
Your Child's Admonition

Ephesians 6:1-4

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Introduction

When this year's Family Enrichment Conference was being planned, I was looking forward to being able to help our parents, especially the ones with younger children. I wanted them to hear and understand what God's plan is for parents and their children. My mind was racing as I thought about all the topics that should be covered.

Then I began to realize that there were only about 6 hours available to present this important topic of parenting. Then, in God's providential care, we had to postpone the series for a week due to the weather. That takes us down to about 4 hours. That isn't enough time to scratch the surface. The biggest problem for me was trying to determine what critical elements needed to be covered during my two messages.

I need to make a disclaimer before I actually start; I have consulted three books by Tedd Tripp: *Shepherding a Child's Heart* and *Instructing a Child's Heart*. The third is by Lou Priolo, "*The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children*." I highly recommend them to you.

This evening I plan to briefly cover four areas: the goal of parenting, the grace of God's design, the duties of parents, and some final comments. We should be done in less than an hour and a half. I'm just kidding!

The Goal of Parenting

Goals Parents Pursue

When I observe parents and children, it is obvious that culture and the shaping influences parents experienced in their lives have contributed to what they believe parenting is. Confusion reigns. Russ mentioned this morning you can go to any religious bookstore and find shelves of parenting books. Each one seems to have identified what a child needs and strategies parents can use to get that kind of child. There are so many goals out there. How do you know which one is right? I suggest the vast majority of those authors are oblivious to God's design for parenting, even those written by Christians. God has given us His operating manual. It is His design. He tells us His goals for rearing children and how we are to parent. Children are ultimately to be disciples who bring Him glory. Parents are ultimately to recognize the idols of their own hearts, bring honor to Him, and be faithful in their parenting. And in case you haven't figured it out yet, there is nothing that brings out the idols we harbor and love more than marriage and parenting.

That being said, let's look at some of the goals parents strive for nowadays.

I saw a bumper sticker that said, "Mom's taxi". One goal driving parents is having their kids involved in as many activities as possible. Activities like soccer, dance, basketball, football, softball, baseball, golf, cheerleading, swimming, and the list goes on. What I ob-

serve are children who are involved in multiple activities in a single week. Is there anything wrong with having your child participate in these activities? No. Perhaps your goal is to have your children develop special abilities and skills. Or your goal could be the possibility of getting scholarships for college. But, is the fast and furious pace required to get to all of these activities worth it? How many activities do they have to participate in? What are they learning? Who wants them to participate – you or your child? What is the cost to family life, the time lost in being somewhere other than home, or not being able to participate in the local church and its ministries?

What about the goal of making sure your child has high self-esteem and self-confidence? This could be driven by how you were treated growing up. Or what you wished you would have been like, or what life could have been like if you had good self-esteem and the self-confidence you believe is necessary to succeed. Are you living your life through your children?

How about being saved. You want your children to be Christians. Is this a worthy goal? Of course it is! Who doesn't want their children to be a child of God? Who wants their kids to spend eternity in hell? Isn't having believing children what parenting is all about? But what are you hoping will happen if your child is a believer? Do you believe life will be easier? That problems in parenting will be solved, or at least easier? That your kids will be better at making wise decisions and your work is less complicated. Your child's professing faith in Christ does not change the basic issues of child rearing. In fact, Scripture is clear that problems have just begun when God saves us. We are attacked by the enemy when we enter the kingdom of God. Children still have idols they worship. They still need to grow to become more and more like Christ. Don't hear me say you shouldn't be concerned about your child's eternal condition. What I am saying is what are you doing to make this happen? Pastor Dan made a statement that I have never forgotten: we must make the Gospel attractive. Are you so concerned about the salvation of your child the Gospel is not attractive? Have you been trying everything you can think of to convict them of their sin and come to Christ? You know the disease of sin. You suffered with that same disease. In fact, there are times when you get sick even now. You know the medicine is what is needed for the cure. Yes, that medicine tastes awful. Yes it's so awful you can smell it when the lid is opened. But it is the cure for their sin. Have you made the Gospel into medicine that is disgusting? Have you chased them around with that bottle in your hand? All you want them to do is swallow this life-giving medicine. Maybe you can finally get them to open their mouth for this medicine hoping they will swallow. But their reaction is gagging and spitting it out as fast as they can.

How about this one. I want my kids to be well behaved. Is this a worthy goal? Of course. But how is that going to be obtained? Manipulation? Behavior modification? Rewards? Punishment? Just because a child is well behaved doesn't mean it is done from a heart that wants to serve God. They could easily be manipulating having learned they are ultimately going to get what they want. If you haven't realized it yet – children are master manipulators, and it only gets worse as time goes by.

And then there's wanting children who aren't an embarrassment. This is a big one. Is this a worthy goal? Who wants to have their children running wild or screaming in a store? Who wants their children running around in church bumping into people? Who wants the chil-

dren's ministry workers coming to get you because your kid is screaming, pushing other kids around, punching, biting, disobeying, throwing toys, and all the other behaviors that are embarrassing. What are you going to do to get children who won't embarrass you?

Here's another one. You say, "I want my kids to have a good education. I want them to succeed in life by being well prepared for the job market. I would hate to see my kids living without so life is hard." Parents expect their children to receive scholarships, to be recognized for academic excellence or outstanding achievement. Their kids need to be the best, or at least near the top, in all they do. But, what if your child isn't able to achieve that kind of success? What about those who aren't college material? Will you think less of your child if they work with their hands? Plus, it used to be that an undergraduate degree was adequate for good white collar jobs. Now a master's degree is becoming a requirement.

Is your goal controlling your children? How are you going to deal with a kid who has friends you don't like or you believe are inappropriate? What if you don't trust your kid when he goes out with his friends? What are you going to do to make it impossible for them to get into trouble? What are you going to do when you find out your child is involved in drunkenness, drugs, sex, truancy, stealing, or worse? Do you believe increasing your control will make them obey you? Trying to control you child will only make them more angry and determined to do what you don't want them to do. They will appear to be obedient, but really they are very practiced liars with the ability to do whatever they want without you finding out about it.

God's Goal

Don't hear me saying that all of these goals are completed wrong. All of the previous goals must be evaluated through the lens of God's goals.

Here is the definition of God's goals for parenting:

Raising your children in such a way that they will glorify and enjoy God by becoming independent, godly disciples who love God, have a biblical self-awareness, and handle life by correctly handling the word of God.

Ephesians 6:1-4 give us how God says this is accomplished. It's like the rails on train tracks. There are two that run parallel to each other. Both rails are critical for the train to run. There is the rail of admonition, and the rail of discipline.

I am going to touch on the rail of admonition some tonight, but I am mostly going to be speaking about the rail of discipline, especially in how it applies to young children.

The Grace of God's Design

Submit to authority

Ephesians 5:21

Culture and people's beliefs decide who they will submit to. They determine who is worthy. They decide what benefit they can obtain by submitting to someone they believe can help them get what they want.

²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of Christ. (HCSB)

But when we look at Eph 5:21, it is clear that God has instituted submission to authority as His design for His creation. Paul gives three examples of submission in the verses following: wives submit to husbands, children submit to parents, and slaves submit to masters. In fact, all of creation submits to one authority - God. He is the one to whom everything in the entire universe submits. All authority has been delegated by God to those who lead. It's not that they deserve it, or are worthy of it. It is God's design. As I mentioned, wives submit to husbands, but husbands submit to God. Children submit to parents, but parents submit to God. Slaves submit to masters, but masters submit to God. We, as members of the body of Christ, submit to those who have been given authority by God. The bottom line is, God has given authority to parents to whom their children must obey. This is right.

Choices produce consequences

Galatians 6:7-8

⁷ Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows he will also reap,

⁸ because the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. (HCSB)

Notice there are positive and negative consequences. Consequences have two types: natural consequences and those that are determined by those in authority. Natural consequences are like kicking the wall and having your toe hurt. Consequences determined by authority teach what has been sown will be reaped. Those consequences are biblical and must be reasonable and logical. They cannot be extreme or excessive.

Teaching our children about consequences is involved in both rails - the rail of instruction and the rail of discipline. There comes a time when children are able to have meaningful conversations. That is the time for conversations about the consequences of sinful choices, and Godly choices.

Wouldn't it be convenient if all children were the same? We could learn what made those conversations successful. However, if you haven't learned yet, the first child is the experimental child. If we could figure out what works and what doesn't working with that experimental child, then we'd be set to have successful conversations with all the other children. But that's not how God created them. Children are like flowers in a flower garden. All of the seeds are planted in the same soil. All of the seeds come from the same package. All of the seeds get the same care and all of the seeds experience the same rain and sun. But what grows are different kinds of flowers. There are flowers that are soft, with vibrant colors, and a very satisfying fragrance. This is what we expected. But there are those which look like flowers, but on closer examination, they are prickly with little sharp thorns. They are hurtful and have a smell that is not appealing. They are disappointments and we don't understand how there could be those kind of flowers planted in the same soil, which came from the same packet, received the same care, and experienced the same rain and sunshine as the beautiful ones. This is not what we expected. We worked so hard to enjoy a beautiful flower garden.

Each child will challenge our dependence on God. They will bring us to our knees in prayer. They will be exasperating. They will be disappointing at times. They will be prickly. They will show how short our tempers; how impatient we are; how much we don't know our Bibles; and how dependent we are on the enabling grace of God.

During these early years, being disobedient to authority and dishonoring parents will bring about consequences that involve more than just conversation. We are going to look at those the next time we're together.

The Duty of Parents

Bring Them Up

As was said this morning, parents are to bring up their children. Bringing them up involves instructing and disciplining your children. These two commands to parents are like the two rails of a railroad track. One rail is instructing; the other is disciplining. Both must be there in order for the train to run efficiently, freely, and at its greatest potential. If one rail is not lined up as it should be, at best, the train will run poorly, if at all. The worst would be the train jumps the rails and ends up not running at all. The efficiency, freedom, and potential that was there, or could have been there, is all gone. Both rails are necessary.

Russ mentioned this morning the discipline should be decreasing and the instruction, let's call it counseling, should be increasing. This is an example of what it looks like. <<slide>>

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Granted, each child is going to be different, and this graphic will be different for each child, but the principal is the same. At the beginning, the discipline is at its greatest and the counseling is at its lowest. As the child grows, the lines show the relationship between those two rails. It isn't what we have in mind when we envision train tracks, but this is how the tracks look in child rearing.

As you see, the early years are the ones where command is aimed at two important lessons. Your children must learn they are individuals under authority and there are consequences for their choices. They are made by God and have the responsibility to obey God in all things. Obeying parents, whose authority is derived from God, is obeying God. This is one of the major points in the book, *Give Them Grace*. This I covered in the first chapter, but it seems that chapter is passed over too quickly. Children must obey their parents by submitting to their authority and they need to learn choices have consequences.

The message of consequences for making choices to disobey must be taught. This is a part of both the nurturing rail and the discipline rail. All of God's creation is built on the principal that choices produce consequences. I don't think I need to labor this principle. We all understand consequences. We as parents have consequences if we don't follow God's blueprint for rearing our children. Our children must have consequences for disobedience. It is important that you teach your children the principal of consequences. This principal operates for their entire lifetime. They must learn it now when they are still young.

What does obedience look like for young children? Here is how Ted Tripp defines it in his book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, "Obedience is the willing submission of one person to the authority of another. It means more than a child doing what he is told. It means doing what he is told without challenge, without delay, and without excuse." I find this easy to remember. It is C, D, E. I would add another C - without complaining. I guess my definition would be C,C,D,E; without complaint, without challenge, without delay, and without excuse. They will obey the first time; without CCDE.

However, you have the responsibility to model honor for your children. How? Let's say your children are watching a movie. They are enjoying it greatly. The children normally go to bed at 7:00. It is now 7:10. The movie isn't over for another 15 minutes. Not honoring your children would be telling them they have to get to bed now. You are tempting them to sin by not obeying the CCDE. Why tempt your children to sin? You would be honoring them by informing them they will be going to bed when the movie is over. You expect honor from your children. They should be honored by you.

Everyone is training their children. The issue is, what are you training them? You may be training them by your tone of voice. You say it nicely the first time, but when there is no obedience, your tone changes. As they continue to disobey, your voice gets louder and louder. You have trained your children. All they need to do is wait until your voice gets to a certain level before they obey.

Or your training involves making threats. Does this sound familiar? After the first request, there is disobedience. You say, "If you don't get upstairs right now and get your PJs on, you are going to be sorry!" That doesn't work, so another threat is issued. "If you don't stop right now and get upstairs, you aren't going to watch any TV tomorrow." Again no obedience; another threat is made. "You had better get upstairs, or you can forget about going to Tommy's birthday party Saturday!" Each threat is accompanied by a raising of decibel level. At last you are at your wits end and your anger is almost out of control. You have trained them alright. They know it's time to obey, but it will be at their own speed and their own way.

Why is obedience important? There are at least three ways:

1. It's for their safety. If your child has not learned to obey the first time, what could happen when they run from you in the grocery store parking lot and ignore your command to stop? What could happen when they reach for the electrical socket? What is going to happen when they are 10, 12, 14, 16, 18? What's going to happen when they are told by their employer to do something they don't want to do? Submission to authority and obedience the first time without complaint, without challenge, without delay, and without excuse is for their safety, if nothing else.
2. They are better able to understand the Gospel. When they understand what submission to authority is and what obedience requires, they will be better able to understand how difficult it is to submit and obey. They will begin to understand the Gospel and their inability to measure up as you instruct them how to live in God's kingdom. They will be confronted with their inability to do what God has commanded without the grace and power of Christ through the Holy Spirit.
3. It trains them to live by principle, not by what they want. They learn to do what is right, no matter how they feel or what they want. Their moods and desires are no excuse to do as they please. They learn they cannot trust themselves to judge right and wrong without instruction. They learn that behavior has moral implications and there are inevitable consequences.

There are other reasons to be on the two rails, especially the rail of discipline, but that's for next time, as well.

I was taught a sermon must not leave your hearers in suspense. They may not show up the next time for whatever the reason. They may be guests. I've brought up issues requiring answers and then don't delivering the answers. Well, sorry - this message is long enough as it is. I can't answer all of the issues I bring up. Now audio and manuscripts are available on the internet. I don't feel badly about keeping you in suspense.

Do Not Provoke

How many kids are provoked to anger and discouraged because their parents are more interested in their comfort, job, hobbies, spending time in front of the TV, going to sports events, and anything else they want to do. They are basically absentees in doing what God calls them to do as parents and as Christians. Life is all about them, not the ministry to which God has called them - being God honoring parents.

Lou Priolo was the speaker at our Family Enrichment Retreat a couple of years ago. He has written many fine books. One of them was called, *"How to Help Angry Kids"*. It was later reprinted with the title, *"The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children"*. In that book he lists 25 ways parents provoke their children to anger and discouragement. I highly recommend you get that book. I would like to give you four of those twenty-five I believe you are probably struggling with.

1. Lack of marital harmony

Children instinctively know when their parents don't have the relationship they should with each other. There is no harmony. One or both of them have developed a closer level of intimacy with something or someone else other than their spouse. It could be a job, play, friends, their parents, or other people who feed their idols. Parents will many times become bitter toward each other and guess who sees it - the kids. What kind of house are the children living in that has bitterness and anger as the main theme? Many times their mother will transfer her affection from her husband to her children. How confusing is it for a child to be treated one way by their mother and another way by their father?

2. Establishing and maintaining a child-centered home

What is a child-centered home? It's a home where the children are the ones around whom the family operate. They are asked where they want to eat. They are allowed to demand something else to eat instead of what has been prepared. They are allowed to choose what they wear. They are allowed to be disrespectful. They interrupt their parents with no regard for what their parents are doing or who they are talking to. They demand their own way. The entire world of the family revolves around the children. Their house is run like a democracy with the children having the most votes. The children's desires are placed on equal or higher status than their parents.

3. Consistently disciplining in anger

When you are angry, there is a great temptation to over-discipline your child. It is during these times that you could very easily be charged with child abuse. Your anger can be perceived as a personal attack by your child. If your child perceives your anger as

the motive for your discipline, he believes you are being vindictive and punishing him. It is difficult for a child not to get angry when their parent is angry.

4. Being inconsistent in discipline

The most common inconsistency happens when parents don't agree on discipline. They have different standards, either for obedience, or for dealing with disobedience, or both. Another way parents are inconsistent is by vacillating day to day, or incident to the same incident, what is tolerated or what the punishment is for the same infraction. One day the child doesn't pick up their clothes and nothing is done. The next day, mom picks them up for them. Another day, the clothes aren't picked up and there are consequences for that behavior. Even the consequences are not consistent. How is the child to know, day by day, what obedience looks like? Or what consequences there will be for the same event? I read the biography of Steve Jobs. His management style was hands on for his "first team". He daily went to each person, asked them what they were working on, and told them exactly what he thought of it. The discouraging thing about it, he would say to the same person one day that the project was a piece of trash, but the next day, for the same project and same person he would say it was great. It's a wonder they continued working for him.

Final Comments

Counting the Cost

Parenting is a priority in this season of your life. It means giving up many of the things you want to do or goals you want to attain. It requires time. It is being prepared and willing to be interrupted at the most inopportune times. It means taking the time to read biblical books on child rearing. It means being an ambassador for Christ. It means being continually conscious that you are working to make disciples of Christ. It means asking God to give you enabling grace to obey Philippians 2:3-5 (I am revising it for our benefit tonight):

³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, ... ⁴ don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in your family, too.

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (NLT)

Parenting has a price - you must count the cost.

But, you also must see the blessing of being a parent. You are shepherding each child God gives you. They are a blessing from God. You get a front row seat in observing God at work in each child's life. You have the joy of God working in your life making you more and more like His Son. How He loves you, His son and His daughter! How He loves your children! How good and wise He is to give you this opportunity to serve Him in this ministry of rearing children!

Parental Evaluation

I'd like to deal with an issue that plagues the church of God in the responsibility of rearing children. First with parents who have children that don't display those qualities we had in the definition of God's goals, and second, with those who look at those parents and judge their parenting.

Russ mentioned this morning that you can't make your children do anything. You have experienced that, but you still try. You are stressed, tired, embarrassed, feel like a failure, and are even angry that your children are like they are. You look at other parents and their children. They must be doing things right or have done things right. Pride is a very important issue. You don't want other people to believe you are awful parents. You don't want them to think you are doing things wrong. Your heart aches. You have tried to follow God's instructions for rearing your children, but your children just aren't turning out the way they should be. You blame yourself for children who are disobedient, unsaved, in trouble, hostile, lazy, unmotivated, not living up to their potential, wild, and anything else that doesn't measure up to not even your expectations not to mention the expectations you believe others have of how your children should be. Believing that you can make your children be what they should be is a dead end street that is really a doctrinal issue. You say you believe in God's sovereignty, but somehow that belief doesn't carry over to how you function as parents. God does not hold parents responsible for the outcome of their children. He holds parents responsible for their faithfulness to what He requires of them. The child is responsible for his choices, and the outcome ultimately rests in God's sovereignty. He is sovereign. So quit being obsessed and feeling guilty for what your child is like when they are growing up or have left your home. How they ultimately decide to live their lives is their choice. You and I cannot be evaluated as good or bad parents based on their decisions. That doesn't relieve us of our responsibility to be faithful. That doesn't relieve us of asking Him for enabling grace and wisdom. That doesn't relieve us of asking other brothers and sisters for their counsel. But it does relieve you of your stress toward your children. It does remove the guilt you are carrying around. Remember, you are planting the seeds God has given you. You have planted them into the soil of your home. You have cared for them according to the instructions on the back of the packet. But God brings the rain and the sun. God causes the seeds to sprout and grow. God has determined what kind of follow each of those seeds will produce. They may not be what you want them to be. But take heart. Be faithful. God is the One to whom you are accountable. Relax. Love your children. They are God's gift to you. He is accomplishing what is needed and good for you and your children. Leave the outcome of your children to God.

Now for those of you who judge other parents for the way their children are turning out. Have you caught yourself saying, "My children will never turn out like that." Be careful. If your children are still at home, you have been given a packet of seeds, too. They may all look like flowers, but on closer examination, you may see they aren't what they appear to be. Perhaps God has blessed you with children who seem to be doing well. God knows their heart. God is sovereignly in control of those children. Thank God if they follow Him and are godly disciples who like according to the principles of Scripture. But you have no assurance they are what they appear to be. How many children have left home and turned their back on what you've taught them and want nothing to do with Christ. There are few parents who don't have children who are unbelievers. Don't judge your brothers and sisters by how their children have turned out. If you see them struggling in doing what God calls them to do, come along side and help. Encourage them. Shower them with praise for what they are doing right and help in what is not right.

Russ said parenting is a responsibility of the body of believers who are here at the Chapel. Let's not judge. Let's pray, work, encourage, uphold in prayer, and go out of the way for each other in this ministry of rearing children.