

Parenting 101

Lynette's father was a tyrant, according to her childhood friends. She wasn't allowed to eat with other children in the dining room but was banished without reason to the kitchen. She got the silent treatment often from her father. He disliked her intensely. "Her father's treatment scarred her badly," an old friend said. "Her mother was too scared to open her mouth."

When Lynette was 16 she was kicked out of the family home. A drifter named Charles Manson found her crying in the street and offered to look after her. Manson became her surrogate father.

Manson is serving a life sentence for masterminding the 1969 murders of 7 people in LA. In September of 1975 Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme attempted to assassinate President Ford.

Joe's father was a brutal drunk who beat his wife and child savagely and often. Joe was the only one of his parent's children to survive infancy. The boy took refuge in fantasy and in his teens discovered a fictional hero called Koba.

Koba was the main character in a popular Georgian adventure story about a young peasant who fought alone and with incredible success to free the oppressed. Joe always wanted to be the best, the bravest, the unbeatable comrade who was always right and never wrong ... and if anyone doubted this, he had better watch out. Koba's revenge would be swift and terrible.

Joe was Joseph Stalin, who was responsible for the deaths of 43,000,000 people.

Saddam Hussein's father deserted him and his mother when he was a child. His stepfather was a cruel person who hated him. He was not allowed to attend school and was passed back and forth between relatives until age 10 when he ran away from home.

We could go on with the examples, Mao Zedong, Adolf Hitler, so many others.

The truth is, that no amount of the right kind of parenting can guarantee successful, well adjusted children, but with out good parenting the statistics are off the charts when it comes to kids going bad.

Parenting is hard, it's sometimes a thankless job, but I believe it's one of the most important jobs we can do.

The Old Testament prophet Malachi said that one of God's great purposes for families is that He seeks godly offspring.

God designed families as the vehicle to pass on His truth from one generation to another.

That's God's design, but what happens in real life is often different.

We've in the middle of a series on the New Testament book of Ephesians. A few weeks ago we started a series within a series.

We're in a section of the book that that deals with relationships, and that's where we've been camping for the past 4 weeks. You might title this series, *Extreme Home Makeover*.

No matter where we are in life, God wants to radically transform us into totally devoted followers of Christ. And no matter where we are in the process we've all got room for growth.

What we've seen as we've zeroed in on the family is that the bottom line goal that God has for us is to have a servant's heart. This true for all our relationships.

Open you Bible to Ephesians 5 page 1041

Verse 21 of Ephesians 5 really expresses the heart beat of God. **Read vs 21**

This is the essence of all our relationship issues. This is the concept that nullifies all our excuses.

And we saw that all through the Bible, God says, "Do as I do." He doesn't say, "Do as I say, not as I do." That's the kind of stuff we pull.

He says "Do as I do," and then He models submission for us. He fleshes it out in real life.

Ten times in Genesis chapter one you read the phrase, "God said..." God said, let there be light, vegetation, sea creatures, birds, animals. Everything that is was created by the word of His power.

Then God made Adam and said, "It is not good that man should be alone."

You could paraphrase that God said, "I'm not finished yet."

Then God made Eve, placed the couple in a beautiful garden and gave them everything they could possibly need.

Their physical needs were met by the abundance of the land, their spiritual needs were met by having a direct relationship with God, and their emotional needs were met by having each other.

Now, there one more thing God could have done. He could have said, "To keep things like they should be Adam and Eve will have no free will. They'll never do wrong as so they won't have to suffer any negative consequences."

He could have said that, but He didn't. He gave human beings the power to choose. Adam and Eve could have chosen to do right and not to have disobeyed God, but they didn't.

They sinned by violating God's decree not to eat the fruit and we've been experiencing the consequences of their disobedience to this day.

We see life through the distortion of sin. We struggle with our relationship with God and we struggle with our relationships with others.

So God says, "Look to me. I'm clothed with majesty and splendor. I alone deserve all worship. I am the King of kings and the Lord of lords."

"But I humbled Myself to serve you. I came in the incarnation and adopted the nature of a created being. I suffered at the hands of my created ones. I went to the cross bearing the sins you committed."

"I served you when you weren't entitled to anything and now I'm commanding you to serve one another."

"Submit to one another in the fear of God and don't give me any excuses." As Jesus put it, *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* John 13:14

So beginning in Ephesians 5:22 on we've been looking at how this mutual submission is to take place.

Wives follow your husbands spiritual leadership. Husbands love your wives by giving

yourself. Children obey and honor your parents.

That brings us the the last of the family relationships, parents here's how you submit your priorities and your agenda to your children.

We're going to zero in on one verse today. Ephesians 6:4. It's just one verse but it is packed with wisdom for parents.

Read Ephesians 6:4

You say, "Wait a minute. I thought parenting was a difficult, complex job. How can you say it all in one verse?"

That's a good question, and let's see if we can answer it by unpacking Ephesians 6:4.

All throughout the Bible parents are treated as a whole lot more than the biological necessity for the production of children.

Parents are responsible agents of God's authority in the family. They're to represent the character and love of God to their children.

I believe the key to parenting is to see yourself in the proper light. And here it is. It's to see yourself as standing in the place of God!

Now, you might recoil at that thought. I don't know. You might be thinking, "Parenting is way too hard already and now I'm supposed to stand in the place of God before my kids. I don't think I can do that.

We'll remember, we've seen in the past few weeks that God would never ask us to do something we're not capable of doing. If God says parents stand in they place of God, then they do.

They real key is to find out what that really means and then see how God wants us to live it out.

It's no coincidence that God calls Himself our heavenly father. In fact, Ephesians 3:15 literally says that God is the father through whom all fatherhood derives it's name. (See NIV footnote)

The very idea of fatherhood is derived from the fatherhood of God.

This year 4 million US couples will bring babies into the world. Eight million people will be parents biologically but I wonder how many have any idea of the seriousness of what they're taking on.

How many are willing to face up to their God-given responsibilities? How many realize the divine responsibility they have to treat their children as God has treated them?

There's a Childfree movement in the US that has a number of web sites and published resources.

They call, people who have children "breeders" and have an obvious animosity toward kids.

Under the question and answer section, one web site gives this advice.

When breeders ask you "When are you going to have children?" answer "When I run out of better things to do."

When they say "My kids are the best thing that ever happened to me." Respond, "Well that's a sad commentary on your life."

If people with children say, "You're being selfish!" your response should be, "Oh, because creating a human being to amuse yourself ISN'T selfish."

Kind of twisted huh? It would be a real shame if one of those happily childfree couples slipped up and got pregnant.

How'd you like to grow up in a home where your parents prided themselves on not ever wanting children.

It's like the little girl who said to me once, "My mommy wanted 4 children and my dad didn't want any so they compromised and had my brother and me."

That must do a number on your sense of worth, to grow up knowing that in reality your father didn't want any children.

The biblical perspective is found in Psalm 127. Come to think of it, I didn't see any Bible verses on any of the childfree web sites.

But Psalm 127:3-5 says, *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. Happy is the*

man who has his quiver full of them.

According to God, children are a gift from God and parents have a God-given responsibility to raise them in a way that's honoring and pleasing to Him.

And if you think about it, it's really striking the way God challenges us in Ephesians 6:4.

It reads, *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath...*

As a point of clarity, the word translated "father" in the original is the Greek noun *pater*. It's where we get our English word "paternity" and it literally means "the male partner."

It's used 372 times in the New Testament and many of those times it's used along with the word *meter* which clearly means mother. *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife* (Mark 10:7) is an example.

But it can be used for both parents. **Turn to Hebrews 11:23 pg 1069**

Read vs 23

There the same word *pater* means both father and mother together.

Now go back to Ephesians 6

The commands for children leading up to chapter 6 have been, Children obey your *parents, honor your father and mother.*

It would seem natural that when the direction turns to the parents that they would both be included.

So what are the directives to parents? If we're to submit to one another in the fear of God what should parents do?

I. Parents Are To Avoid Self-Focus

Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath... The parallel passage in Colossians 3 says *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

NIV *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

The Message *Parents, don't come down too hard on your children or you'll crush their spirits.*

The New Century Version reads *Fathers, do not nag your children. If you do are too hard to please, they may want to stop trying.*

NASB *Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.*

Now, couple those different translations together and see if you don't have an accurate description of so many young people today. Embittered, crushed in spirit, angry.

Why? What causes children to give up? What provokes them to anger? We could come up with a whole lot of reasons this morning, but in this context there's one specific thing.

The positive side of this verse is going to deal with discipleship and training. It follows a section that tells children to obey and honor their parents. So in context, the thing that provokes and exasperates children is the wrong type of teaching and example.

Remember, we're supposed to submit to one another in the fear of God.

Parenting is hard work. It takes time and energy and emotion. And while the whole authority aspect is crucial, parents are supposed to lead like Jesus led.

As we've seen over and over again, Jesus is a servant leader. He is Lord. He is master. He's in control. But He's also the epitome of love.

Love doesn't seek its own. Love isn't all about me and my wants and my comfort. Love is about the other's good.

I'd highly recommend that you get a Self-Confrontation book and read lesson 16, which is *Guidelines for Training Children* and look in the section titled *Ways That Parents Provoke Their Children To Anger*.

I'd like us to think through the 5 major ways that they list. Remember, these all grow out of an attitude of self-focus.

1) You can provoke your child to anger when you fail to demonstrate biblical love

Parents, listen to God's description of biblical love from I Corinthians 13.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. I Corinthians 13:4-8

Because you're the parent and have God-given authority in the home doesn't mean it's OK to violate God's commands.

Here's some ways we can disrespect God's directives:

- a) Impatience, not letting your child be a child and go through the learning curve when it comes to doing things.
- b) Bragging, "When I was your age I walked to school through the knee deep snow uphill both ways."
- c) Rudeness, Embarrassing or demeaning your child
- d) Keeping a record of wrongs, "I've told you a thousand times to pick up your toys."
- e) Not Persevering, In other words responding in anger to your child because you're focused on your own difficulties.

Here's another way we can provoke to anger...

- 2) You can provoke your child to anger when you fail to live as a Christian
 - a) Judging your child's behavior when you don't judge your own
 - b) Speaking unwholesome words, Yelling, calling names, demeaning with your words
 - c) Lying to your child
 - d) Failing to confess to your child when you're wrong
- 3) You can exasperate your child when you become the Authority in their life instead of pointing them to God's authority.
 - a) Demanding your child serve you while you refuse to serve others
 - b) Imposing your aspirations on your child instead of encouraging them to be what God wants them to be
 - c) Comparing your child to others. "Why can you be like Susie? She always gets good grades."
- 4) You can embitter your children when you neglect your child

You say, "Oh I'd never neglect my child. I make sure they get all the stuff they want, play

sports, go to dance class, go to camp. We're busy in our family."

- a) Fail to take the time with your child to teach them how to apply the Bible to life
- b) Fail to listen patiently to your child because you're too busy with important stuff
- c) Fail to discipline your child in a biblical manner

I can show you study after study where kids say the thing they want most from their parents is better discipline and better communication.

Think about some of the wrong things we do as parents. We make too many rules and then have to let some slide. We make rules in the heat of anger and then have to back down. "If you do that again you're grounded for a month." Dad makes a rule but Mom's a soft touch so she doesn't enforce it.

See, all of those wrong responses come because of our own self-focus as parents.

I. Parents Are To Avoid Self-Focus

II. Parents Are To Disciple Their Children

Read verse 4 again

There's obviously 2 key words here that we want to define so we can understand our responsibility.

The first is the word "training." It's the Greek term *paideia*. This word is used 19 times in it's verb and noun form. It's translated "teaching" "punish" "discipline" "instruction."

It's the same word that's translated "instruction" in II Timothy 3:16, one of the most important verses in the New Testament.

There were told, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

All of the Bible is practical for our lives. It's the very Word of God. It tells us doctrine, that's God's truth. It gives us reproof, so it tells us if we're doing wrong. It's useful for correction, it tells us the right thing to do. And then it's profitable for instruction.

That's our word *paideia* and it means how to keep doing the right thing. How to keep walking in the right path.

It also has the idea of discipline. Remember “discipline” and “discipleship” are derived from the same root. Discipline is a lot more than punishment. It’s punishment that’s part of a bigger goal. It’s directing so that someone’s life is changed.

A parent has to know God’s principles for living and then has to teach them, by speech and by example to their children.

The second key word is the word “admonition.” This is a translation of the Greek term *nouthesia*. This term is used 11 times in its noun and verb form. It’s translated as “admonish” and “warn.”

It actually comes from 2 words, *nous* which means “mind” or “understanding” and the verb *tithemi* which means “to place.”

It literally means “to place in the mind.”

A parent needs to develop the habit of instructing their child that when they do wrong it displeases God. God forgives and is merciful, but He’s also angry at sin.

Here’s where it’s crucial that parents keep their theology balanced.

If all you do is harp on God’s anger at sin you end up with a neurotic child.

On the other hand, if all you stress is God’s love you’ll end up with an irresponsible child.

God is a God of love and forgiveness but He’s also a God who is angry with sin. By admonition we tell our children about God and His character. By nurture we demonstrate His character.

Pastor Chuck Swindol has a book entitled “You and Your Child.” In it he talks about growing up in Houston, Texas and a campaign the Houston Police Department came up with to try and stop the rising tide of juvenile crime.

It was called “Twelve Rules For Raising Delinquent Children.”

1. Begin with infancy to give your child everything he wants. He’ll grow up believing that the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words laugh at him. He’ll think he’s cute.
3. Never give a spiritual training. Wait until he’s older and he’ll decide for himself.

4. Avoid use of the word "wrong." It may cause him to develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, when he's arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he's being singled out.
5. Pick up everything he leaves lying around so that he'll be experienced in putting all responsibility on others.
6. Be careful that the silverware and drinking glasses are clean but let his mind feed on garbage.
7. Fight frequently with your spouse in front of your child. That way he won't be as shocked when the marriage breaks up later.
8. Give your child all the spending money he wants.
9. Satisfy his every craving.
10. Take his side against neighbors, teachers, and the police. They're all prejudiced against your child.
11. When he gets into real trouble apologise for yourself by saying, "I never could do anything with him."
12. Prepare for a life of grief. You're likely to have it.

Swindoll writes, "Had Solomon been mayor of Houston back then, he would have promoted that campaign. He would have encouraged parents to believe the words in Proverbs 22:6 *Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.*"

What I find interesting is that almost every book and commentary that mentions Proverbs 22:6 takes it as some kind of promise.

I'd agree with Swindoll that it's just the opposite. It's a warning. The Hebrew literally says, "Train up a child in the mouth of his way."

That's an idiom meaning, "in the way he wants to go." The Hebrew verb "train" is the word *chanak*, which means "to dedicate."

Dedicate a child to his own way and when he's an adult he's going to keep on acting that way. He'll keep acting like a selfish, self-centered kid.

Unfortunately we all know people like that.

A Christian parent's job is to train their children in God's way.

Where does all that begin? It starts with our relationship to God. So here's the questions parents need to ask.

Do I know Jesus Christ as Savior? Is Jesus Christ my hope for forgiveness and eternal life? Jesus said, *He who believes on Me has everlasting life.*

Am I serious about applying the Bible in my life? Am I honest with God about my weaknesses as well as my strengths?

Do I have a servant's heart or, is life all about me? Am I transparent enough with my children that I'm willing to admit when I'm wrong and ask forgiveness or am I so unsure of myself that I have to keep pretending and never let my defenses down?

Am I exasperating my kids and myself by my unbiblical attitudes and behavior?

If need be, am I willing today to cry out to God for forgiveness.

Am I willing to call on God for His strength and wisdom? Am I willing to commit myself to being a godly parent?

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

One last thing. Maybe you're a parent of an older child that's gone down a different path than God wants for them.

It's obviously a different path than you wanted for them and your feeling exasperated. You're losing heart. You feel like you did the right stuff but your child turned out wrong. You're thinking, "Wait a minute Ed, this doesn't work."

Remember, as hard as this is for parents to come to grips with, your child is their own person. They have a will just like everyone else.

God never commands us to be successful. He only asks us to be faithful. We have no guaranteed method of causing all of our children to follow God.

It wasn't that way with the people in the Bible, and it isn't that way for us.

God is calling you and me today, to keep on walking with Him. Keep praying for your child. Keep encouraging other parents to parent God's way. Keep on teaching Jr. Church and ministering to other children.

Don't lose heart.