

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Pattern for Parents, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 6:4

Code: 1950A

Tonight as we continue in our look at what the Word of God has to say about the family, we come to the responsibility of parents. Turn in your Bible to Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 4. Amazingly when the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gives parenting instruction, it's just one sentence...one brief verse. Ephesians 6:4, "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

You have a negative and a positive. The negative--do not provoke your children to anger, obviously means treat them with love, treat them in a way that affirms your affection to them so they don't become hostile. The positive--bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

What is parenting? Very simple, really, loving your children so that they're not angry with you and bringing them up to know the Lord. You might think there would be a whole book on parenting, or there might be a whole chapter on it, but there's just one verse cause the task is so highly defined.

That instruction, "Not to provoke your children to anger," must be understood, and we'll endeavor to do that in weeks to come, and the instruction, "To bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," must be understood as well, and there are some component parts to that which we will endeavor to grasp as well. But how wonderful that the whole responsibility can be refined down to one statement.

In spite of the simplicity of the instruction, parents today appear to me to be somewhat frightened about the whole prospect. They are challenged by the times in which we live, the issues at hand, and some of them look at parenting as a frightening responsibility. And it is, to some degree, a serious and challenging task but not for the reasons that most people might suggest. If you just surveyed people about having children, they might tell you that they have some reluctance about having children because it's expensive. You have to have a bigger house and you have to get a bigger car or cars. You have to get a lot of extra clothes and food and you have to pay for all their medical needs and college. They might say, and it's also very time consuming. If you have any personal goals or personal desires, or personal plans, personal interests sort of take a back seat to the demand of children. They are highly demanding. And while we might think that that extremely demanding time is only in infancy, as they grow older we find the demands are not less but more and more complex.

Some people would say parenting is challenging because it calls for such focus on children's activities. In other words, there's so many things that they're supposed to be involved in that you wind up spending time and energy in running that endless taxi service to meet all their needs, and the more of them you have, the more complicated it gets.

And I suppose there are those superficial things which make parenting to some degree challenging. The real reason that child raising is so difficult, the real challenge before us, and we as Christians know this, can be boiled down to two components. And I think we need to understand these if we are going to love our children in such a way that they aren't angry with us but rather return that love, if we are to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If we're to do that, that we must understand that the difficulty really comes on two levels, or in two areas. And we can reduce them an external component and an internal component. The external simply means the pressure of the society and the culture that is around us. The internal, the pressure of the nature of the child that is within him or her.

Parenting is not difficult because it is expensive. It's not difficult because it's time consuming. It's not difficult because it's distracting from your personal agenda. It's not difficult because it gets so complex to meet all the demands. It is really difficult because there are such heavy pressures from the society around us and heavier pressures from the nature of children within them. And until we understand that, we're not going to understand what parenting is really all about.

Now there are some issues the Bible doesn't talk about. It doesn't talk about common sense things, practical things, personal preferences as to how you raise your children and what are the techniques of childbirth and the techniques of child rearing and all of that. The Scripture doesn't really say much about that except, as I've pointed out to you in a prior message that you are to spank your child when your child does not obey the Word of God. So we told you earlier that your responsibility is to teach them the Word of God, hold them to the standard. And if they do not obey the Word of God and your authority as you apply it in their lives, you discipline them physically.

But you need to understand the two great challenges, and I want to help you to understand them tonight, if I can. First of all, let's talk about the external, and by that I mean the culture around us. Life is frankly no longer simple. It is no longer centered in the home. It is no longer centered in the family as a close-knit and only marginally influenced unit, that is influenced from the outside world. That's not true anymore. There was a time when that was true. There was a time when you grew up on a farm and you basically lived your whole life there. You ate breakfast with the family, you probably went to a little school down the road and went to school with all your neighbors and were taught by a teacher or two from the local area. You went back home, worked on the farm, sat around the house at night and basically were instructed in life by that family relationship. And that home would be only marginally influenced from the outside world. And that basically has been true for a long, long time.

Even families living in more urban areas still had a predominant influence in the home and with the family. Parents, churches, schools had community standards which were established for childhood education even, childhood training. And basically followed paths of measured increments of learning and measured increments of exposure to reality that suited a child's age and capacity to deal with issues.

In other words, there were secrets the children didn't know. And it was very important in raising children to unfold those secrets at reasonable times so they were not blasted with things for which they were neither intellectually or emotionally able to make a proper response. In other words, we could say the children had controlled exposure. And the family and the church and the school and thus the local community was in charge of that.

All of that is gone now in what Neal Postman(?), a writer and professor at New York University in the area of communication, has called "The Disappearance of Childhood," in a book republished from its original 1970's publication, republished in 1994, the book, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, helps us to grasp what is happening around us.

Childhood, as we know it, is disappearing, or has almost disappeared. The thesis that Postman sets forth, and I think ably does, basically is the idea that childhood as a unique period of human development is disappearing. He, by the way, is building on a thesis that has been studied for a number of years now and there have been a number of books written on this particular thesis. It is quite a topic of discussion in academic circles.

Let me tell you why he believes and others believe that childhood is disappearing and what are the manifestations of it. First of all, clothing used to be different for children. Now it is as much like adults as possible. And while that isn't the issue itself, that is reflective of the issue. Children now demand to be dressed as closely to the dress of their parents as they possibly can be.

Childhood games. I remember when I grew up we had games, games that we invented. Sometimes we had games that nobody else ever heard of. But I remember games like Hide and Seek, and Kick the Can, and Stickball, and I remember sandlot baseball where we made up our own rules and we played with anything and everything we could find...sometimes a rock in the middle and a bunch of old socks wrapped around it and then it was wrapped in black electric tape and we hit it with a stick and called it baseball. Childhood games. If you grew up in Philadelphia or Baltimore or an eastern city, you probably played stepball, a childhood game that we invented.

What was really great about it was, it was played without any adult supervision. In fact, there weren't any adults around. And that was fine. There weren't any uniforms. There weren't any umpires or referees and there wasn't any equipment and there weren't any spectators. And you know what?

There weren't any unrealistic expectations. And we played those games just for the fun of it and we played them by the hour.

Where are the childhood games today? Today's children play copies of adult games, like Little League baseball, six year olds standing out there at all the appropriate positions trying to play a game that is impossible for them to play, absolutely impossible. PeeWee Football, PeeWee Basketball, PeeWee Soccer, and PeeWee whatever else, totally supervised by adults. In fact, there are adults all over the place, clogging up the field and base paths and everything else. Lots of sophisticated equipment, special fields, umpires, referees, a whole bunch of spectators and the kids could care less about the game. For the most part the game is not for the fun of the kids and the expression of childhood imagination...listen to this one...it is for the reputation gained by gloating parents. It's not for the fun of the kids, it's for the reputation of the parents who have systematically eliminated all the child's imagination and most of the fun.

And then there's behavior and language and attitudes and desires and all of these things now are basically indistinguishable between children and adults. Children don't talk like children, they talk like adults. Their attitudes are adultlike. Their vocabulary is adultlike. Many today are now crying for equal rights for children, because they're nothing other than short and light adults.

In the past we were convinced the children needed to be protected. They needed to be processed in a series of sequential developmental opportunities and we called those grades in school. Remember those? And what you learned in those grades was all categories that were refined and defined according to your capabilities as you grew. Information was phased out to you carefully prepared and dosed in prescribed degrees and amounts as the child was being shaped into an independent thinking individual.

And, frankly, "The maintenance of childhood," says Neal Postman, "depended on the principles of managed information and sequential learning," end quote. That's how a child really was a child because a child only knew certain things. And there were secrets about life that a child didn't know yet.

Until one great invention, electronics came. Before that parents and teachers could decide what children heard, what they saw, and when in their development they heard it and saw it. But then came electronics and with the electronics came the media...the first time in human history. And because of electronics, printing presses were built and books and magazines and then radio and then recordings and then tapes and then CDs and then video tapes, cameras, billboards, movies and particularly television, all forms of modern media directly produced by electronics. Now we can't even conceive of life without electronics.

What does that produce? It produces an uncontrollably overexposed population of children...overexposed to everything without regard for any plan or any sequence. All of a sudden in your home, your children are no longer only able to know what you tell them and what your teacher tells them, they can turn on the television and be blitzed with any information about anything at any time at any level. Computers now and Internet personalize the world's best and the world's worst for anybody who can access it. And the whole educational sequence, the whole educational hierarchy has collapsed under the weight of video.

Television is undifferentiated in its accessibility. That is to say television doesn't make any distinctions between an adult and a child, none at all. And television is having a massive influence on children, and you might be surprised to know this. Three million children are watching television every night of the year between eleven and eleven-thirty P.M. Two point one million between 11:30 and 12 A.M. One point one million between 12 and 1 A.M., somewhere around 750 thousand children are watching television between 1 and 1:30 A.M. Supposedly the time when most adult television is being presented.

Neal Postman says this, "We may conclude that television erodes the dividing line between childhood and adulthood in three ways...all having to do with its undifferentiated accessibility. First, because it requires no instruction to grasp its form." That's easy, push the button and look at it. "Secondly, because it does not make complex demands on either the mind or behavior. And thirdly, because it does not segregate its audience."

"Television...says Postman...is without any secrets. And therefore there can no such thing as childhood." Childhood is all about secrets, it's all about not knowing. Innocence is, whatever level of innocence we could assign to a child, certainly not moral innocence, but innocence as to the issues of life is completely lost in this environment. A group...and I think you would understand this...a group, any group, is largely defined by the exclusivity of the information its members share."

What do we mean by that? Well, if everybody knew what lawyers knew, there wouldn't be any lawyers. If everybody knew what doctors knew, there wouldn't be any doctors. If everybody knew what preachers knew, there wouldn't be any preachers. And if children know what adults know, there aren't any children.

So they're overexposed to things their minds and emotions cannot handle. They are consequently hurried into massive temptations which they are unable to deal with. And under the onslaught of this corrupt world with its wrong ideas, its wrong desires, its wrong words, it's wrong deeds and its wrong attitudes, children can become severe problems to parents and society. They are exposed consistently to what they are not able to handle emotionally, what they are not able to handle morally, what they are not able to handle socially or spiritually. And what happens is, they do not have the self-control and the self-restraint to deal with the issues that arise because of this information.

There is a gradual decline in shame and a gradual loss of all self-restraint. Again, Neal Postman says, "In having access to the previously hidden fruit of adult information, they are expelled from the garden of childhood," end quote.

And you look at the culture and you see that. The whole culture is moving toward homogeneity of style, dress, language, food. I remember when McDonald's commercial were geared to kids. No more. Clothes, food, language, style, games, all homogeneous. Sadly the result is tragic. You have children without the ability to handle the information they're exposed to. And they're exposed to ideas and attitudes, desires and behaviors that they just cannot deal with. They become potentially severe social problems in the home, in the school and in society. And I'll show you that by simple statistics. In 1950, in 1950 adults committed serious crimes at a rate 215 times the rate of children's serious crimes. When I'm talking about children, I'm talking about fourteen and under, according to this study. I'm talking about serious crimes which would be classified as murder, rape, aggravated assault, and armed robbery.

Alright, in 1950 adults committed those kinds of serious crimes at a rate 215 times the rate of children's crimes. By the way, you might want to know that in 1950 in the United States of America there were 170 children arrested for serious crimes the entire year...170. Which as a percentage of the crimes .0004%. Children didn't commit crimes.

That's changed. How are you going to restrain a child in a world of unrestrained adults when the children know everything the adults know? By 1960, between '50 and '60 television came, electronic media began to have its impact, things began to expand, the world began to be made available. It seemed an innocent time but here's an interesting statistic. By 1960 adult serious crimes were committed only eight to one times that of children's crimes. It went from 215 to one--to eight to one in ten years.

By 1980 the rate was five to one.

So between 1950 and 1980, there was an eleven thousand percent increase in crimes committed by children fourteen and under. And when I'm talking about serious crimes, there was an eight thousand, three hundred percent increase in lesser crimes. Crime is no longer an adult activity. But neither is anything else.

If American can be said to be drowning in a tidal wave of crime, then the wave has mostly been generated by our children. Crime like most everything else is no longer an exclusively adult activity, it has become a child's activity. Almost daily the newspapers tell us of arrests being made of children, who like those who play tennis at Wimbledon, are getting younger and younger all the time.

In New York City, a nine-year-old boy tried to hold up a bank. In Westchester County back in 1981 in July, Westchester County in New York, the police charged four boys with sexual assault of a seven-year-old girl. The alleged rapists were a thirteen year old, two eleven year olds and a nine year old, the latter being the youngest person ever to be accused of first-degree rape in Westchester County.

Ten to thirteen year olds are involved in adult crime as never before. Indeed, the frequency of serious child crime has put youth-crime codes to their absolute limits. The first American Juvenile Court was established in 1899 in the state of Illinois, and the idea established in 1899 for juvenile courts, the idea could come to its end before this decade is over because legislators throughout the United States of America are hurriedly trying to revise criminal laws so that children who commit crimes are treated exactly like adults.

In California a study group formed by the Attorney General has recommended sending juveniles convicted of first-degree murder to prison, rather than to the California Youth Authority, where they've always gone in the past. It is also recommended that violent offenders be tried as adults.

In Vermont, the arrest of two teenagers in connection with the rape, torture and killing of a twelve-year-old girl has driven the state legislature to propose hardening all juvenile codes. Again in New York, children between the ages of 13 and 15 who are charged with serious crimes can now be tried in adult courts and if convicted can receive a normal long prison sentences. Prisons are going to be populated with these young people.

In Florida, Louisiana, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, laws have been changed to make it easier to transfer children between the ages of 13 and 15 to adult criminal courts if the crime is serious enough. In Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon and Utah, the privacy that usually surrounds the trials of juveniles has been eliminated and newspaper reporters may now regularly attend all the proceedings. They're being treated like adults because they're acting like adults.

This unprecedented change in both the frequency and brutality of child crime indicates that the concept of childhood is rapidly slipping from our grasp. Our children live in a society whose psychological and social contexts do not stress the differences between adults and children. As the adult world opens itself in every conceivable way to children, they will inevitably emulate adult criminal activity. Not only adult criminal activity, but adult immorality. And one of the consequences of this is has been a rise in teenage pregnancies, we all know about it. Births to teenagers continually rising, particularly in the age group between 13 and 17. Millions of babies born every year illegitimately to teenaged kids. Babies being born, we read about occasionally, to twelve year olds and thirteen year olds.

Alcohol, drugs, obviously a large part of consumption of these things is by children. The statistics are staggering, I won't labor through all of them. You're aware of that.

So we have an immense problem here. We have an overexposed generation of children who have to be treated like adults because they have all the adult information. Instead of parents trying to bring them under control, parents have been taught...don't ever spank your child. Don't ever discipline your child. And if something's wrong with your child, you've got to understand what the problem is. And the problem is not sin, the problem is a lack of self-esteem. So what you've got to do is build them up.

Now this immense challenge put upon parenting from the outside is compounded by an even more immense challenge put on parenting from the inside. The internal, let's go to that one.

What do I mean by that? Well children may be ignorant when they come into the world, they may be naive, they may be unexperienced, they may be cute, but they are not innocent with regard to evil. I suppose the simplest way to say it is this, the seed of every known sin is planted deep in the heart of every child. The seed of every known sin is planted deep in the heart of every child. And the truth, listen to this because it's so important, the truth is not that if things somehow turn out badly our children might get messed up. Our children are severely messed up when they arrive. It's not that if things don't work out the way we would like, our children may drift spiritually and they may wander morally, but rather...listen...the drive to drift spiritually and morally, the drive to sin is embedded in their natures. And it is the compelling drive.

They don't come into the world seeking God and righteousness. They come into the world seeking the fulfillment of their sinful desires. Listen, all that is required for the tragic harvest is that children be allowed to give expression to their most evil desires. We talk about mass murderers all the time, and they're always doing things about them on television. We talk about pedophiles, the horrible crime of molesting children, rapists, homosexual perversions, lifelong chronic criminal behavior and people are always asking the question. What happened to them when they were young? What did their parents do to them? They must have been in an abusive environment. They must have been in some kind of a situation where they were mistreated and maltreated. The question is always asked...what did their parents do to them?

Let me tell you something. Mass murderers, pedophiles, rapists, perverts, lifelong criminals are not the products of what their parents did to them, they're the products of what their parents didn't do to them. If you're running around trying to find some traumatic event in the life of a Jeffrey Dahmer when he was a child, you might not find it. Now how do you explain a homosexual murdering cannibal? What did they do to him? That's not the question. The question is, what didn't they do to him? Cause the Bible says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of righteousness will drive it from him."

You see, what happened was they just followed the natural course of their sinful nature. It's frightening, folks, because as people bring these little reprobates into the world, as adorable as they are, and have absolutely no commitment to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and no commitment to use the rod, they are simply allowing the children to give full expression to their depravity, what we're going to have is adult disasters, if not child disasters. It isn't that mass murderers and pedophilic child killers were made that way by their parents...do you know that many of them didn't have no parental influence, many of them were foster children?

You see, the problem was they became what they were potentially at birth because they were never instructed and restrained. And even more, they were never converted.

In Psalm 58, and I'll just read a couple of Psalms to you because I think they're very important as a touchstone for us in understanding this. Psalm 58 verse 3 says this, "The wicked are estranged from the womb and these who speak lies go astray from birth, they have venom like the venom of a serpent." Whoa...they're little snakes. "The poison of asps is under their lips, they're wicked when they come out of the womb, they are liars from their birth." That's called total depravity, if you're looking for a theological category for that.

In Psalm 51 and verse 5, David says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me." He doesn't mean that he was an illegitimate child, he wasn't. What he means is from his conception to his birth he was iniquitous. And let me tell you something. Understanding the total depravity of your children is the important practical foundation of all parenting. You can be depraved people under some control by teaching them morality and punishing them in a proper way, a loving way, but nonetheless in a firm way. You can bring your children under control, but ultimately what you want to do is see them pass from darkness to light, right? You want to see their heart transformed so that instead of loving sin they love righteousness. Instead of wanting to give full expression to their evil desires, they want to give full expression to what is honoring to God.

All this psychological analysis stuff of all these criminals, trying to figure out what somebody did to them, misses the point. It's not what somebody did to them, it's what somebody didn't do to them. Nobody would deal with them. Nobody would confront their wickedness. Nobody would show them the divine standard. Nobody would hold them to the conformity to that divine standard by the threat of corporeal punishment in a loving and affirming way, of course. And most of all, no one led them to the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ so that they would have a supernatural restrainer.

It really is of little consequence what you do with your children in terms of the practical issues. What little schedule you put them on or don't put them on is not the issue. What is the issue is that you lead your fallen sinful child to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. That's the issue. God, and I know you hate to think of this, and I even hate to think of it when I look at my precious children and

grandchildren, but God has not given us holy, little angels to be delicately handled so that they don't go astray. They're not holy little angels to be delicately handled so they don't get corrupted; they're corrupt little sinners who have to be led to become saints.

If you have trouble with this, just recognize that your children are a miniature version of you.

Now the world recognizes this disaster. And the world says, "What are we going to do? We've got this tremendous problem with these children, they're out of control. They're angry, aren't they? Boy, we have an angry generation. Listen to their music. Look at their films. Vengeance, anger, brutality, hostility. And who are they most angry with? Their parents who have frustrated them, the very thing that Ephesians 6:4 says don't do, and made them bitter and angry.

What is the world going to do? Well, all the psychologists got together and they came up with a solution. Solution right out of hell, the solution is they lack self-esteem. Boy, does that work good from an economic standpoint. People will pay to come and have you tell them how wonderful they really are. You make a lot of money doing that. They say that the problem, you see, is they don't have a proper self-respect, they don't have a proper pride in themselves and they need to see themselves as good, noble, wonderful people. In fact, they need to love themselves.

And so, you take all of these young people and you say, "You just need to love yourself the way you are, you need to accept yourself the way you are and you need to just feel good about yourself the way you are." And you just pour gas on the fire because all they want already is their own will and their own way, right? And you're just telling them they're justified in it.

The Newhouse News Service recently sent an article to subscribing newspapers. The title of it was, "Note to California...Drop Self-Esteem." Interesting article. This is what it says, "It has been fashionable to blame these problems on low self-esteem, figuring that people who don't like themselves don't have enough incentive to stay out of trouble. But that's wrong...says a psychologist and professor and author who has spent years studying the choices people make...the issue is much simpler...he says...it's a matter of self-control." He says the problem is they don't know how to control themselves.

Now he's getting close to reality, isn't he? The problem is not that they need more self-esteem, the problem is they need more self-control. This author and a number of others who are putting pressure on the state of California have concluded that, "Developing self-control will do more good for you than anything else and will help you stay out of trouble." Boy, how obvious is that?

If you have self-control, you're going to control yourself, you're not going to be out of control. So this psychologist and professor says, and I quote, "If we cross out self-esteem and put in self-control, kids would be better off and society in general would be much better off."

And I agree. I agree. But they decry the fact that we've all been told that we have to boost their self-esteem, make them feel good about everything. The article says this, and I think it's very interesting. "Leafing through a trendy parenting magazine, for example, you will read, 'We have to be content with ourselves before we have the ability to truly give to our children.'" Oh, so the parents have to be really working on their own pride, too. And then he says, "This is one of the neatest philosophical tropes of the self-esteem movement, self-absorption as altruism."

It's reached its most popular expression in Whitney Houston's anthem, you didn't know Whitney Houston had an anthem, she does. "The greatest love of all," you've heard it sung. Do you know the lyrics? "Everybody's searching for a hero, people need someone to look up to, I never found anyone who fulfilled my needs, so I learned to depend on me, the greatest love of all is easy to achieve, learning to love yourself, it is the greatest love of all." That's the national anthem of self-esteem.

The song went, by the way, double platinum, in case you care. It became a staple of Superbowl halftime shows, Olympic extravaganzas, and it the sing-along song at school assemblies.

The result of this self-esteem emphasis is that you've got to defer to every kid because every kid's got to have a right to express himself so he feels good about himself. And it just escalates the out-of-control behavior.

And you know how the schools are adapting to it? It's fascinating. They're abandoning standards...get this...eliminating grades, like A,B,C,D,F, and substituting subjective feelings for objective facts in evaluations. I'll give you an illustration. There's a new technique being used in public education called "inventive spelling." Now I did this for years but nobody...nobody saw it for the creative genius that it was. It's called "inventive spelling," it's become widespread, it's become very popular. And it allows students to spell words in any way that feels right to them. Because what is really most important is that they feel good. So you raise a generation of people who are driven toward the personal fulfillment of self-esteem and feeling good...and you think that's going to solve criminal behavior?

Imagine a courtroom scene. "I'm sorry, your honor," the defendant says, "I was just...I was just living too much in my mind, it was like reason had me by the throat and I just couldn't feel straight." Let me tell you, self-esteem can't tame the little beast, it just pours gas on the fire cause it feeds the sin of pride.

So what's the answer? Back to Ephesians 6. The answer, "Fathers," speaking for both really, father and mother, "do not provoke your children to anger, which these things do, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Now let's begin at the beginning. What do you need to do to change this? You've got this external world coming at them, you've got this internal corruption being allowed to run its course, both colliding in tragic consequences. And what is your job? Your job is to teach that little one the law of God and lead them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, right? You are an evangelist in your home, first and foremost, you are an evangelist.

It's not what you do to your children that make them go astray, it's what you don't do largely. So what are you going to do? First of all, children need to know they are sinners. They need to know in no uncertain terms how deep that sin goes in their nature. They need to be taught that they will feel impulses that are wrong and illegitimate and dishonoring to God and emblematic of the fact that they are alienated from God. And they need to be shown clearly the consequences of that sin. When I talk about that I'm talking about the forfeiture of blessing, difficulty in life, death and eternal hell...children need to know that. Children need to be evangelized with the truth of sin, the truth of death, and the truth of hell. When you preach the gospel, anytime you preach the gospel really to anybody, it's got to be at least 75 percent law and judgment, and 25 percent grace and forgiveness, right? Because you can't preach grace and forgiveness if people don't understand law and judgment. Your children need to understand that they need a lot more than to know Jesus wants to be your friend.

They need to know about God's law. They need to know that they have violated it, that they have no capacity in them to keep it to the pleasing of God. They can keep it externally because you force that, but their hearts have to be transformed or they will die and perish in eternal fire. There's no different way to evangelize a child from evangelizing anybody else.

One of the things that I am so grateful for in my life is that I had the privilege of having my children sit at my feet while I preached to adults. They understand the gospel that I preach to everybody to be the gospel that applied to them. If I preached on law and judgment, they heard it. If I preached on hell, they heard it. When I preached on grace, they heard it. There isn't some other message for them. There isn't some soft sell.

Jonathan Edwards said that whenever he preached to children, he liked to preach on hell because he said, quote: "It is easier to terrify a child than an adult by setting before it dreadful things."

Children should be terrified about eternal punishment, shouldn't they? It's a terrifying reality. Children are more susceptible to those terrors, and they're also more susceptible to the winsome glories of heaven. You don't leave that out. They are more susceptible to truth and they are more susceptible to error, are they not? Your little child goes marching off to school, and for the most part believes whatever some authority tells him. It's easier when they're children to lead them to the truth as it is to lead them to error.

Your children need to know that God is angry with the wicked every day and that includes them. He is angry with them. He is angry with their sin. He's very angry with their sin and He will punish them in hell if they are not forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ. They need to understand that. They also need to understand that if they put their trust in Jesus Christ their sins are forgiven and they need not fear, but they can live with the hope and the joy of heaven. So a parent's first task is to pursue vigorously the eternal salvation of their children.

Now let me sum up some things. Remember, your children are ignorant of the gospel which saves, you have to tell them. They are sinful and they lack a solid fear of the consequence of their sin. They don't have that. You can reinforce that by consequence that you bring to them when they break the law of God which you apply to them in your family. Your children are selfish and they are self-centered and proud. They crave worldly pleasure. They are frivolous and thoughtless about serious matters. They are influenced by the world around them and they are greatly affected by evil friends. They cannot understand the blessings of salvation. They cannot understand the joys of conversion unless they see them in your life.

So leading your little ones to God is a formidable task but it is a thrilling one. Should we streamline? Should we abbreviate the message when we teach children the gospel? There's no biblical reason to do that. You want to use terminology they can grasp. You want to be very clear and very patient in communicating the message. You don't want to drown them in a sea of verbiage. You don't want to crush them under the weight of some heavy complicated argument.

But when the Scripture does speak of how you evangelize your children, and how you teach your children, the emphasis is on thoroughness. Where do you get that? Listen to Deuteronomy 6:6 and 7, "And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up."

In other words, you just constantly are teaching them the truth about God and about judgment and about grace and forgiveness and salvation...when you stand up, sit down, lie down, walk in the way. Thorough...you don't have to be confusing and complex, but you don't want to be too simplistic, either.

Children cannot be saved until they're old enough to understand the gospel clearly and embrace it with genuine faith. But you start as soon as you can teaching them and God knows when that heart readiness has come. People always ask me, "At what age?" It's different for every child and different in every circumstance. But they do need to be mature enough to understand sin and righteousness, to understand repentance and faith, to understand punishment. They need to be old enough to understand the seriousness of their sin, the nature of God's holy standard. At what age? It varies from child to child. But at the beginning you just start teaching and teaching and teaching and as they

develop that understanding, God will work His work when they reach the point of comprehension.

I like to call those steps toward God. And every time your children take a step toward God and say, "Well, Mom...Mommy or Daddy...I want to ask Jesus into my heart," you affirm that. You affirm that. God knows when it blossoms into the real thing. You affirm every one of those steps.

Don't soften the part of the message that sounds unpleasant. Talk about hell and judgment, talk about the blood of Christ, talk about the cross, atonement for sins. Don't tone down the demand for commitment to Christ, surrender to His Lordship. They need to know all of that.

Now specifically, and I'm going to close with this, what do I tell them? What sort of sequential steps of information do I give them? Let me give you just a little outline to follow. You can find this in my book on Faith Works if you want your own copy of it.

Number one, teach them about God's holiness...teach them about God's holiness. Teach them to fear God, that God is a holy God who cannot look upon iniquity, that God is without sin, without error, that God never does anything wrong, says anything wrong, or thinks anything wrong. God is perfectly holy. Start with that. Don't start with "God loves you and wants to be your friend." Start with God's holy standard, "I am the Lord your God, consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am holy, you shall be holy for I am holy," Leviticus 11:44 and 45, start there. Start with Joshua 24:19, "You will not be able to serve the Lord for He is a holy God, He is a jealous God, He will not forgive your transgression or your sins." Or 1 Samuel 2:2, "There is no one holy like the Lord." Or 1 Samuel 6:20, "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?" Or 1 Peter 1:16, "You shall be holy for I am holy." Or Hebrews 12:14, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." Start with the holiness of God. Show them that God is absolutely holy and has set an absolutely holy standard. Matthew 5:48, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." And ask them if they're perfect like God? They know they're not.

Because God is holy, tell them God hates sin. God hates sin. Exodus 20 verse 5, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children of a third and fourth generations of those who hate Me." Tell them that God is angry with sinners. He hates sin. And tell them that sinners will never be able to stand in His presence. Psalm 1:5, "The wicked will not stand in the judgment."

So God has a holy standard, that's where you start. Secondly, show them their sin. Show them their sin so that they understand that they have fallen short of that divine standard. Tell them that the gospel is a remedy for sin, that the whole emphasis of the good news is it is a message of forgiveness to an otherwise doomed person who will perish forever in hell. Tell them that God will give them forgiveness. Show them that as you deal with them by setting standards, holding them to the standards but when they demonstrate sorrow and repentance, acting in forgiveness.

There are a lot of byproducts to redemption, but the main issue is the forgiveness of sin. So you want to show them their sin. You say, "How do you do that?" Well you can talk about specific sins, bad attitudes, words, lies, failure to do a duty that they were told to do, disrespect, dishonoring their parents. But beyond that, talk about the fact that anything and everything in their life, no matter how good they try to be, fall short of a perfect standard and so they are sinners to the core and in danger of hell.

Tell them they're not alone, everybody's in the same situation so that they don't think that you're just treating them with some kind of ugly attitude that sets them apart in a world of nice people as those that aren't. Tell them that everybody's in the same situation. Tell them there was a time when you were in the same situation, too. That before you came to Jesus Christ and received forgiveness for your sins, you were in exactly the same situation they were in.

You see, Jesus said in Mark 2:17, "I didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." They have to know they're sinners but they also have to know that Jesus came to call them. And remind them that everybody's in the same boat. Explain to them Romans 3:10 to 18, "There is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands, none seeks after God."

And now you've showed them their sin. You've told them that God hates that sin. You've told them that everybody's in the same situation. Now tell them they can do nothing to earn their salvation. This is important. They can do nothing to earn their salvation. Tell them you're in a serious situation from which you have no ability to remove yourself. Your sins have offended God, you can't forgive yourself. He has to forgive you.

Isaiah 64:6 is a good verse, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." In other words, the best we can do is filthiness. Tell them Romans 3:20, "By the works of the law no one will be justified in His sight." Galatians 2:16 says the same thing.

In other words, tell them they're sinners like everybody else and they cannot do anything to earn salvation, cause they're probably going to say, "Well I'm going to try to be better." That won't do it. Remind them that they are in a helpless state, helpless...helpless. They cannot help themselves.

That's where you want them. Aware of God's holy standard, aware of their sins and helpless as sinners before a holy God. And then the third major point, you've told them about the holiness of God, you've shown them their sin, thirdly, instruct them about Christ and what He did...instruct them about Christ and what He did. That's just obvious. Tell them the good news. Tell the story of Jesus. Tell them that He is eternally God. Tell them that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, that God took on a body and came into the world, that God is such a loving God that He sought to save the

very sinners that were alienated from Him. Yes, tell them Jesus is the eternal God. Tell them Jesus is Lord of all. Tell them about Revelation 17:14 that He is Lord of lords and King of kings. Tell them about Philippians 2:9 to 11 that God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, the name Lord...and at that name every knee should bow, every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Tell them about Acts 10:36 that says He is Lord of all. Tell them that this eternal God who is Lord of all became man, Philippians 2:6 and 7. Tell them that He came into the world and took on human form. Tell them that He lived a pure and sinless life. Hebrews 4:15, "He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." "He committed no sin," 1 Peter 2:22, "nor was any deceit found in His mouth." First John 3:5, "In Him was no sin." Tell them the eternal God, who is Lord of all, became man and was absolutely sinless. And then tell them that He became the sacrifice for our sins.

I love that verse, 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Tell them that Jesus became the sacrifice for us, that He took God's wrath. Tell them that He shed His blood and died as an atonement for our sin. And on His death on the cross, or by His death on the cross, a way of salvation for sinners was provided. Explain to them that He died bearing our sins.

And then tell them about the resurrection. Tell them that He was delivered up for our transgressions and raised for our justification, Romans 4:25. Tell them that He came alive from the grave to show that He had paid indeed for our sins and satisfied the justice of God, conquered sin, conquered death, conquered Satan. Tell them the story of Jesus. Not just the little stories about His...His parables or His encounters with men, tell them the main story.

And then the fourth emphasis, tell them what God asks them to do in response. And what is it? Repentant faith, in a phrase. To repent and to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. Tell them of Acts 17:30, "God is now declaring that all men everywhere should repent." Repent and turn to God, it says in Acts 26:20. Tell them to turn from their sin and ask God to forgive them through Christ. Tell them to trust Jesus, to believe that He died for them and that He will save them. Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Urge them to put their trust in Christ. Tell them to seek the Lord while He may be found, not to postpone it. Plead with them to be reconciled to God in this way.

You say, "How early do you do this?" Early. They'll respond positively if this is done in a loving environment. Just keep doing it, and keep doing it. Only God knows when it becomes their faith and not just yours acceptable to them. Leading children to salvation is no different than leading adults...no different. Same gospel but the hearts of children are more tender, more eager, more responsive because they're not filled and cluttered with accumulated years of selfishness, worldliness and cultivated lusts. What a tremendous privilege to lead your little ones to Christ.

From a nineteenth century father to his children, here's a letter. "My dear children, never did I pass a more truly solemn or interesting moment than that in which my firstborn child was put into my arms and when I felt that I was a father. A new comfort was then produced in my heart which every succeeding day has tended to confirm and strengthen. I looked up to heaven and breathed over my baby the petition of Abraham for his son. 'O that Ishmael might live before you.' Recognizing in the little helpless being which had been so lately introduced into our world, there was a creature born for eternity and who when the sun shall be extinguished would be still soaring in heaven or sinking in hell. I returned to my closet for private devotion and solemnly dedicated the child to the God who had given me the precious life. And I earnestly prayed that whatever might be his lot in this world, he might be a partaker of true holiness and numbered with the saints in everlasting glory."

The father goes on. "During the days of your infancy I watched you together with your mother with all the fondness of a parent's heart. We have smiled upon you when you were slumbering. We have wept over you when you tossed with feverish restlessness and pain. We have been the delighted spectators of your childish sports. We have witnessed with pleasure the development of your intellectual abilities and have often listened with somewhat of pride to the commendations bestowed in your person. But in the midst of all of this, one deep solicitude has taken hold of our minds which nothing could ever divert or abate and that was a deep anxiety for your spiritual welfare, yes for your salvation. You cannot doubt, my children, that your parents love you. In all your recollections we have a witness to this, we have, as you know, done everything to promote your spiritual welfare and so far as was compatible with this object, your pleasure also. We have never denied you a gratification which our duty and ability allowed us to grant. And if at any time we have been severe in reproof, even this was an intimate form of love. We have spared no expense in your education. In short, love and intense love of which you can at present form no adequate conception has been the secret spring of all our conduct toward you. And as the strongest proof and purest effort of our affection, we wish you to be partakers of true holiness. Did we not cherish this anxiety? We should feel that amidst every other expression of regard we were acting toward you a most cruel and unnatural part."

In other words, what he means if we didn't feel this way we would feel cruel.

"Genuine love desires and seeks for the objects on which it is fixed. The greatest benefits of which they are capable. And as you have a capacity to serve and enjoy and glorify God, how can we love you in reality if we do not covet for you this highest and holiest distinction? We should feel that our love had exhausted itself upon trifles and had let go objects of immense infinite eternal consequence if it were not to concentrate all its prayers, desires and efforts on your personal salvation."

"Almost every parent," he writes, "has some one object which he desires above all on behalf of his children. Our supreme ambition for you is this, that whatever situation you occupy, you may adorn it with the beauty of holiness and discharge its duties under the influence of Christian principles. Much as we desire your respectability in life, we would rather see you in the most obscure, even menial

situation, provided you were partakers of true holiness then behold you on the loftiest pinnacle of the temple of fame, the object of universal admiration, if at the same time your hearts were destitute of the fear of God."

He goes on to say, "We presented ceaseless prayer to God for your salvation. As soon as reason dawned, we poured the light of religious instruction into your mind. You can't even remember the time when these efforts began. Have we not instructed and warned and admonished and encouraged you as we laid open to your view the narrow path that leads to eternal life? How could we endure to see our children choosing any other ways than those of wisdom and any other path than that of life? How could we bear the sight to behold you traveling along the broad road that leads to destruction and running with a multitude to do evil? O God, hide us from this sad spectacle in the grave and ere that time comes, take us to our rest, get us out before we ever see that. How would it embitter our last moments and plant our dying pillow with thorns to leave you on earth in an unconverted state, following us to the grave but not to heaven. Or should you be called to die before us, how could we stand at the dreadful post of observation without one ray of hope to cheer our wretched spirits? How could we have sustained the dreadful thought that the very next moment after you had passed beyond our kind attentions you would be received to the torments which know neither end nor mitigation."

So he ends his letter. Greatest task you have is a steward of your children, is to work, to pray, to lead them to the knowledge of Christ. The issue in parenting is not controlling your children as an end in itself, but leading them to Christ. Then the Holy Spirit will transform them on the inside which works to neutralize the pressure of the world and the drives of depravity. They are subdued in the work of the Spirit in salvation.

Father, we thank You tonight for the responsibility and the hope that we have as we exercise that responsibility. You've told us, "Raise up a child in the way he should go and when he's old he won't depart from it." We thank You for giving us these precious little lives. We thank You for making us Your children so we know what to tell them. O we think of parents, millions of them across the world, who can't lead their children to You because they don't know You. And, Lord, may we know it's not just what we say, it's who we are, that our character and the integrity of our lives in the godliness and virtue we demonstrate to those children either undergirds or supplants the gospel we preach to them. O may we lovingly, tenderly, kindly, patiently with great forgiveness and understanding lead our children to Christ. And may You raise up another generation to Your glory and the glory of Your Son in whose name we pray. Amen.

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