

Spiritual Disciplines - Fatherhood

Eph. 6:4 – “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”.

The Need for Godly Fathers:

I believe the lack of godly fathers is at the root of many of the social and spiritual problems in America today. The Scriptures lay a great deal of responsibility at the feet of the fathers and when this responsibility is not assumed and fulfilled, chaos is the result. We have many young (and old) men today who do not understand responsibility, morality, or love because they never had a father to teach it to them. I believe that much of the promiscuity and perversion among women is the result of seeking attention that their fathers never gave to them. Read Luke 1:13-17. This passage refers to the work of John the Baptist in preparing a people for the Lord. Part of John's work was to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children. Why? Because godly fathers are a foundation of a good Christian home, which is a building block of the Church and of a good society. When godly fathers are physically, spiritually, or mentally absent, the home suffers and chaos results.

Children have a natural love for both of their parents, but they have a special honor for their fathers. Look at the passage below:

Proverbs 17:6 – “Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.”

When fathers fail to fulfill God's expectations for them and let both God and their children down, the children look elsewhere for attention and direction. It is not possible for a mother to fulfill both her role and the role of a husband. That isn't to say that God can't bless single mothers, enabling them to raise godly children. I mean that whenever a godly father is missing, he can't be replaced.

Many of the key passages on child raising are directed at fathers (See Ephesians 6:4, Proverbs 4:1-4, Isaiah 38:19, Colossians 3:21, Hebrews 12:7-10, 1 Timothy 3:4-5). This doesn't mean that mothers don't also play a tremendous role in parenting. However, the leadership has been given to men and these verses imply that men are to play a key role in loving, teaching, and disciplining their children!

The Father's Directives

One of the key passages in Scripture relating to the role that fathers must play in the home is Ephesians 6:4. This passage gives fathers four directives: Don't provoke your children to anger; Bring them up (Tenderly Cherish them); Nurture (Discipline) them; and Admonish (Instruction) them. Let's discuss each of these.

Don't Provoke them to Anger

Somehow, many of the behavioral traps that men easily fall into bring our children down in frustration and provoke them toward anger, bitterness, and ungodly lives. Read Colossians 3:21 and discuss how the following behaviors can be manifested and how this provokes a child to anger and discouragement.

Criticism

We can be overly critical, always pointing out their faults and never letting them know we are pleased with what they have done. We can also exhibit a critical spirit by never being satisfied with what they are doing. For example, “Yeah, that was pretty good but I bet you can do even better next time.”

Over Strictness

All of us have things that we prefer and things that bother us. Many times, these preferences go beyond the bounds of Scripture and can create unnecessary rules and regulations for our children. Sometimes we also fail to see the point where we need to let go and trust God and the teaching we have given them.

Irritability

Men are very goal-oriented beings with an agenda of things to accomplish. We snap when things don't work out. This type of behavior can really frustrate a child, especially when they bear our wrath without having been the cause of our problems. Even if they were the cause of the problem, sinful anger doesn't accomplish God's purposes; it just makes it worse.

Inconsistency

This has to be one of the greatest frustrations for children. Sometimes parents want it this way. Another time they want it another way. We might understand the differences (a lot of times it's our mood), but unless our children do, they get very frustrated and confused. We must be consistent in what we say and do.

Favoritism

We see examples of this in Scripture. Isaac favored Esau. Rebekah favored Jacob. This created sibling rivalry, unfair treatment, and a lot of hurt on the part of the children. We must try to demonstrate equality in our love, attention, and affection. If we don't, it will just breed more problems in our families.

Tenderly Cherish them

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Once we know what not to do, we need to know what to do. Many people skip past this portion of Ephesians 6:4 because the meaning is not clearly illustrated in the King James Version. To “bring them up” means to tenderly cherish your children. This describes a way in which we accomplish our instruction and discipline, the next two parts of this passage.

Our model for fathering is the way God, the Father, attends to His children. Psalms 25:6 says, “Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old.” Consider how patient, loving, and merciful God is toward you, despite your limited understanding, endless questions, lack of faith, and outright rebellion against Him. Consider the infinite gap between His knowledge and your knowledge, His perfection and your sin. Then, consider your children and the way you respond to them. Are there more similarities than differences? What might God be convicting you to change?

Discipline

Discipline is a dreaded but necessary part of child raising. Proverbs 22:15 says, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” Proverbs 13:24 also says, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” The rod here is symbolic of all forms of discipline, not just spanking.

What is the goal of discipline? **The goal in correction is to get the child to surrender their own will to that of the parents., who are seeking the child's best interests. The rod, when used appropriately, is a tool that not only corrects, but prevents misbehavior. The child learns that when we say something, we mean it and that there are negative repercussions to ignoring us.**

When people think of discipline they normally think of violence and anger. What are some ways that we can conduct discipline in a tender and loving manner? **We should gain our composure before disciplining. This ensures that we aren't disciplining out of anger and that we have time to think through the correction. It also helps if we can determine what corrective actions we will take when specific situations occur.**

Instruction

The word “instruction” literally means “to place before the mind”. It is the process of instilling knowledge, understanding, and wisdom in our children so that they might have the right concepts “before their mind” when they make decisions. While teaching methods may vary from person to person, the importance of accomplishing this task in them cannot be overemphasized. Read 1 Samuel 3:11-13 and discuss Eli's failure to instruct his children.

Many parents think of giving lectures when you say that they should instruct their children. What does the Scriptures teach us about how and when we should instruct them? Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and discuss how to have an instructive lifestyle in today's society.

The key to applying this passage is to see that it is challenging us to teach them out of every aspect of life. Every activity, problem, or challenge, is an opportunity to teach our kids. Sometimes, we are more interested in pacifying them, ignoring them or getting them out of the way than teaching them. A lot of this can be accomplished if we slow down a bit and include our children in everyday activities. Talk to them more. Discuss what is happening in their life and how God feels about it. Give them a heavenly perspective. This can also apply to teaching them life skills (changing the oil, cooking, cleaning, etc...)

How does the direction to be tender and loving affect how we instruct our children?

Our job is not to sit them down to lecture them. Our role is more of an encouraging coach. We need to be working for their utmost good, getting involved in their lives and helping them understand what is good and what needs to be changed. We need to teach them how to think about things. We need to teach by example and live out Christian principles in front of them.