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

Shade for Our Children
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-69

It was 1978, twelve years ago, when we embarked upon a study of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. It's been nearly that many years since we gave attention to a very very important verse in Ephesians that speaks well to the matter of this particular day. Open your Bible, if you will, to Ephesians chapter 6...Ephesians chapter 6, verse 4.

The verse says, "And fathers," or better, parents, "do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

An old Chinese proverb says this, "One generation plants the trees, and another gets the shade." You and I are still living in the shade of some trees that were planted by our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. We are shaded, to some degree, by their moral standards, their spiritual commitment, their value system, their sense of right and wrong, their commitment to duty. We are shaded by what our parents and grandparents planted.

The question that faces us today is what kind of trees are being planted today to shade the future generation from what may well be the blistering heat of an Antichrist dominated world. Are we planting anything or are we leaving our children totally exposed? It is obvious or should be to every one of us that our culture as to morals, values, ethics, duty, commitment is disintegrating. The very systems on which we base our life are convoluted, skewed and out of sync with God's divine order. We allow in our country the massacring of millions of unborn children while at the same time sentencing a man this week to six months in jail for killing a hummingbird, which demonstrates to us that we don't understand that man is made in the image of God, very different than any animal.

I was reading an article this week in Reader's Digest about animal rights. One of the people quoted in the article was extolling the equality of all created things with this statement, "A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." The article went on to say that there are those people who are howling far and wide that the killing of six million roasting chickens is the modern equivalent of Hitler's massacre of the Jews. What in the world kind of values is our culture going to have?

I was also told two weeks ago that there are more people in law schools today in America than all other graduate programs combined. It is unthinkable what the future holds in a society that is going to litigate itself to death without a moral standard by which to determine what is right. Are we going to be sentencing people to prison for killing birds and let them run free who kill children?

Where is our culture going? What kind of value system, what kind of morality, what kind of standard are we establishing to shade the next generation? Are we planting anything? Or are we leaving them totally exposed?

Well Scripture is certainly clear when it speaks of our responsibility to our children. God has set the standards. And any mother knows that children are supposed to be a blessing. And they are usually when they arrive. There are some mothers who don't want them at all and so they have them aborted. There are some mothers who even having given birth to them don't want them so they dump them in a trash bin or give them away. And there are most mothers who want them at first and then after a few years aren't sure they want them anymore. Children are supposed to be a blessing. Children are supposed to be a joy. Children are supposed to be a benediction from the Lord to grace our lives with fulfillment and meaning and happiness and satisfaction. They are given for our joy and yet they turn out to be heartbreak upon heartbreak upon heartbreak. Left exposed to this world and unshaded by the proper kind of protection they will indeed break your heart.

But let's get back in touch with God's basic perspective. Genesis chapter 4, when we go back to the very beginning of God- giving children we read in Genesis 4:1, "The man...that is Adam...had relations with his wife Eve and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. And she said, I have gotten a man-child," literally with the Lord. In other words, the Lord was the source of this child. The Lord gave me a child. In verse 25, "Adam had relations with his wife again, she gave birth to a son, named him Seth, for God has appointed me another offspring." She saw her children as gifts from God. Chapter 17 of Genesis and verse 20, "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you, behold I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes and I will make him a great nation." Even to Ishmael God says I will bless him. How will You bless him? By giving him children, twelve princes I'll give him. That is a great blessing.

Genesis chapter 29, in Genesis 29 and verse 31, "The Lord saw that Leah was unloved and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben for she said because the Lord has seen my affliction, surely now my husband will love me. She conceived again and bore a son and said, Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved He has therefore given me this son, also." She thought when she had her first son her husband would love. She found out only her child loved her. By the time she got the second son she got the second son and knew that the second son was to fill again the void of love she felt not from her husband. The point is this, that God gave her children so she could enjoy their love. Children are a blessing. Children are a source of love.

Rachel was feeling this barrenness in chapter 30 verse 1 and she said to Jacob, "Give me children or I'll die." Verse 2, "Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel and he said, Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" The point is only God can give children, God gives

them for joy, God gives them for blessing, God gives them to fulfill our lives. Verse 6, Rachel finally said God has vindicated me and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son. Again, a gift from God. Verse 17, God gave heed to Leah, she conceived and got a fifth son and said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband." Verse 19, "Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son, Leah said, God has endowed me with a good gift." Children are to bring goodness, joy, blessing, benediction, promise, hope, fulfillment, meaning to life.

In chapter 33 and verse 5 and here Esau meets Jacob and Jacob says that those with him are the children whom God has graciously given your servant. Gifts from God. Graciously given to be a blessing and a benediction.

In Ruth, that wonderful book, in verse 13 of chapter 4, listen to this, "So Boaz took Ruth, she became his wife, he went into her and the Lord enabled her to conceive. She gave birth to a son. Then the women said to Naomi, Blessed is the Lord." Children are to be a blessing. Always it has been that way. God gives them for our encouragement. God gives them for our joy.

Proverbs 23:24, "The Father of the righteous will greatly rejoice and he who begets a wise son will be glad in Him." That's God's purpose. Children are to make us happy. "Be wise, my son," says Proverbs 27:11, "and make my heart glad." A wise son indeed gladdens the father's heart. Proverbs 29:3 says, "A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad." And so it goes.

Now how is it that with God's purpose that children are to bring us joy and happiness, contentment, satisfaction, and love, that instead they become a heartbreak? Marriages and families in our time tend to be war zones, disaster areas. Homes aren't havens. There isn't peace and joy and contentment and bliss. Rather conflict, intimidation, estrangement and a generation of people being raised today exposed rather than shaded by any kind of proper God-ordained standard of living.

To make this practical, let me just talk to you a little bit before we look at our text. The Houston Police Department published a timely little booklet called "How to ruin your children." Tongue and cheek it says, "And guaranteed to be 99 percent infallible." This is what the Houston Police Department experienced dealing with delinquency and criminals has led them to conclude. Here's how to ruin your children. Number one, begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants. Two, when he picks up bad words, laugh at him. Three, never give him any spiritual training until he is 21, then let him decide for himself. Four, avoid using the word "wrong," it may develop guilt feelings. Five, pick up everything he leaves lying around so he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility for everything on others. And it goes on and on. Even the culture sees that a child without discipline and instruction is a potential disaster.

Another book written by a medical doctor also takes a somewhat sarcastic approach to this and suggests how to create a tragic child. First, here are ten easy steps for developing your normal

healthy baby into a drug addict, or alcoholic. Here they are, ten steps. One, spoil him, give him everything he wants if you can afford it. Two, when he does wrong you may nag him but never spank him. Three, foster his total dependence on you so drugs or alcohol can replace you when he's older. Four, protect him from your husband and from all those mean teachers who threaten to spank him from time to time or discipline him and sue them if you wish. Five, make all of his decisions for him since you are a lot older and wiser than he is, he might make mistakes and learn from them if you don't. Six, criticize his father openly so your son can lose his own self respect and confidence. Seven, always bail him out of trouble so he will like you. Besides, he might harm your reputation if he gets a police record. Never let him suffer the consequences of his own behavior. Can I stop and inject that that to me is one of the most important issues in child raising, children must suffer the consequences of their misbehavior or you'll never alter their conduct. Number eight, always step in and solve his problems for him so he can depend on you and run to you when the going gets tough. Then when he's older and still hasn't learned how to solve his own problems he can continue to run from them through drugs or alcohol. Nine, just to play it safe, be sure to dominate your husband and drive him to drink, too. Number ten, take a lot of prescription drugs yourself so that taking non- prescription drugs won't be a major step for him. That's how to develop your normal healthy baby into a drug addict or alcoholic.

He further says, "Here's how to develop your normal child into a homosexual. One, start out by using the ten easy steps followed by the alcoholic's mother. But this won't be enough. Further, show your love for your son by protecting him very carefully. Don't let him play football or baseball with the other boys, he might get hurt. Don't let him have a paper route, or work outside, he might catch pneumonia in bad weather. Three, be sure he spends lots of time with you and very little with his father or any other adult males."

Then he suggests, here's how to develop your normal child into a sociopathic criminal. One, start with the same ten easy steps the alcoholic's mother uses with the following exceptions and additions. Never spank your child. Physical punishment is a thing of the past. In fact, spanking is now considered immoral. By the way, it's against the law in Sweden which also has the highest teen-age suicide rate in the world. Let your child express himself any way he feels like it, he'll learn from your example how to behave, he doesn't need any discipline. Don't run his life, let him run yours. Let him manipulate you. Let him play on your guilt if he doesn't get his own way. And don't enforce the household rules, if there are any, that way he'll be able to choose which laws of society he will break when he's older and he won't fear the consequences since he never suffered any. Don't bother him with chores. Do all of his chores for him then he can be irresponsible when he's older and always blame others when his responsibilities don't get done. Be sure to give in when he throws a temper tantrum, he might hit you if you don't. Don't ever cross him when he's angry. It will also help if you choose to believe his lies and you may want to tell a few yourself...particularly on your Income Taxes. Criticize others openly and routinely so he'll realize that he is better than everyone else. Give him a big allowance and don't make him do anything for it. He may get the idea that he'll have to work for a

living later on if you make him work for it. If he does do anything worthwhile around the house, be sure you pay him richly for each and every good deed, you wouldn't want him to think that a feeling of responsibility is its own reward.

And then the doctor says, "Here's how to develop your normal child into a hysterical daughter. Use the same ten easy steps the alcoholic's mother used, point by point, but also do this: spoil her, always let her get her way especially if she pouts or cries. Marry an immature husband and never meet his physical needs, for warmth and affection he'll become very close, too close, in fact, to his daughter instead. Lie to yourself a lot so she can learn to use the technique of denial also. Always praise her for her looks, never for her character. Put a mirror on every wall so she can continually admire herself. This is one of the most important rules for producing hysteria. And whenever she runs away, and she probably will do this frequently, be sure to run after her and apologize for not letting her have her own way in the first place. Whenever she pretends to be sad and feigns a suicide attempt by swallowing a couple dozen aspirins or sleeping pills, be sure to save her dramatically and show her how guilty you feel for not letting her have her own way in the first place. Encourage her to become a movie star, by now she's so dramatic that acting would be quite natural. Get divorced and remarried two or three times so she can learn what you already know, that all men are good for nothings but you might as well live with one anyway.

And you can go on beyond that. Instruction on how to raise an adult schizophrenic. Show no affection. Have a weak father, weak mother.

How do develop an obsessive child, rigid and inhibited. Be critical, snobbish, domineering, legalistic.

How to develop an accident prone child. Fight with each other and the child will wind up having self-inflicted punishment in the form of accidents.

How to have an obese child. Feed him lots of food and leave him home alone.

How to have an anerexic child. Same way and throw in, have no respect for your husband.

How to have a hyperkinetic child. Don't ever spank and have an absent father. And so it goes.

Some studies have even indicated that bed wetting children are somehow more frequent in the homes of women's libbers. Amazing.

The point is this. God has given us children and unless we obey God's standard, we will produce a disaster. Now sometimes it's not really the mother's fault. Some husbands are weak and witless, some husbands are absent. Some husbands have left all together. But unless you obey the standard that God has laid down, that child that God has given you to be a joy and a blessing and a

benediction and a comfort and a consolation all your life long will turn out to break your heart.

Now we need to go back to our text to find out how to raise that child right. We've seen how to do it wrong, how do we do it right? Let me read you the first three verses. "Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise that it may be will with you in that you may live long on the earth."

Now the first thing he says, and I'm only going to briefly mention it is, that children are called to obey and honor. Obey is the act, honor is the attitude. So what we want out of children is obedience and honor. They need to learn attitudinally to honor their parents and in terms of action, to obey their parents. They don't know this naturally. Do you understand that? The Minnesota Crime Commission acknowledges this when it writes, quote: "Every baby starts life as a little savage...(except my grandson, all the rest)..." Then they said this, "He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it, his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch. You deny him these things once and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty. He has no morals. Doesn't know anything and has no developed skills." Sounds like a bum on skid row. "This means that all children," says the Minnesota Crime Commission, "all children, not just certain children, all children are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in their self-centered world of infancy, given free rein to their impulsive actions to satisfy each want, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist," end quote.

So, folks, if you want to prevent that, you've got a little work to do. Children develop in four areas. And it's indicated to us in Luke 2:52, "Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, favor with God and man." Right? Wisdom, that's mentally. Stature, that's physically. Favor with God, that's spiritually. And man, that's socially. Mentally, physically, spiritually, socially, children develop. When they come into the world they are undeveloped. They have to be taught to obey, for this is right. And God gave this commandment and put a promise in it for long life if they would have the right attitude. Honor means the spirit of obedience, obedience means the act of obedience. They are to honor their parents which means they have such respect for them they want to do what is right and then they're to do what is right. But they aren't going to do that automatically. They have to be trained to do that. The key, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit-filled life, even for a child. Children need to be under the control of the Holy Spirit but they need to be taught that by their parents. We have a tremendous task at hand. And if you don't teach your children to honor and obey you, then your children will break your heart. This is absolutely essential.

Go back with me to Proverbs for a moment. And let me just give you a little bit of a refresher on what it says in the book of Proverbs, just a few key verses. Proverbs...you don't have to look them up if you just want to listen...Proverbs 3:11 and 12, "My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father the son in whom he delights." Any father who really loves and delights in his son will discipline him, will reprove him, will correct him.

Proverbs chapter 10 verse 13, here's the means, verse 13 says in the last part of the verse, "But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding." Now in this modern culture we would say, "No, a computer is for him who lacks understanding...or an encyclopedia for him who..." No, a rod is for the back side of him who lacks understanding. And what he means here is not that they don't have information but they don't apply it. If you have a child who demonstrates a lack of wisdom in living, get out a rod and use it on his backside, or her backside. That's what the Bible says.

Chapter 19 verse 18, and this is so practical, verse 18 of chapter 19, "Discipline your son while there is hope," cause there's going to come a time when there's no hope. You can't do it anymore. Your son gets too old, you try to hit him with a rod, he'll break it over your head. And notice verse 18, "Discipline your son while there is hope and do not desire his death." If you don't discipline your son while there's still hope, you're desiring his death. What do you mean by that? One, he'll grow up to be a drug addict and he'll die of an overdose. Two, he'll grow up to be an alcoholic and maybe at the age of 19 run his car into a tree or a wall somewhere and kill himself. He'll grow up to be a homosexual at 25 and die of AIDS. He'll grow up to be a criminal and end up killed. No, you discipline your son while there's hope. The alternative is to desire his death.

Chapter 22 of Proverbs and verse 15, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child," that is right. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart, the rod of discipline will remove it far from him." You see, again corporal punishment is the consequence for disobedience which modifies behavior...painful, immediate consequence alter behavior. Proverbs 23:13 and 14, "Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you beat him with the rod he will not die." He'll tell you he's dying but he's not. He won't die. "You shall beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from Sheol." You're not talking now about only saving his life, you're talking about saving his soul...the whole person, when you use that rod.

Proverbs 29:17, I love this, "Correct your son...and your daughter certainly implied here...correct your son or daughter and he will give you comfort, he will also delight your soul." Let me tell you something. I hear all of this discussion about how to raise your children and all this cleverness and how to have your children love you, and how they can turn out to delight your soul and they can give you a thousand psychological ways. Let me make it simple. The Bible simply says if you correct him, in other words, if you correct him with a rod and discipline him or her and make them live an obedient life, they will delight your soul. It isn't that tough. It isn't that complex. Set a standard, live by that standard and correct to that standard.

That's it. And he'll give you comfort. In your old age he'll support you. He'll love you, call you blessed and delight your soul. If you don't do that, Proverbs tells you what will happen and I won't look up all the verses I'll just give you the list. Proverbs says if you don't do this, if you don't discipline your child and raise your child properly, he will be a grief to his mother, a rebel to his father, a sorrow to his father, a disaster to his father, a disgrace to his parents, a humiliation to his parents, a user of his

parents. And then look at chapter 29 verse 15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom but the child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother." He'll shame you. He'll be an embarrassment to you.

If you want a child who is a grief and a rebel and a sorrow and a disaster and a disgrace and a humiliation and a user and a shame, then don't do anything. But if you'll discipline that child, set a standard, live by the standard, discipline to the standard, your children will love you, delight in you and comfort your heart.

Now, let's go back to Ephesians and see the specifics of what the Apostle says. We have a tremendous gift from God in our children. They are to bring us immense joy. They are to bring us delight, blessing, happiness, fulfillment, comfort, consolation, satisfaction. And we're looking at a society where children for most people are a pain, a disaster. They break their parents hearts with their drinking, with their drugs, with their sexual promiscuity, with their moderate or extreme criminal behavior, with their lack of values, with their lack of honor and regard for their parents. They shame their parents. They terrorize their parents in some cases. They manipulate and monopolize the home. That's not God's intention.

How you going to take that little savage as cute and cuddly as he is or she is and guarantee that this one is going to be a joy to you? Here's the principle stated in verse 4, negatively, "Do not provoke your children to anger," positively, "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." That's it. It isn't that complicated. You don't have to be a child psychologist to figure it out. You don't have to go to a thousand seminars and buy all the books on the shelf. It is not that difficult.

You say, "Well that was a different time and place." No. In Paul's day they had a very very difficult situation they were facing in that terribly pagan culture. For example, in the Roman world there was what was called Patria Potestes which is Latin meaning "the father's power." And in that society the father had total power, absolute power over his entire family...without any judication in any court of law he could sell off any member of his family into slavery. He could make them work in the fields in chains. He could take the law into his own hands, he could punish them, he could inflict the death penalty on his own children as long as he lived...even if he was 60 and his children were 40. There was no age limit on the patria potestes, the father had right and power over all his children even the power of life and death.

We are told that when a child was born it was placed before its father's feet. And if the father stooped to lift the child it meant that he acknowledged the child and wished it to be kept. If he turned and walked away, the child would be thrown out. Children which were thrown out, very commonly in ancient times, were thrown on dump piles, thrown in the street or left in the forum in Rome and they were collected by people who raised them to be slaves and prostitutes for the business of prostitution and slavery in Rome.

To show you this there's a letter that's been discovered from 1 B.C. from a man named Helarion(?) to his wife Alis..A-l-i- s. This is what that letter says translated: "Helarion to Alis his wife, heartiest greetings." Gals, when you get that letter you're in real trouble...heartiest greetings? Then he writes, "Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. 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 I will send them to you. If good luck to you you have the child, if it is a boy, let it live, if it is a girl, throw it out." Unwanted children were common, commonly left on the streets of the city. Seneca wrote and I quote, "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." Their world wasn't much different than our world. We just have the medical technology to do it before they're born. Same process.

So, Paul was speaking to a world where children were severely abused and unwanted. And in our world they are also severely abused and murdered, and even the ones that are born are very often unwanted. Let me tell you something. The greatest abuse of a child is not physical, the greatest abuse of a child is to leave that child alone. That's the greatest abuse because that child cannot develop physically, spiritually, socially, mentally on its own. It will be the savage all its life long. You throw your child away when you don't spend time with your child, when you don't bring that child up in discipline and instruction from the Lord you throw that child away. That's common in our day. Even the children that are born are thrown all over the place. The mother wants to go here, go there, go here, go there, the child is in the way, farm the kid over to this baby sitter, take the kid over to this neighbor, move the kid over to grandma, just don't cramp my style. That is a throw- away child. Raising a child is a full-time responsibility. That's how mothers in the past put up the trees that shade us.

Notice verse 4, the word fathers there is patera, it normally is used for the male head of the family. But sometimes is used of parents, that's how it's translated, for example, in Hebrews 11:23 where it talks about the parents of Moses. It includes, of course, the idea of the father's headship but also of the mother's partnership. And really we should translate it that way here. Verse 1 says, "Children, obey your parents," and implied in verse 4, "And, parents, do this with your children." So he's talking to mothers and fathers. And he's giving them the responsibility together. Remember what I told you in 1 Thessalonians how Paul took the mother metaphor and then the father metaphor in speaking of his relationship to the Thessalonians? Talked about how the mother is the gentle, nursing, tender, caring, loving, nurturing person and the father gives the exhortation, the encouragement, the commands, sets the standard. That's the partnership. They do it together. Proverbs 4:3 brings the father and the mother together in the instruction of the children. Both have to be involved in that mental, physical, social, spiritual development.

To try to give some practical feet to that, a few years back two sociologists at Harvard University named Glick(?) identified the crucial factors in predicting future delinquency of children ages five and

six. And then in their study tracked that for a number of years and they found to be 90 percent accurate. They could take a five-year-old, six-year-old kid, look at the factors in their life and with 90 percent accuracy predict future delinquency...future...we don't use the word delinquency anymore, future anti-social behavior, anti-social conduct. And then they came back and presented four necessary factors to prevent delinquent anti-social disfunctional children.

Here are the four, these are Harvard sociologists. One, the father's discipline, it must be firm, it must be fair and it must be consistent. Where you have a father doing discipline firmly, fairly and consistently, you work against the future disaster. Second, the mother's supervision. That's the word...the mother's supervision. The mother knows where they are at all times and she knows what they are doing at all times, and she is in involved in their lives personally, continually supervising them. In her presence she controls them. And even when they're out of her presence she knows where they are and what they are doing and they know she knows. The third factor they said to guarantee against a future disfunctional child is the father and mother's demonstrated affection...the father and mother's demonstrated affection. Where the father and the mother love each other and demonstrate that affection before the children, there is a healthy response. They feel secure. They feel there's a loving control of their world. They also feel good about marriage for themselves. And the fourth, very simple, the family's cohesiveness, time spent together.

Now is that very complicated? It took Harvard sociologists to figure that out that the father is in charge of the discipline, that the mother is there to supervise, that the two are to love each other and the family is to be together and that guarantees that you're not going to raise a delinquent. How hard is that? That's what the Bible says. That's what the Bible says. The husband is the head of the family. The mother obviously nourishes and cherishes her children. And they are to love each other, husband loving wife, wife loving husband, and they are to do things together as a family. That's so basic. But that's what makes healthy children.

Paul Meier M.D. said the key to right parent/child relationships can be summed up in these five things. One, love, parents loving each other and their children. Two, discipline, setting a standard and making people live by that standard or pay the consequence. Three, consistency. Consistency is very very important. When you're dealing with a child it isn't important that you be perfect, no one expects that. It is important that you be consistent. Both parents need to stick together, use the same rules, consistently enforce those rules so that a child doesn't get away with something one time and get punished for the same thing another time, it needs to be consistent. You have love, discipline, consistency. The fourth thing is example...example. In healthy families the parents never expect children to live up to a standard they themselves do not keep. That's what devastates pastors' families because it's so intensified. If a guy is in the pulpit preaching preaching preaching all the time, goes home and lives some other kind of life before his children, that's just devastating. They hypocrisy of it is devastating. They cancel out the whole thing. That's true in the life particularly of a Christian. And the fifth thing, said the doctor, love, discipline, consistency, example, the fifth thing that

makes a healthy child is a man at the head of the home. God never intended a home without a man. Why do you think in the Old Testament if a man died that woman was never to be left, what was she to do? Immediately she was to marry his next of kin. Why? For her sake? Not primarily for her sake. Surely for her sake in part. But so that there would be a father in the home. The vast majority of neurotics, both children and adults grow up in homes where there's no father or the father was absent or weak and the mother was dominating. And again I say, sometimes you can't help that and we have support ministry to assist those mothers who have literally have been dispossessed by an unfaithful husband. It's a tragic thing.

So, both parents are involved. Both parents. Now what do they do? Negatively, do not provoke your children to anger, that's the negative thing. You say, "Well, what does that mean? Don't make them mad?" Well yes, but it means more than that. The word "provoke" used only twice has the idea of irritating them. It has the idea of making them intensely angry underneath, exasperating them, embittering them, disheartening them so they become frustrated, angry. We have a lot of people like that. Oh, we have a lot of angry people, a lot of hostile people. Did you read last week about the man driving down the Harbor Freeway, some guy drove up alongside him and just put a bullet in his brain? That's a very angry person. That's a young person, filled with anger, hostility, bitterness.

How do you do that? How do you provoke your children to that kind of anger? Let me give you some ways so you can avoid them. One, by over-protection. You want to really frustrate your child, fence him in, don't trust them, don't give them enough opportunity to develop their own independence so they can find out who they are. You want to really frustrate them, don't let them take any risks and you'll create an angry mood, especially when they compare themselves with what other children are allowed to do. They need to be themselves, they're people, there are persons there. They need to express themselves little by little by little they need to learn to face life on their own. Give them that rope, let them do that. They'll learn and they'll learn the best way they learn, by hitting the wall now and then. But if you over-protect them you'll exasperate them and an exasperated child is an angry child and an angry child isn't going to have a loving relationship with his parents.

Secondly, another way to provoke your child to wrath is by favoritism, favor one child over the other. That is very frustrating. Don't ever compare your children. You want to see the tragedy of that, read again the story of Jacob and Esau. Don't compare your children with each other. Each is unique. Each is a gift from God. Each to be loved and be loved because they are special.

Another way to exasperate your children is by pushing achievement. Push them in the area of achievement. Just keep pushing and pushing and pushing until they never have a sense of having accomplished anything. Nothing is ever enough. If they get C's, you demand B's. They get B's, you demand A's. You demand A's, you demand all A's and they can't satisfy you. Some parents literally crush their children with pressure, school, sports, academic achievement, music, whatever it is. The child gets very very bitter.

I remember a young girl and I was visiting her in the UCLA psychiatric clinic. She eventually killed herself. A beautiful girl but she could never achieve the grade point that her parents pushed her to achieve and finally she killed herself and that was her way of saying, "I'm so angry at you because of the pain you've put in my life because I can never succeed, I never have a sense of accomplishment that I'm going to make you hurt the rest of your life." And so she killed herself and in effect said, "Now live with that." She gave back the hurt.

Another way you can exasperate your child is by over- indulgence. Give them everything they want and you know what, if they don't get the next thing they want, they get angry. Have you noticed that? Have you noticed at Christmas when they get way more than they can possibly get that when some other kid picks up one thing that they've got out of a dozen they get angry? That will just move on in to adulthood. Over-indulgence leads to anger when they don't get what they want. And then when they grow up and they get in an environment where they work and they're paid by somebody else and it's not mom and dad anymore and you've got to earn what you get and they don't get what they want, they get so angry they'll hurt to get it, even kill to get it, steal to get it.

Another way to make an angry bitter child is by discouragement. Just remind them all the time they'll never amount to anything. Just remind them all the time that they're not any good, they're useless, they're in the way. Don't give them any rewards. Don't give them any approval. Don't do any nice things for them. Don't honor them. You'll destroy their initiative. You'll destroy their incentive. You'll destroy their motivation.

Another way to provoke your children to anger is to make them feel like an intrusion in your life, fail to sacrifice for them. Leave them all the time. Make them fend for themselves. Make them fix their own meals, make them clean their own room, make them buy their own stuff, make them take care of their own deals, get their own transportation. Don't take them places because you can't be bothered. Don't let them get in your way because you've got to do your stuff. Have them become slaves around the house to do all your work. Make no sacrifice for them and they'll resent you.

Another way to provoke your children to wrath is by failing to allow them to grow up, by not letting them make mistakes, not letting them goof up. Have you ever been at a table where some kid spilled milk and you thought the parents had just seen the holocaust? Such an unbelievable over-reaction. Or when some little kid gives a stupid idea and you say..."Boy, that's a stupid idea." Now wait a minute, let them share some of their ridiculous ideas and not be condemned. Don't expect perfection, just progress.

You can also exasperate your children by neglect...by neglect. The story of Absalom is probably the story of neglect, as sad as any I know of. I remember a pastor...a youth pastor friend of mine overheard his little boy in the back yard talking to the friend next door. The friend next door said, "I'm

going to the park with my dad." And this youth pastor's little boy said to his friend, "Oh, my dad doesn't have time to go to the park with me he's too busy with other people's children." Just shattered him, changed the framework of his life. I tell people all the time, you know, I've had a deal with my two sons, both my boys went through school playing baseball and the simple deal was I go to your games, you come to my sermons. That's the way it goes. I'll be a part of your life, you be a part of my life. It's not that complicated. Don't neglect them. I believe it's the greatest sin today, just neglect your kids, just leave them alone. That's a throw away child. Be involved in their lives.

Another way that you can provoke them to anger is by bitter words and physical cruelty. Physical cruelty ought to be obvious, bitter words might not be as obvious. Your tongue is so much sharper than a child's that you can use ridicule, sarcasm, you can slice them up with your tongue because of your superior vocabulary. Just like you can beat them up because of your superior strength. Do you realize that we say things to our kids that we wouldn't say to another human being on the face of the earth, except our wives or our spouse? We would never say the things we say to our children, probably not even those things to our spouse. That should not be. That should not be. A wife who refuses to submit to her husband in love as to Christ will destroy the whole authority submission principle in the child's life, a husband who refuses to love his wife as Christ loved the church will destroy the authority submission principle in the child's life. The family just needs to be what God says it to be, husband loves wife, wife submits to husband in love, those two love each other, those two raise the children in the things of Christ. They don't provoke them to anger. And in the end the child is the blessing, the joy, the comfort, the consolation that God intended.

One other simple thing, you need to set an example and live it. Someone wrote, "If a child lives with criticism he learns to condemn. If a child lives with hostility he learns to fight. If a child lives with ridicule he learns to be shy. If a child lives with shame he learns to feel guilty. If a child lives with tolerance he learns to be patient. If a child lives with encouragement he learns confidence. If a child lives with praise he learns to appreciate. If a child lives with fairness he learns justice. If a child lives with security he learns to have faith. If a child lives with approval he learns to like himself. If a child lives with acceptance and friendship he learns to find love in the world."

We don't want to provoke our children to anger, to bitterness, discouragement. What do we want to do? Let's go to the positive, raise them up, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. That's very simple, isn't it? The discipline and instruction of the Lord assumes the Scripture. The law of the Lord, Deuteronomy 6, meditate on it all the time, teach it to your children. This idea of discipline is an interesting word...the word discipline, paideia, means to rear a child and it implies training. And training is an interesting concept. Let me see if I can give you a definition. Training means rules and regulations enforced by rewards and punishment. That's training. Rules and regulations enforced by rewards and punishment. That's what you have to do with a child. You say here's the standard, we set it, we follow it setting an example, we hold you to it. If you meet it we reward you. If you violate it we punish you. Plain and simple...plain and simple.

Discipline then is training. By rules and regulations enforced by rewards and punishment and we have to do that. We say here's God's standard of right behavior. We will live it, mom and dad, that's the example, and we will hold you to it and reward you when you follow it and punish you when you don't.

But what about the word instruction? That's obvious...that simply means teaching with warning in view. The word is admonition, verbal instruction with a view of judgment. We warn you, that's teaching with teeth in it. If you keep doing that, there's going to be consequence.

Susannah Wesley, the mother of 17 including both John and Charles Wesley once wrote, "The parent who studies to subdue self-will in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving of a soul. The parent who indulges self-will does the devil work, makes religion impractical, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to drown his child soul and body forever," end quote.

Now God forgives our mistakes. We make mistakes with our children. But if the general format is right, we have a standard, we live by that standard, we hold you to that standard, and all of this an environment where mom and dad love each other and love you, you've got the makings of godly children. A mother might look back at her life and say, "If I could do it over again, how would I change it?" Maybe some of you could identify with this mother who said, "I would love my husband more in front of my children, I would laugh with my children more at my mistakes and joys. I would listen more, even to the littlest child. I would be more honest about my own weaknesses, never pretending perfection, admitting I was wrong. I would pray differently for my family, rather than focusing on them I'd focus on me. I would do more things together with my children. I would do more encouraging. I would bestow more praise. I would pay more attention to little things, deeds and words of thankfulness. I would share God more intimately out of every ordinary thing of every day I would move toward God."

On this Mother's Day in 1990 when we still have a little shade from the trees of the past, it would be well if parents would again commit themselves to be planting some like this for the future. Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You again this morning that Your Word comes to us in such a penetrating way. We know that we cannot be all that we ought to be but by the grace of God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit we can be sufficient for the task of parenting that You've given us. Forgive us for our failures. Forgive us for the times that we hurt our children, our life partner. And, Lord, we thank You for the grace that covers our failures and mistakes. We pray too for those dear friends who exist in families where one parent is not a Christian or where one parent is absent, the struggle is so difficult. We pray, O God, that You might be to them the Father that family needs, the mother that family needs. And we do pray, Father, that You might cause us to so invest our lives in our children that they

are the delight, the blessing, the joy, the source of love, comfort, consolation all our life long, that You gave them to us to be so that we might know the full joy of godly children, knowing full well that if we train them up in the way they should go they'll not depart from it. And that those for whom we cared in their infancy will in love care for us in the latter years of our lives. May the bonds of our family be built so tightly and strongly that we shall all enjoy the best that You intended with marriage and family to be in all its joy. We'll thank You for that possibility in Christ. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).