



Growing in Gentle Parenting

Ephesians 6:1-4

THRIVE! Growing and Changing in the Christian Life

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

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IL

livinghopechurch.net

“The happiest and holiest children in the world are the children whose fathers succeed in winning both their tender affection and their reverential and loving fear. And they are the children who will come to understand most easily the mystery of the fatherhood of God.”

~ **John Piper**

1. Evening service at 5pm.
2. New members class begins Sunday August 21. Pastor Matt will be teaching.
3. In two weeks we'll have Ruth Dougherty with us during the morning service. She is relocating to Greece.
4. Please sign your children up for VBS today. So much has gone into this for your children. Don't miss a blessing!

If you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the seat in front of you. Open your Bible to **Ephesians 6**. The title of our message this morning is “Growing in Gentle Parenting.” This is part of our series “Thriving in the Christian Life.”

Proposition: Anything less than gentle parenting turns our children away from Jesus.

Means of Grace

Salvation is a miracle isn't it? God promises to finish the work He begins in all His children (**Phil 1:6**). I want to tell you when we think of growing up godly children that there is hope. I was raised in a family where I did not have a godly mother or father.

God saved me when I was 15. But I still needed mothers and fathers to guide me and grow me up! Those mothers and fathers were in his local church.

God is more interested in your children than you are. Having said that, God's love for your children doesn't let you off the hook. He uses means. The greatest tools in the home for pointing your children to Christ and seeing them grow up in Him is missionary mom and missionary dad. St. Paul asked the question, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" (**Rom 10:14**).

Jonathan Edwards: Home is a little church

The Puritans believed and taught that your family is your church. Every man has a responsibility to pastor his wife and his children. Jonathan Edwards said, "Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief means of grace."

Gentle Parents

Ephesians 6:1–4 (ESV), "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." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but **bring them up** [*nurture in gentleness*] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Outline

In order to grow as gentle parents...

- **Aim** for the heart of your child.
- **Avoid** making your children resent you.
- **Nurture** your children with God's love.

God is Our Perfect Heavenly Father

Our Heavenly Father, Almighty God, has a perfect relationship with us. He is a perfect loving Father. God loves His children, all true believers in Christ with a **perfect**, everlasting love!

Our love toward God is *never perfect*. **We sin in thought, word, and deed**. As Christians, if we are honest, we are all disobedient children of our heavenly Father. No matter how much we want to be perfect we mess royally mess up so often! Our completed perfection has to wait until we get to heaven.

We will never while on this earth be a perfect reflection of God's love. However that doesn't mean we shouldn't seek to learn from His example. I believe Ephesians 6:1-4 is really a command for fathers to be like our Heavenly Father.

I. **Aim** for the heart of your child.

The Covering

The father is the instrument of heaven or hell for your children. You're the gatekeeper and you are to be the covering and protector for your home. How do you do that? Aim for your child's heart.

Fatherlessness Statistics

- 63% of youth suicides are from homes that have uninvolved fathers or come from fatherless homes (US Dept. Of Health/Census) – 5 times the average.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children have uninvolved fathers or come from fatherless homes – 32 times the average.

- 85% of all children who show behavior disorders have uninvolved fathers or come from fatherless homes – 20 times the average. (Center for Disease Control)
- 80% of rapists with anger problems have uninvolved fathers or come from fatherless homes –14 times the average. (Justice & Behavior, Vol 14, p. 403-26)
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes or uninvolved fathers – 9 times the average. (National Principals Association Report)
 - 75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes – 10 times the average.

Paul in Ephesians 4 is aiming for the heart of children. They are to honor the Lord through honoring and obeying their parents. Paul goes on to tell us how parents, and particularly fathers fail to reach the heart.

But let's be clear. We need to read the hearts of our children. **Mark 7:14-21**, “And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: 15 There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

Then Jesus explains the parable in verse 18, “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Proverbs 4:23 (NASB), “Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.”

Children

Children – a gift from the Lord. *Tekna* (**children**) does not refer particularly to young children but to all offspring -children of all ages. Sons and daughters still under their parents' roof are to **obey** and **honor** them.¹

Behavior Modification is Superficial

Attempts to address behavior may produce a change, but this change will only be behavioral in nature. The things of God are not fully addressed. Therefore the change, even if it appears to be beneficial, will not be lasting change.

To have lasting change you must reach the heart. Here are some ways we miss the mark. We don't want to use carnal tools to raise our children in the flesh. Galatians 5:24, "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Here are some carnal tools and wrong motives. for raising our children.

1. **Competition:** Who had it first – the fight over the toy. Instead aim for heart issues. It doesn't matter who had it first. Are you wanting to be generous? Are you both wanting to be just and kind and gentle?
2. **Manipulative threats. Intimidation.** "Stop it or I'll smack you!" "Stop it now! I mean it!" You might do a number of things to manipulate. Yell. "I swear, if you don't stop." Instead, the motive is: we ought to glorify God. This doesn't glorify God. Sometimes the kids just need your love and attention. Especially little ones who can hardly talk. They scream or grunt for your attention. Give it to them. Love them!
3. **Belittling:** "You are just a disobedient child!" You might insinuate that they are dull of hearing or stupid. You might call names. No, they are made in the image of God, that's why they should obey.

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1986). *Ephesians*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (311). Chicago: Moody Press.

4. **Guilt/emotional appeal:** “You are putting us in the poor house!” “How can you do this to me when I work so hard!” No, just give clear, calm guidelines. “We will not have a phone for you because you are not yet responsible enough,” or “We want to honor God by living within our means.”
5. **Bribery and Prizes.** “If you share, we’ll go for ice cream!” “Be nice or I’ll take away your allowance.” Instead, reach their heart. “Be kind because it honors God.”
6. **Fear.** The illustration of the girl in the airport. “If you don’t stop fussing, we are going to leave you here in this airport!” Using the fear of abandonment to control behavior. Instead, find out the heart motive for the fussing. Maybe they are tired and need you to care for them. Don’t be lazy. Guard their heart.

All of the above may be temporarily effective in changing behavior but the heart will be left unchanged. This will also lead to another unpleasant consequence. By practicing the negative patterns above the parent will both display and encourage hypocrisy. You don’t really want godliness. You want peace.

Radical Defiance by Children was Capital Offense in Old Testament Israel

Respect for parents is of such grave importance to God that Moses commanded, “He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death,” and “He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:15, 17; cf. Lev. 20:9). Either to physically or verbally abuse a parent was a capital offense in ancient Israel.²

² Ibid, 312.

The Right Motive for Children to Obey

Ephesians 6:1, “**Ephesians 6:1–4** (ESV), “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” “In the Lord” – Obedience is always based on the worthiness of God, not the parents. Impetus (Why?): 5th Commandment. This is right.

Children should obey their parents for the Lord’s sake.

Chief End of Man

I often ask my children: “What is the chief end of man?” The answer they give: “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” This is the reason children should obey.

They should give the right opinion of Jesus Christ. They should grow in virtue, that is the desire to please God in all things.

2 Cor 5:9, “We make it our aim to please him [Christ].”

1 Cor 10:31, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

II. **Avoid** making your children resent you.

The Role of a Father

We have a wrong idea of headship. Yes, the man is the head of the home. That means he is to take ultimate responsibility to lead the home in gentleness. He is to be a covering and an instrument of heaven and peace for the home. He is to bring order and stability through meekness and gentleness.

There is so much confusion in the world and even in the church regarding the role of a husband and a father. A man in the marriage is stronger emotionally and physically than his wife. He is called to listen, love, protect, and provide for his wife and children.

Objections: You may say, well I need to be honest and say what I need to say in the home. I will tell you, that is a sure way to provoke your wife and children to anger and bitterness.

A Look at the Command

Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up [*nurture in gentleness*] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Don't provoke – Don't push them toward resentment and bitterness. Don't escalate.

1. **Verbal abuse.** Don't use controlling, abusive tones and words in your home. Don't slam doors. Don't use crude or foul language. Instead, be a peace maker. No verbally abusive person enters the Kingdom. 1 Cor 5:11, “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.” Tones are just as destructive as words. Watch your tone parents.
2. **Physical abuse.** Battered children are a growing tragedy today. Even Christian parents—fathers especially—sometimes overreact and spank their children much harder than necessary. Proper physical discipline is not a matter of exerting superior authority and strength, but of correcting in love and reasonableness.
3. **Humiliation.** Never chasten or correct your children in front of others. Withdraw from the room with your child and speak to them privately.
4. **Escalation.** Don't escalate arguments. Fathers should be thick-skinned men. We should be loving, not easily offended.
Neglect. If you want to embitter your children, never spend time with them. Don't read the Bible with them. Don't pray with them. Instead of taking your children for granted - be thankful.
5. **Irritation.** If you often have a discouraging negative tone, you will provoke your children to anger.
6. **Anger.** Deal with your anger problem – be a loving, tender father.
7. **Immature parenting.** Turn off the TV and pay attention to your children. Be an adult. Have self-control. Put childish things away.
8. **Crabbiness.** Crabby, tired parents take it out on their kids

9. **Pushiness.** “You’ve got to get good grades!” “You’d better behave or else!”
10. **Favoritism.** Treat children fairly. Kids get jealous easy.
11. **Comparisons.** Comparing to other kids. Why can't you be like this kid?
12. **Blame Shifting.** “I sure hope my child heard that sermon!” Even though the blame is really on you. You haven’t taught these truths to your child.
13. **Put Downs.** Yelling at your kids. Putting them down. Thinking and expecting the worst of them.
14. **Bringing the kids into marital disagreements.** When parents fight and disagree and then ask the kids to take sides.
15. **Selective Involvement.** Busy parents don't make their kids a priority yet suddenly show up when there is trouble.
16. **Patronizing.** Don’t treat your teenagers like toddlers, instead expect the best from them. Follow through and encourage them. Treat them with love and respect. Lead by example. Serve your children. Hold your children accountable, but be a disciple-maker with your child. That takes lots of time, encouragement, thoughtful discussions, etc. If you expect them to act like little children, they will.
17. **Legalism:** Teach the Bible in a moralistic way. Teach them their worth is by being “good.” Make sure you tell them not to embarrass you. Don’t worry about their heart, just as long as they have the right outside.
18. **Controlling** and chiding your children for always acting childish, even when what they do is perfectly normal and harmless, does not contribute to their maturity but rather helps confirm them in their childishness.
19. **Over-protection.** Children need careful guidance and certain restrictions, but they are individual human beings in their own right and must learn to make decisions on their own, commensurate with their

age and maturity. Don't over-shelter them. They are going to be in this world making their own decisions soon enough. Spend time with them and teach them trustworthiness so that when you are not with them, they will make the right decision from the heart. Their wills can be guided but they cannot be controlled.

20. **Withdrawal** when your children don't obey. Using love as a tool of reward or punishment—granting it when a child is good and withdrawing it when he or she is disobedient. Often the practice is unconscious, but a child can sense if a parent cares for him less when he is disobedient than when he or she behaves.

The Wife Follows the Husband

The husband needs to take full responsibility. He is the leader. If a wife is demonstrating the above behaviors, it may be that she is following her husband.

The Coldness of Fathers in Paul's Time

“A father's love for his children would have been hard even to imagine. By the Roman law of *patria potestas* a father had virtual life and death power not only over his slaves but over his entire household. He could cast any of them out of the house, sell them as slaves, or even kill them—and be accountable to no one. A newborn child was placed at its father's feet to determine its fate. If the father picked it up, the child was allowed to stay in the home; if the father walked away, it was simply disposed of—much as aborted babies are in our own day. Discarded infants who were healthy and vigorous were collected and taken each night to the town forum, where they would be picked up and raised to be slaves or prostitutes.”³

Provoking to Anger

³ Ibid, 316.

To **provoke ... to anger** suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment that gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment that boils over in outward hostility.⁴

How often I used to do this when my children were smaller. I could be capricious and impulsive instead of thoughtful and careful in correcting my children.

It's easy to provoke them and exasperate when there is no foundation of love. When a father is not gentle and kind and not displaying the love of our Heavenly Father, but instead we can be...

- Impatient
- Overbearing
- Irritated
- Rude
- Selfish
- Loud
- Harsh
- Difficult

There are so many ways we can provoke our children to wrath. The chief two are:

- Neglecting our children
- Having a domineering or disrespectful or angry culture with our children.

Consider Lou Priolo's 25 ways of provoking children to wrath when you have more time.

Twenty-five ways parents provoke their children to anger.⁵

1. Lack of marital harmony. Genesis 2:24 Heb. 12:15
2. Maintaining a child-centered home. Pr. 29:15 II Ti. 3:1-2
3. Modeling sinful anger. Prov. 22:24-25 Js. 1:19-20 Mt. 5:21-23 Ro. 12:1f Ps. 38:1

⁴ Ibid., 317.

⁵ from Lou Priolo.

4. Habitually disciplining while angry. Ps. 38:1 Gal. 6:1 Heb. 12:5-10 I Th. 2:3f
5. Scolding. Eph. 4:29
6. Being inconsistent with discipline. 2 Co. 1:17-18 Ecc. 8:11
7. Having double standards. Phil. 4:9
8. Being legalistic. Mt. 15:8-9
9. Not admitting you are wrong and not asking for forgiveness. Mt. 5:23-24 Js. 5:16
10. Constantly finding fault. Job 32:2-3 Pr. 19:11
11. Parents reversing God-given roles. Eph. 5:22-30
12. Not listening to your child's opinion or taking his/her side of the story seriously. Prov. 18:3,17 20:5 Eph. 4:25 Js. 1:19
13. Comparing them to others. 2 Co. 10:12 .
14. Not making time just to talk. Js. 1:19 Pr. 20:5
15. Not praising or encouraging your child. Rev. 2-4 I Co. 1:1ff, Col. 3:21
16. Failing to keep your promises. Mt. 5:37 Ps. 15:4 Col. 3:9
17. Chastening them in front of others. Mt. 18:15
18. Not allowing enough freedom. Lu. 12:48 I Co. 13:11
19. Allowing too much freedom. Pr. 29:15 Gal. 4:1-2 .
20. Mocking your child. Job 17:1-2
21. Abusing them physically. I Ti. 3:3 Num. 22:27-29
22. Ridicule or name calling. Eph. 4:29
23. Unrealistic expectations. I Co. 13:11 I Th. 2:11
24. Practicing favoritism. Luke 15:25-30
25. Child training with worldly methods instead of God's Word. Eph. 6:4 Pr. 3:5-6

III. **Nurture** your children with God's Love

All of that drives our children away from God. We can say we love God all day long, but how do we express His tender love to our children?

RAISE THEM THROUGH NURTURE

Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up [*nurture in gentleness*] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Instead, **Bring them up**... Tenderness... connection!! Bring them up (nourish in gentleness). Calvin translates “bring them up” with the words, “let them be kindly cherished,” and then goes on to emphasize that the overall idea is gentleness and friendliness.⁶

Cover with Friendliness

Fathers, you are the covering for your family! Cover you kids with friendliness and gentleness!

RAISE THEM THROUGH BOUNDARIES / DISCIPLINE (Formal instruction and consequences)

Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up [*nurture in gentleness*] in the **discipline** and instruction of the Lord.”

This means both the disciplines of teaching your children and holding them accountable.

In the **Discipline**... this is formal training. This is a strong word which means “discipline, even by punishment.”⁷ “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” (Hebrews 12:11). Discipline produces practical “righteousness.” It also produces

⁶ Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 213.⁶

⁷ Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: The mystery of the body of Christ*. Preaching the Word (200–201). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

“peace” — *shalom*, well-being, wholeness. That is what it did for me and my children.⁸

Kids Need Boundaries

Kids need training and boundaries. You know there are few boundaries when...

- Your 13-year-old walks into your room without knocking on the door and doesn't respect your privacy.
- Your 10-year-old interrupts your conversations with other adults without saying “excuse me” or waiting politely for a chance to get your attention.
- Your teen tells always has to answer back with a reason your instruction isn't fair.
- Your young child tells you what to do and throws tantrums if you don't do what he or she says.

Establish Boundaries through Teaching

Teach your children what the boundaries are. Help them. Use the Word of God. Use the Proverbs.

Examples – Toddlers and elementary – use the ten commandments. Deut. 6:6-7, “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children.”

Teach the commandments **diligently** to your children. There is no room for lazy parenting.

Examples Teens

Getting ready for church. Need to get the kids in the car. I've done it wrong by lecturing them and honking the car horn.

Instead, I've learned to go inside and help them get out. I've learned to be a servant.

RAISE THEM THROUGH TRAINING (Informal counsel and training- Deut. 6)

⁸ Ibid.

Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up [nurture in gentleness] in the discipline and instruction [training] of the Lord.”

...and **Instruction**... Tender Instruction... Instruct / Counsel (explain it!) The word “instruction” comes from the Greek noun *nouthesia*. The word is translated “*admonish, correct, to come along side, to encourage or instruct.*” It means to admonish and confront, to bring about truth to bear on the life of your child. In the New Testament, it is almost always accompanied with **tenderness and tears**.

Fathers should be Encouragers

Nothing is more powerful in a home than a firm but cheerful father. Ephesians 6:4 tells us specifically, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.” Fathers are given a God given authority. That authority is like a chain saw. If it is used in the wrong way it can do almost irreparable damage.

Children are rebellious by nature from birth. Fathers need to use their God-given authority to mold his children.

Conclusion: Queen Mary Ship

I’m told that when the Queen Mary was retired it had been the largest ocean liner to go across the ocean. During WWII it was used to carry troops and then after the war it became a passenger liner. Then in 1967 it was retired to become a floating restaurant.

When they brought it back to refurbish it, they removed the three smoke stacks and they were to repair them. The problem was, when they set them upon the deck, they disintegrated. You see, they had been covered with 30 coats of paint, and when they looked at it all of the steel had rusted away and all that was left was paint. **THE SUBSTANCE WAS GONE!**

Don’t build up false behavior modification with your children. Reach the heart! Out of the heart is the fountains of everything that happens in life.

Aim for conversion with your children. Don’t aim for your kids to be merely “good kids” who have no substance! Aim for them to be under the

power of God. Let them know Him and be filled with all the fullness of God!

Pray with them. Be kind and gentle with them. Be firm but kind! Love them! Guide them. Lead them to Jesus! **Anything less than gentle parenting turns our children away from Jesus.**