

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

God's Pattern for Parents, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 6:3

Code: 1950B

Tonight we continue in our family series and getting close to the end. In fact, when we resume this in a few weeks, we're going to digress a little from the family and if everything goes right we're going to talk about singleness. Many of you have asked me about this because many of you are single. We did a little survey a few months ago and noted about 75 percent of our congregation is thirty-five and under and many of them are single. So we're going to address how that works in the economy of God. But for tonight, we're going to be looking at this matter of parenting.

Open your Bible to Ephesians chapter 6...Ephesians chapter 6. The key verse really here in the New Testament that gives to us God's design for parenting is verse 4. It simply says, "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

It's a tremendous statement in that verse. It again with an economy of words covers a vast field. Books, treatises, volumes have been written on parenting, God has reduced it to one statement. "Do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

This is God's pattern for parenting. And as we begin, I want us to remember something, it's very important at the very outset. As God's redeemed people we are called to be unique, we are called to be different. We are called to be distinct. We are called to be separate from the world. In fact, the whole epistle of Ephesians points to the reality that we are not to live as the rest of the world lives. We live in light not darkness. We live in wisdom not foolishness. We walk in the Spirit not the flesh. And we are unique then because we have the knowledge of God, we have the Word of God, we have the Spirit of God and God has called us to live in unique and distinctive ways.

In fact, that extends even to our relationships in the family. We don't conduct relationships in the family the way unregenerate people do, the way the world does. We have a completely different plan and pattern.

In Leviticus chapter 18 when God established the standard of behavior for Israel, He pointed out this reality of uniqueness. This is what He said, "You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes and to live in accord with them." In other words, you're different. You don't do the way the world does. You don't conduct your lives or your relationships the way the world does.

Later in that same eighteenth chapter of Leviticus God further says, "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled, thus you are to keep My charge, or My command, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you so as not to defile yourself with them. I am the Lord your God." A call to be different. A call to distinctiveness.

And God has maintained this desire for his people through all time. We are separate. The standards, the principles, the statutes, the commandments by which we conduct our lives before God in the family and before the world are unique. We are separate. We are to have an undefiled uniqueness. We are to follow principles which are not in any sense assisted by human wisdom, nor are they refined or defined by human wisdom. We are not to succumb to the pressure of the world. We are not to listen to the world's diagnoses of what might be wrong with people or marriages or families. We are to turn to the Word of God. We are to live distinctively.

And God is not saying anything different today. He's still saying, "Do it My way." And as far as the parenting role is concerned, that too is summed up magnificently in that verse I just read, and herein lies God's pattern. It doesn't sound anything like modern psychology. It doesn't sound like the things that we have been told about childhood education, about how to raise a child. It doesn't sound anything like what the world is currently saying. And it shouldn't because it is divine.

We've already found out that the pattern for husbands is completely distinct from the world, the pattern for wives completely distinct from the world, the pattern for children in response to their parents is distinct and so is that for parents in regard to their children. This is not the message of secular psychology. This is not the message of conventional wisdom. This is not the message of political correctness. This is the Word of God.

And the place we have to begin is with the recognition that all children come from God. God gives them to us and then has given us the manual on how to raise them. Genesis 4:1, "And she conceived...that is Eve...and bore Cain and said, 'I have gotten a man from the Lord.'" At the very outset Eve knew who was the source of her children. She went right past Adam to God. In Genesis 4:25, the same chapter, "Later on she bore a son and called his name Seth, for God...she said...has appointed me another seed." Children, says the Old Testament, are an heritage from the Lord. They are gifts from God, they are given to be to the praise of His glory and to be a blessing to us.

But how often do children become a heartache and a heartbreak because God's pattern for parents is not properly followed. As we look at the divine standard then we are looking at our responsibility and we're looking at the path to joy and blessing in the lives of the children and in our own lives as well. Clearly the instruction here in verse 4 is given to parents. In fact, the word "fathers" is occasionally in the New Testament translated "parents." We cannot exclude the mother at this particular point, we

must include her as she comes under the leadership of her husband. The instruction is given to the parents because they have the responsibility, the rule, the lead, the oversight to bring their children to the place where they will honor God.

Now the standard that is established here is not only unique in our society but it was unique in Paul's as well. For example, just to illustrate what was going on in the world in which the apostle Paul wrote this, there was a Roman law called patriapotestas, literally means the "father's power." And under patria potestas Roman father had absolute power over his family. As I pointed out this morning, the view of leadership in the Gentile world was one of dominant dictatorship and that worked in the family as well. For example, a father could sell his children as slaves. A father could make them work in the fields in chains, if he wanted, and there are illustrations of this in ancient literature. He could take the law into his own hands to punish his children. And he could even by Roman law execute his own children. For as long as the father lived there was no age limit, there was no limit to the extent of his control. In fact, when a child was born it was not uncommon for that child to be placed before its father's feet and if the father stooped to lift the child, it meant he acknowledged the child and it could live. If he turned and walked away, the child was thrown out on the street to die or be picked up and raised as a prostitute or a slave.

A letter from Hilarion to his wife, Alis from 1 B.C. found in ancient sources says this, "Hilarion to Alis his wife. Heartiest greetings." Now, guys, you really don't want to start a letter to your wife like that, but he did. "Know that we are still even now in Alexandria," he writes being away. "Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria, I beg and beseech you to take care of the little child, and as soon as we receive wages," apparently he was a soldier, "I will send them to you. If--good luck to you--you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out." That is documented from ancient times, unwanted children were commonly left in the Forum in Rome. They were collected at night by people who would then nourish them to make slaves and stock the prostitute houses of Rome with them.

Seneca, the well-known Roman orator said, "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into the sickliest cattle. Children who are born weak and deformed we drown."

So Paul was writing to a world where children were abused and children were murdered, just like our world where they are slaughtered largely before they can ever come out of the womb by the millions through abortion. But one and a half million children at least annually, probably a lot more than that, who are allowed to be born are consequently beaten, burned and abused by their parents to the degree that they have to be removed from their families, over a million and a half of them a year. Two hundred...pardon me, two thousand of such die, killed by their parents through burning, drowning, being thrown out windows, off bridges, killed with knives, hammers, razor blades, you name it.

Our world today is not a lot different than that ancient world. "Time" magazine reported in one survey that 70 percent of parents if they had to do it all over again would have no children. Too much of a nuisance. Somewhere between 30 thousand and 50 thousand children a year are used for pornography. A third of all children born wind up in foster homes because they're unwanted. Millions are left at home alone to be raised by the television while their mothers go to work. The chancellor of New York City's one million student school district said, quote: "Society has turned against children."

Hostility toward children in ancient times and even in modern times. Against that background of ancient Roman society and the background in which we live today, we hear the words of Paul, "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Again, pateres, the term "fathers" is normally used for the male head of the family, but sometimes used to speak of parents. It is so translated, for example, in Hebrews 11:23, it says, "By faith Moses when he was born was hidden three months by his parents." And certainly the mother is involved with the father and we can extend it here to include her. Proverbs 4:3 shows this dual role, it says, "I was my father's son tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother." Proverbs 1:8, "Hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother." Both parents are involved in the headship of the husband in the bringing up of the child.

A study was conducted several years ago covering a span of years by sociologists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck from Harvard and they identified after all of this study four crucial factors in predicting children who were not delinquents. This was a multi-year study and it was found to be 90 percent accurate. They said these are the four essential factors to prevent delinquency, just purely from the observation of those worldly people. One, the father's discipline, fair, firm and consistent. Two, the mother's supervision in the home, knowing where the children are all the time, knowing what they're doing and being available to them. Three, the parents unceasing affection demonstrated to each other and to the children frequently. And fourthly, the family's cohesiveness, time spent together.

Both parents must be involved in this wonderful privilege, this wonderful opportunity. And as we look at the thing itself that is indicated here in the verse, you'll notice there's a negative and then a positive in terms of the instruction. And we want to consider both. The negative is this...do not provoke your children to anger. That's how the Word of God sums up what you don't want to do, you don't want to make your children mad, you don't want to make them angry, you don't want to make them hostile or bitter, you don't want them to turn against you and all that you hold dear. Colossians adds, "Lest thy be discouraged." You don't want to destroy them.

Provoke, you will notice, is used only here and in Romans 10:19, that term. And it means to irritate. It's an intense form of "to make angry." Don't do that which angers your children. Don't do that which irritates them, provokes them, frustrates them, exasperates them or embitters them. And, my, is there being a lot of that done today...angry, sullen, bitter children. Just in the last few days, three little

boys, one of them six-years-old trying to kill a month-old infant. Unimaginable hostility and anger. Ten to fifteen percent of children have contemplated or tried suicide. One fourth of admissions to the psychiatric unit of children's hospitals are suicide related. Even children as long as...as young as six and seven have tried to take their lives.

Los Angeles Times article from some years back said, "The eleven year old had slashed his wrists. 'I want to go to heaven,' he sobbed, 'I can't stand these stomach aches and being unhappy. If only I could die, it's hard to live, living is horrible, I just want to die because nobody cares if I die so I just want to die.'" And for years psychologists and experts questioned whether young children could really suffer severe depression and intentionally seek death. Now they know they can, sometimes swallowing poison, sometimes darting into heavy traffic. A twelve-year-old girl hanged her doll by its neck, drugged her little sister, cut both her legs with scissors, slashed her wrists and overdosed on hypnotic drugs. "I would be better off dead," she explained, "then no one will ever have to look at my ugly face again." And eleven-year-old boy tried to kill his dog, attempted to suffocate his baby brother with a pillow, jabbed pins and needles into his stomach. And asked why, he answered, "Because mother doesn't have any love in her for me." Said one six year old, feeling emotionally rejected by his mother, "I want to die because nobody loves me." Said another, "I'd rather die than be spanked, they want me dead." A battered ten year old whose thirteen-year-old brother had committed suicide earlier said, "Everyone kills and everyone dies, there's no way out." An eleven-year-old boy preoccupied with death and the idea of joining his dead grandmother threatened to throw himself in front of a car, did so, beat and disfigured his face, didn't die, finally jumped out of the window of a two-story building. He wanted to go to be with somebody he thought loved him. A five-year-old girl obsessed with knives burned her three-year-old sister, tried to choke her with a shoestring, threatened her mother with a knife, ran from the house into heavy traffic. A six-year-old boy who wanted to die because, "Nobody loves me," cut himself with his father's razor, was later found hanging from a second-story window. You don't need anymore illustrations, they're all over the place.

Judge Burton Katz(?) of the Los Angeles Court said, "It becomes very disturbing to see the hollow eyes and expressions on juveniles when they are so totally disenfranchised, so totally disaffected, so totally removed from the system that there's absolutely no hope whatsoever."

You can turn your child into a tragic child, you can turn your children into a story like that. And it may not be because of what you do to them, it most likely will be because of what you don't do to them and for them. How can you provoke your child into tragedy? How can you provoke your child into anger? How can you get a bitter, sullen, antisocial delinquent?

Here are some easy steps.

Spoil him.

Give him everything he wants, even more than you can afford, just charge it so you can get him off your back.

When he does wrong, nag him a little but don't spank him.

Foster his dependence on you. Don't teach him to be independently responsible, maintain his dependence on you so later on drugs and alcohol can replace you when he's older.

Protect him from all those mean teachers who want to discipline him from time to time. And threaten to sue them if they don't let him alone.

Make all of his decisions for him because he might make mistakes and learn from them if you don't.

Criticize his father to him, or his mother so your son or daughter will lose respect for his parents.

Whenever he gets into trouble, bail him out. Besides if he faces any real consequence, it might hurt your reputation.

Never let him suffer the consequences of his behavior, always step in and solve his problems for him so he will depend on you and run to you when the going gets tough and never learn how to solve his problems.

If you want to turn your child into a delinquent, let him express himself anyway he feels like it.

Don't run his life, let him run yours.

Don't bother him with chores, do everything for him then he can be irresponsible all his life and blame others when things don't get done right.

And be sure to give in when he throws a temper tantrum.

Believe his lies because it's too much hassle to try to sort through to get the truth.

Criticize others openly, criticize others routinely so that he will continue to realize that he is better than everybody else.

Give him a big allowance and don't make him do anything for it.

Praise him for his good looks, never for character.

And on it goes...

You want an obsessive child, be critical, snobbish, domineering, legalistic. You want an accident-prone child, fight with each other, ignore the child and the child will hurt himself to get your attention. And so it goes...

The point is, you have this treasure, you have this child and you can exasperate that child. How do parents do that? I've just given you a little litany of things that you can read about in a typical book on child raising about how to raise a delinquent. But let me give you my own list here of how to provoke a child to wrath. I'm going to give you this list rather rapidly, so stick with it.

Ten ways. Number one, by overprotection...by overprotection. Fence them in, never trust them. Don't give them the opportunity to develop independence. And deprivation will instill an angry mood. Parents must give children room to express themselves, to discover their world, to try a new adventure, gradually releasing them to live independently. Let the rope out. Overprotection frustrates and angers a child.

We live in a world where that's a tendency among Christians. Keep them under your control all the time. You have to be very careful about that or they become exasperated.

Secondly, you can do it by favoritism. Isaac favored Esau over Jacob. Rebekah favored Jacob over Esau. And the sad results are well-known. Don't compare them against each other, they're each unique. Love them the same without regard for each, without special regard for each, no respect of persons. If a child feels that you love another in that family more, that is a very, very frustrating experience.

Thirdly, you can cause a child to become angry by setting unrealistic achievement goals. Some parents literally crush their children with pressure, pressure to excel in school, pressure to excel in sports, in music, in any activity they do. And it really has little to do with the child and everything to do with the reputation that the parents want. This becomes very frustrating when the child has no sense of having reached a goal, no sense of having fulfilled an expectation. It leads to being angry and bitter.

And I have dealt with such children. I have dealt with such children who have killed themselves. I think of one girl in particular who killed herself to get her parents off her back. She never could accomplish enough to satisfy them and she was so angry she wanted to hurt them in the profound way she could so she took her life so they would have to live with the pain of causing that. Devastating.

You can frustrate your child to anger by over-indulgence, by giving them everything they want, by picking up after them always, by allowing them to throw all responsibility and accountability on others. You can exasperate them by letting them sin and get away with it so they learn to do that successfully. Ultimately when they face the world and people don't serve them and don't take all the responsibility for them, and for their misdeeds, they will get angry and bitter and violent. It's just exactly the kind of generation we're seeing raised today.

Fifthly, you can exasperate your child by discouragement. And I think that comes in two ways...a lack of understanding and lack of reward because both of those destroy motivation and they destroy incentive. You must understand your children. Understand what they're thinking. Understand what they're trying to accomplish. Understand why a certain thing happened, why a certain behavior occurred, why a certain incident went a certain way. Grant them a listening ear and an understanding heart and reward them graciously and generously with love. Give them approval and honor and be patient with them or they get very defeated and discouraged. And that turns to anger.

You can provoke your children to anger, number six, by failing to sacrifice for them. In other words, by making the child feel like he's constantly an intrusion into your life, constantly an interruption, always a bother. You want to do what you want to do, you and your husband want to go where you want to go, you just farm these kids out somewhere, leave them. Let somebody else take care of them. You're not about to change your life style, you're going to do what you want to do. You're going to have your fun and your pleasure and you're going...the kids are just going to have to fend for themselves. Leave them, make them prepare their own meals, don't take them places because you can't be bothered with them. And they will resent your being uncaring, unavailable and self-centered.

And it's one of the things that I'm so very thankful for in my own family is Patricia's devotion to our children all the years when they were growing up in the home. Many years when I had to be going and traveling and she refused to do that because she wanted to be with those children all the time.

Number seven, you can provoke your children to anger by failing to allow for some growing up. What does that mean? Let them goof up a little. Let them make mistakes. So they knock something over at the table, laugh it off. They just don't quite have the manual dexterity yet, or the coordination. Give them a little job and if they do it in an unacceptable way but it's a little bit of progress, commend them. Let them share some of their ridiculous ideas. Let them plan some silly things to do and do them. And don't condemn them, just expect progress not perfection.

The best of men are not perfect, are not perfect. New York Tech many years ago defeated Rensselaer Poly twenty-one to eight. In that game the only Rensselaer touchdown was set up by a sixty-three yard pass play, says the newspaper. On the play there appeared to be a breakdown in the Tech defense. The next week when reviewing the films, Tech coach Marty Senall(?) noticed that

the defensive back on the play, freshman John Smith, stood frozen on one spot while the receiver flew by him for the winning touchdown. "Hey, Smitty, why didn't you move?" the coach yelled.

Said Smith, "I couldn't, my contact lens had just popped out and I covered it with my foot waiting for a time to put it back. If I had left the spot, I never would have found it again in that grass and my parents would have killed me for losing it."

Now I'm telling you, when you're in the big game and you live with that much fear of your parents, you've got a problem. Let's your kids fail. They're going to lose things. Hey, I remember when Matt flushed my watch down a toilet. I said, "Why did you do that?"

He said, "I just wanted to see what it would look like going down."

Did I spank him? No. In fact, I wish I'd have been there, I'd like to see what it looked like when it was going down. I laugh for a little growing, for a few experiments.

Number eight, you can provoke your children to anger by neglect. If there's any biblical illustration of this it's probably David and Absalom. David spent no time with him. No time shaping him and Absalom ultimately hated his father with a passion, tried to pull a coup to dethrone his father and take his place. Neglect, and the worst kind of neglect? Lack of consistent discipline. That's the worst kind of neglect.

I'm not talking about the neglect of time and things, I'm talking about the neglect of discipline. Teach them, discipline them, consistently using the rod in love.

Number nine, you can provoke your children to anger by abusive words. You understand that a little child has a very limited vocabulary and you have a very comprehensive one, verbal abuse is a terrible thing. A barrage of well chosen words from your adult vocabulary can cut that little heart to shreds. And what is as devastating as anything are words of anger, words of sarcasm, or words of ridicule. Frankly we say things to our children we would never say to anybody else.

You know, I don't remember everything that I heard growing up but I remember some things. And the things that I remember were sarcasm. The things that I remember were biting ridicule. Things we can't forget. Abusive words.

And then lastly, by physical abuse. An angry child is often a beaten, abused, over-zealously punished child, usually from an angry, vengeful parent who only cares that he has been inconvenienced or irritated, not that the child needs correction for his own good.

Well those are some very simple practical things. If you want to provoke your child to anger, you can do it by overprotection, favoritism, setting unrealistic achievement goals, overindulgence,

discouragement, failing to sacrifice for them so that they can see your love, failing to allow for them to grow up, by neglecting firm, consistent, loving discipline, by abusive words and physical abuse as well. Don't do that.

Turn to the positive with me. Rather, "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," or the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as the Authorized says. Bring them up. They won't get there themselves, I might add hastily. You've got to bring them up. They're not going to get there by themselves. You have to bring them up.

Proverbs 29:15 says, "A child left to himself brings his mother shame." And that is what I told you earlier. It is not what parents do to children so much, although obviously if they do things that are abusive and painful it has effects. But it is what parents do not do that exasperates children, the lack of discipline, the lack of love, the lack of care. You must bring them up. This is a call to raise your children, to focus on it.

Now let me give you some practical instruction at this point. How do you do this? How do you bring your child up? What is the real key to this challenging work?

I'm going to give you the key. Turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 4:23...Proverbs 4:23. And here we are really going to get to the issue. This insight here tells us what is wrong with all of your children and all of mine, it's the same problem. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

Now what you have here is a clear cut divinely inspired statement that the issues of life come out of the heart. All the matters of life proceed from the heart. In Mark 7 and verse 21, Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness as well as deceits, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness." All of these evil things proceed from within.

And the same thing essentially is recorded for us in Luke chapter 6 and verse 45, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil. For his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart."

Now what you want to recognize with your child is this, you have a heart problem. You're not dealing with behavioral issues, you're dealing with the heart. In fact, let me go beyond that and say, behavior is not the crucial issue, changing your child's behavior is not the crucial issue. In fact, a change in behavior without a change in heart is nothing but hypocrisy, it is a sham because the sin and the rebellion is still there and is only delayed as to its expression. All behavior, all conduct is linked to some heart condition, some heart attitude. And parents, listen, your task as parents is to set yourself to the heart of the child.

First of all, to help the child understand that he or she has a very sinful heart. And that it is that inner corruption that rises to cause all evil words, thoughts and deeds. Parenting must target the heart. It cannot target the behavior or it is shallow and superficial.

And as I told you last time in our study, parenting, first of all, is redemptive. It goes for the heart. And the first thing your child needs to know is he has a wicked, sinful heart that is alienated from God and is the fountainhead of every imaginable iniquity. And that something has to happen to change that heart. That leads the child to salvation and sanctification.

One writer says it this way, "The world's smallest battlefield is the child's heart. And the conquering of it calls for all out hand-to-hand combat."

Your child's heart is a battlefield where sin and righteousness are in conflict. The problem with your child is not a lack of maturity. The problem with your child is not a lack of experience or a lack of understanding. Those will exacerbate the problem. But the problem with your child is a wicked heart. And listen to this, no one outgrows depravity. Nobody.

So the goal of parenting is to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The goal of parenting is not control. It's not to get them under control. It is not to produce in them socially commendable behavior. It is not to make them polite and respectful. It is not even to cause them to conduct themselves in a morally acceptable manner. It is not to make them obedient. It is not to give you as a parent something to be proud of. The goal of parenting is not to get them to perform for your approval. The goal of parenting is salvation and sanctification. The goal of parenting is to see your child saved from sin and its eternal wages and then to follow the path of sanctification.

Listen, any objective less than that is only behavior modification. The issue is the heart. And you have to understand that you have a sinner who is depraved to the very core, who needs salvation and forgiveness and sanctification. And you start by making that child aware of a sinful condition and the judgment of God. And as I told you before, you even make that child aware of an eternal hell. Don't just train your child to be self-controlled and learn to say no when wanting something. Train your child to understand temptation and resist it because the sins of greed and lust and selfishness and covetousness and indulgence dishonor God and pander a wicked heart. Punish for the sin but teach that the heart is the problem.

Sinful, unsaved, unsanctified children are ruled by the same exact desires that their larger counterparts are. Your children are ruled by lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life. They're selfish, self-centered and they want everything they can see...NOW.

Correct them not to satisfy the offended irritated frustrated parent, that's anger, that's vengeance, but to satisfy God who has been offended and God has not just been annoyed. And remind them that God who has been offended seeks a reconciliation with them through trust in Jesus Christ.

This is...this is the target of all parenting. It's the heart and it is salvation. This means reproof, rebuke, correction, the use of the rod but nonetheless consistently. We've talked about that. You never use the rod, listen now, you never use the rod as punishment for sin, that's not your job. You never use the rod as payment for sin. You use the rod as correction to avoid payment at the hands of God.

And the rod has a very important place. This week I received a beautiful little letter from a young boy in our congregation, eight or nine, named Stephen. This is what he wrote me. He gave me this last Sunday.

"Thank you for the birthday card." I sent him a birthday card as I do many of the children. "It was very nice of you to send me a card with your picture on it. I really liked your message on disciplining kids. One day while getting spanked my Dad broke his switch. A few days later I decided to make him a new switch. It ended up being bigger than I wanted it to be." I love that. "I wish every pastor would preach the Word like you do. Stephen." I think Stephen understands, don't you? What a sweet little guy to go make his father a switch.

Bring them up, bringing them up means targeting the heart. Let me take you to a passage in the Old Testament that will further define this heart-centered instruction. In Deuteronomy chapter 6 you have a very important formula given here for the raising of children. Deuteronomy 6 is really a chapter instructing parents. Down in verse 7 it talks about teaching them diligently to your sons. This is all about family instruction, a very, very important chapter. It refers to instructing sons again several times later in the chapter.

Now as you bring them up and as you teach them and as you instruct them, what do you teach them? Let's start at the beginning, verse 4. The first thing you teach them in this section, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." The first thing you teach them is to recognize the true God and that He is sovereign, to recognize God, the one God, the Lord who is one. That's the first thing. Teach them about God.

Secondly, verse 5, teach them to love God. "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." That's the second essential in bringing them up.

Thirdly, verse 6, teach them to obey God. "And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your sons." Teach them about God, teach them to love God with all their heart and soul and might and teach them to obey God, all His

commands.

Then fourthly, teach them to follow your example. Verse 7, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and 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, show your children that in all times in your life, all experiences in your life on the tip of your tongue always is the Word of the living God. Let them see that your life is dominated by divine truth. Let them see all of life as a classroom. Every occasion in life an opportunity to teach. Every experience in life an opportunity to point them to heaven. Everything that happens to them is a path back to Scripture.

Jesus was the absolute master at drawing spiritual reality from the world around Him. From water, from fig trees, from mustard seeds, from birds and bread and grapes and pearls and wheat and tares and cups and platters and nets and dinners and vineyards and foxes and men and women and light and dark, everything that happened in life opened up a window on divine reality. I must sensitize my children to see the hand of God and hear the voice of God and the print of God in every flower, every rock, every mountain, the sea, the sky, the babbling brook, the whispering trees, the cricket's chirp, the roaring waterfall, the gentle slop of the surf, the fragrance of a flower, salt air, little babies, fresh hot berries, hot buttered-baked bread, a puppy, a squirrel, grandma, and on it goes. Everything in life is a classroom to draw them back to God.

And also, it is essential in bringing them up, verses 8 and 9, that they be reminded repeatedly about these truths, reminded about the true God, about loving God, and about obeying God and about following your example. How do you do it? Bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead, write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. All of that, simply ways to say...keep the reminder going all the time, constantly, constantly at all times. Have it, as it were, at the front of your mind, have it right on your hands, put it on the doorposts of your house and on the gates so that you are incessantly taking them back to the truth of God.

And then one other lesson. Teach them to be wary of the world around them. Verse 10, "Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you great and splendid cities which you didn't build, and houses full of all good things which you didn't fill and hewn cisterns which you didn't dig." In other words, they're going to take over a very advance civilization already in place. "Vineyards and olive trees which you didn't plant and you shall eat and be satisfied, then watch yourself lest you forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery." Warn your children that when they get out in the world and they begin to see all that's there and they begin to touch and taste and explore and sense and experience, that they not forget God.

Teach them about the true God. Teach them to love Him with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their might. Teach them to obey Him. Teach them to follow your example. Show them that life is a

classroom, no matter what the scene. Constantly remind them of those things which are precious to them and to you. And teach them to be wary of the world.

With that in mind we go back to Ephesians 6 and we'll draw this to a conclusion. In Ephesians chapter 6 here, a couple of key words. The first one, "Bring them up in the discipline..." The Greek word is paideia, it means to "rear a child." Involves training, instruction, learning. It is used also in Hebrews 12 verses 5 to 11 of chastening or disciplining. It essentially means training. It encompasses discipline.

Here's what it really can be summed up to mean. Enforced conformity, enforced conformity of the heart and the life to God and His truth. Enforced conformity of the heart and the life to God and His truth.

How do you enforce it? By punishments and rewards. Bring them up, train them, raise them with chastening and discipline and training and instruction and learning and enforced conformity of heart and life to God and the principles of His Word.

Susannah Wesley had seventeen children, including John and Charles. She once wrote this, "The parent who studies to subdue self-will in his child works together with God in the saving of a soul. The parent who indulges self-will does the devil's work, makes religion impractical, salvation unattainable and does all that is in him to drown his child, soul and body forever."

Don't indulge self-will in a child, subdue it. Breaking self-will is the key. Teaching them that they are sinful and that self-will is a sinful expression that is an offense against God for which God will punish them eternally. Teach them that they are called to obey the law of God which they are to do but can't do apart from God's grace working in their hearts. Show them their sin and show them that they can't do anything about it, only God can change their hearts through their faith in Christ. And as they exercise simple faith in Christ, when they're young, accept each step they take. God only knows when true conversion takes place. Encourage every step toward Him.

The word "admonition," bring them up in the admonition or instruction is the word nouthesia. It has the idea of warning in it. And it takes us back to what we've been saying before. We have to warn our children that there are not only obviously physical consequences in the family to their behavior, but there are much more serious consequences from God. So important.

Training...the word "training," or "discipline" may refer to what is done to the child in terms of discipline, but the word "instruction" refers to what is said to the child. It's verbal instruction with a view to judgment. In other words, you must do this because if you do that, here are the consequences.

It was said of Eli's sons in 1 Samuel, it was said of Eli's sons, this tragic statement. His sons brought a curse on themselves and Eli did not rebuke them. If you read the sad, sad story of Eli's family, you have the key right there. It wasn't because of something he did to them, it was because of what he didn't do. He did not warn them.

The Minnesota Crime Commission says this, "Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered, he wants what he wants when he wants it. His bottle, his mother's attention, his playmates, toys, his uncle's watch. Deny him these once and he seizes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, and no developed skill. This means that all children are born delinquent, if permitted to continue in their self-centered world of infancy, given free reign to their impulsive actions to satisfy each want, every child will grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer and a rapist," end quote.

Not bad from the Minnesota Crime Commission. What they're describing is what? Depravity. The task is formidable, folks. And the truth of the matter is, only God can change the heart. The goal is not to modify their behavior, the goal is for God to change the heart. To lead your child to Christ and then when your child acknowledges Christ, to lead that child to sanctification by discipline and instruction.

Spend your time helping your child to understand how sinful he is. Spend your time helping him or her to understand that only God can change the heart. Spend your time disciplining that child to conform to God's law. But more than that, to love God with all his or her heart, and soul, and mind.

One father looking at the parenting process in retrospect had some practical things to add to that. "If I were starting my family again," he said this, "I would love my wife more in front of my children. I would laugh with my children more at our mistakes and our joys. I would listen to my children more, even to the littlest one. I would be more honest about my weaknesses and not pretend perfection. I would pray differently for my family. Rather than focusing on them, I'd focus on me. I would do more things with my children. I would do more encouraging. I would bestow more praise. I would pay more attention to little things. I would speak about God more intimately. Out of every ordinary thing of every ordinary day I would point them to God."

And that's really it. I don't think all the...all the little nuances of behavior are the issue. I don't think whether your child stands still or runs around in a circle is the issue. I don't think whether your child sits like little Lord Fauntleroy with an unwrinkled garment on the stool, or jumps across the back of the couch. I don't think that's necessarily the issue. What is the issue is the heart and whether that little life can be taught to love God and understand that only God can change his or her heart. That's the path of parenting. That's the path it has to take. And it's heart work and it's a battlefield and it take not only great instruction and discipline but utterly consistent example.

Let me tell you about a little sickly child, as I close. Sick with rheumatic fever and assorted illnesses, so that child was in bed much of its early years of life, carried a residual heart defect, caused certain restriction and activity. The child was prone to accident and mishap, went through assorted surgeries and accidents from reckless activity. The child was mischievous, did such terrible things as letting all the neighbors' pet birds out of the cages so they all flew away. One morning taking a dozen eggs out of the refrigerator, putting them in the hall, taking a hammer and smashing them all just to see what a hammer did to an egg. Running away several times, usually only as far as the lady's house who made those good pies. Directing traffic in the middle of the street, setting fire to the kitchen, telling the teacher to pray for his father because his father had chopped off his foot, simply because he wanted the best share and tell. Biting people so that his father had to make a sign around his neck that said, "Don't play with me, I bite."

Now I am intimately acquainted with that little boy, it was me. And so it went, even to one occasion where my father had to come and get me out of jail. Why was I like that? Was it because my parents didn't love me? No. Was it because somehow they spanked me and I was wounded in my psyche? No. It was because I was really just like all the rest, depraved to the very core. And if left to myself, who knows what criminal activities I might have engaged in. But persistent prayer and persistent instruction from loving parents led me to Jesus Christ and to salvation and the path of sanctification and to stand before you here as a preacher.

You may look at your little one and say, "This is double depravity, I'm not sure I can cope with it." You can't, but God can. Stay on your knees and understand what it is that you're doing, it's heart work for salvation and sanctification. And the rest flows out of that.

Father, thank You for a wonderful time tonight to think through these things which are familiar to us and yet need to be rehearsed again and again as we face that daily responsibility of leading our little ones to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to You. Help us to be faithful for His glory. Amen.

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