, "and when you walk by the way," you're already walking by the way, the question is are you seizing teaching opportunities, "and when you lie down and when you rise up." So be encouraged by the fact that it's not necessarily something else that needs to be done, it's just a better way of accomplishing what you're already doing.

I mentioned this already but take advantage of our church's children's ministries to help you as you teach. So reviewing their memory verses with them. Reviewing the lesson summaries in our church bulletins. Their take-home papers and all of that. Be a good steward of the resources that are available to you.

Also, focus on application. The great commission is not just teaching as an end in itself, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe." We're not just talking about teaching facts, we're talking about teaching our children to do.

Teaching our children to observe and then, many times, to rejoice in the potential results. Many of us who are older would say this, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." And when I think about the children that God has given me, now a grandson that God has given me, what an incredible gift and I have no greater joy. Would we not all say it? I have no greater joy than to hear of my children walking in the truth.

You know, the importance of our church doing this well has been reconfirmed the last couple of weeks. I have been in the country of Albania and there are people all over the world who are counting on American churches being strong models. Did you know that? Models that they can look to and models that they can be supported by. Here are a few things about the country of Albania. Beginning in the mid-1400s they fell under Turkish rule of the Ottoman Empire. Some they converted to a form of nominal Islam, just to satisfy their captors. After World War II, after 500 years of Ottoman domination, they declared independence and they immediately embraced communism. In fact, they put in writing that their state religion was atheism. They lived under communism for 50 years until the early 1990s. When communism fell, the majority of the population re-embraced Islam so today some 25 years later, less than one percent of this country is evangelical

Christian. They have done a couple of censuses now about individuals who attend the various evangelical churches of any stripe all throughout the country, it's somewhere between 10 and 20,000 people.

So I had the privilege of traveling to a city and teaching a module on biblical counseling, then to go to a coastal city to speak at their annual Shepherd's Conference for pastors and their wives. This is one of the key pastors, the man who pastors one of the largest churches in the capital city of Tirana, G. Caruso and his wife A. and their dear children. I was actually speaking at their church last Sunday morning. I also spent quite a bit of time with this couple. By the way, G. and his wife have been to our biblical counseling training conference twice from Albania. This is a couple, Blair and Sue Alvarez and their daughter Kathryn. They are missionaries from Grace Fellowship down in Kentucky where Brad B. serves. They are in the country of Albania working with evangelical churches, training for discipleship and small groups and biblical counseling. They are also working on translating a number of our counseling resources into Albanian. Blair was telling me that he was having a conversation with a Muslim man about fear and happened to ask, "Hey, would you be interested in the pamphlet that talks about what God's word says about fear?" and the man said, "Well, sure, I'd be happy to have that." And Blair gave it to him and went up to their apartment. His wife came in about 20 minutes later and said, "There is a guy out in the alley outside of our apartment reading one of our pamphlets." She didn't realize that Blair had given it to him so Blair came out some time later, they had to go on some errands, and the man was still there. He's reading one of Jay Adams pamphlets on fear. Just amazing how God uses his word in all sorts of ways. By the way, they are translating right now Jay's, what I think, seminal work, "The Theology of Christian Counseling," into Albanian. They need about \$2,000 to complete that. If you want to get involved in it, just throw something in an offering envelope. That would be a huge help to them. But these are the kind of pastors. It's a small group. A small group of churches.

Well, how do we help pastors like that? You want to help pastors like that, don't you? How do we help them? Well, by taking our parenting and Christian education responsibilities seriously. To be an example for young churches to follow. Also by supporting, like the Biblical Counseling Training Conference many of you served during that week. I mentioned G. and A. had been here twice. They grew up under communism. The pastor's wife told me she did not remember ever hearing the name God until she was 14 years old. So by serving them during the Biblical Counseling Training Conference, we're helping them well. Blair and Sue have been here 8 times now. That's how important they consider that training to be.

Also with our seminary program, our master of arts and biblical counseling, I was actually sitting in a smoke-filled café in Albania getting ready to go and teach over there but I was logging in with an online class that I'm teaching right now in our seminary and talking with students from the Dominican Republic, talking with students from Brazil, talking with students around the US while I'm sitting in Albania and some of you support that kind of ministry so we can be a blessing to persons like this.

Also by being willing to share your pastors. You know, I left the other night, nearly 2 weeks ago now, and got word when I got to Chicago that Betty Bowman had had a stroke. I woke up the next morning in Istanbul to the news that she had passed away and I'm so glad that this church is willing to share your pastors with people from around the world and therefore just to joyfully receive the pastoral ministry of whoever is available at that time. Thank you. There are people, listen, we have needs here. There are other churches around the world who have greater needs and so we are trying to share every way we possibly can.

Just one other thing I would say, you know, some of these people in Albania, they're concerned because, here's what they're hearing: the church in America is on decline. They are concerned about that and they have reason to be concerned about that. That's why it's so important for us to do the job well and I'm also very thankful for the strong financial giving of this church family. You're making a difference not just here in this community but in places around the world.

"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord."

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for the clear direction you have given us about parenting and for the abundant grace that is available to us as we try to do this well. So Lord, I pray that you would give us a passion for this in our homes. I pray that you would give us a passion for every facet of Christian education in this church. And, Lord, I pray that our commitment to fulfilling this task would be strong and evident. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.