

Sermon Title: Spirit-Led Parents  
Scripture Text: Eph. 6:4 (Ephesians #43)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 7-17-22

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Ephesians Chapter 6—where this morning, it is one verse: about Spirit-Led Parents.

As we ponder this morning what it means to be a parent, let's say up front: It is a complicated task! It is also a supremely high calling. If you are a parent, nobody else really wants your job, but everybody thinks they can do it better than you can—just ask them. You don't know the limits of your endurance until you have children. And from infancy on, your children will discover those limits *and* make sure that you get pushed beyond them.

You probably can *never* appreciate your own parents' hard work and sacrifice until you have children of your own. That's the real reason why parents are so happy when you have children. They don't snicker in your face, but they are saying, "Aha! Now *you* are going to understand what we went through!"

Here is a succinct description of what parenthood is all about, according to the Word of God; it is familiar to most Christians: Psalm 127, Verses 3 through 5—"Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate." (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

Have you ever tried to shoot an arrow? I've seen people do it with the compound bows, and take down big animals and all of that—and that's *really* impressive. I tried it when I was a young teenager at a YMCA camp. During a game we had, I had scraped up my arm; and then the next day was my day for archery, and I held that thing out there and I let my hand go the wrong way, and removed the scab from my arm with the bow. And after a couple of days, I hit the target a few times. That's a *great* metaphor for parenthood! It is something *really difficult* to do, and yet what a *lofty* thing—to launch children into the next generation, toward the bullseye of God's glory!

We are continuing in the context of Ephesians. This is the fourth of six paragraphs, all devoted to different earthly relationships and our roles within those relationships. There is a keynote for all six of these paragraphs; and I keep pointing it out to you every week, because it is so important that you not isolate these things from their context.

All of this *presumes* that you have read, understood, and believed Ephesians, Chapters 1 through 3. The theme of this book is: "in Christ"; it is assuming you are "in Christ" (cf. Jn. 15:5)—I understand that I am a sinner (Rom. 3:23); I understand that I cannot save myself (Prov. 20:9; Rom. 5:6; Eph. 2:1); I understand that You sent Your Son to die to take Your wrath for my sins (Is. 53:5-6; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 5:9; 8:32); and then, when I put my faith in Him (Eph. 2:8), You give me His righteousness applied to my account (Rom. 4:3, 23-25; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; cf. Is. 61:10)—it is *assuming* that relationship.

Then, you work your way through Chapter 4; and you get to Chapter 5, and especially Verse 18—"Be filled with the Spirit"; and then there's a comma, and a whole bunch of characteristics that represent the people who *are* Spirit-controlled—or, Spirit-led, or, Spirit-filled.

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And the *last* of those is the one after which you could put a colon and say: Here is what I am going to explain now in detail; it is Verse 21 of Chapter 5—"being subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (LSB). As you are "filled with the Spirit," you will arrange yourself under other people (Mk. 9:35; Phil. 2:3-4). Whatever your role is, your goal is to lift up other people around you (Gal. 6:10; 1 Thess. 5:11).

*Then*, he begins *applying* that principle to different relationships: first to "wives" (Eph. 5:22-24); then to "husbands" (5:25-33)—how those two different roles complement each other and come together into a new thing, better than either of the individuals could be on their own (Matt. 19:5). Then he talks about "children" (6:1-3) and parents (6:4) in what it is supposed to be like in a Spirit-led home (cf. Col. 3:18-21; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 2:4-5); and then the next two will be "slaves" (6:5-8) and "masters" (6:9)—which, in our culture, equates roughly to employees and employers; and we will see those in the next couple of Sundays.

But next on the agenda is how parents are to arrange themselves under the authority of God to serve their children for the glory of God (Prov. 20:7; Mal. 2:15). One verse: Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 4—"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

There is a balance throughout this whole section here: Wives' duties are balanced by husbands' duties and responsibilities; children's duties are balanced with those of parents'; slaves' are balanced by their masters'. There is a combination—there is an interactive intertwining of different roles in these relationships.

"Fathers" is the word chosen by Paul and the Holy Spirit with the obvious thought in mind that, in the ultimate position of responsibility in the home, *that* rests with the father. But in the Hebrew culture, it was understood that such instruction to parents was applied to both fathers *and* mothers; and as a matter of fact, the exact Greek word that is translated "fathers" here—which is a legitimate, appropriate translation of it—is also used in another way. For example: Hebrews 11:23—"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his *parents*"—plural; exactly the same word as "fathers" here; so it is obvious: Though it says "fathers," it is addressed to fathers who are in the relationship of a husband to a wife, who are in a relationship to the Lord, so that they all want what the Lord wants in their relationship. The father is ultimately responsible, the mother adapting to that unique father. Remember, Ladies: Adapt yourself to "your own" idiomatic "husband" (5:22)—the one who is unique, that God has given to you.

It is also obvious: Our one verse is neatly packaged into two parts; and so, dangle that in front of a preacher, and he will make it into an outline. "Spirit-Led Parents"—Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 4: There is a Negative Instruction, and then a Positive Instruction. We will start with the Negative, and work our way up to the Positive. Ephesians 6:4—"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger"—that is the negative part.

"Provoke to anger" is a translation of one Greek word; it needs several English words to get the meaning across. It means "to rouse toward wrath," "to provoke," "to exasperate," or "to anger."

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The noun form of this verb occurs just once in the New Testament, and we saw it recently; it's in Ephesians Chapter 4, Verse 26—"Do not let the sun go down on your *anger*"; and the sense of it there is "an angry mood." *Never* let a day end with *you stuck* in an angry mood; God has provided that *that* not be the case. The root of this word has to do with an attitude of settled anger. There are a couple of different words for an *explosion* of "anger" (e.g., Acts 12:20; Gal. 5:20), or, the "pouring out of wrath." This is talking about the underlying attitude, and the meaning that we should apply here is that *we must not* treat our children in such a way that they develop an angry or resentful attitude. Trust me: They came *wired* from the factory to *be like that* (cf. Gen. 8:21; Ps. 51:5; 58:3)—*we* have to counteract that; we have to train them otherwise (Prov. 22:15).

The parallel to Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 4, is in Colossians Chapter 3, Verse 21; and that time, Paul and the Holy Spirit chose a little bit different word there: It says: "Fathers, do not *exasperate* your children." "Exasperate" means "to stir up" or "to agitate."

So if you put those two verses together—written in a short span of time by the same guy, from the same jail cell, to similar people in similar churches—you understand that the meaning is really beyond doubt. The meaning is: Do not treat your children in such a way that will embitter them against you, or push them into rebellion, drive them away from you, make them afraid to talk to you.

With that word from God as the backdrop, we need to think about how to apply that. The wonderful thing about the Bible is that it is so transcultural. The truth is *always* true (Jn. 17:17b; cf. Ps. 119:89, 160; Is. 40:8). Our culture is very different from the culture in Ephesus or the culture in Colossae in the First Century, but parenthood is parenthood, and children are children, and God's standard is *always* the same (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17).

So I put together a little list for you of parental errors that tend to embitter children. You're not supposed to "provoke your children to wrath" (NKJV); well, what are some things to stay away from? Remember, this is the *negative* part of the command. Well, let me give you a little list here:

One would be: Overprotection.

Now, when your child first comes to you, *they need your protection*; pretty much everything in the world would be life-threatening to them without *you* providing protection, 24/7. They need you to feed them, clothe them, deal with the consequences of feeding them, protect them from boogymen, and all of that stuff. But as a child grows, you need to *continually* reconsider what combination of freedom and opportunities and responsibilities he or she needs. Maturity needs to be noticed, rewarded, praised, encouraged—and it's an *ever-changing* target!

Protection is keeping children from being forced to deal with things that they are not equipped to face—keeping them from things that will harm them. *Overprotection* is *preventing* kids from facing things that they *must* learn to face in order to be challenged and to grow toward maturity.

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I mean, it might be something as simple as using silverware instead of hands; you have to let them progress as they need to progress. They need to learn to face fears. Now, you keep them from the things that are going to do serious harm to them; but they need to learn to face fears, they need to learn to develop confidence. It is *your* job as a parent to discern what each child is ready to accomplish, and to be there to help him or her scale new heights.

I remember when Brad got his first little bicycle, and it had the training wheels on it; and thank the Lord, I was at an age that I could still run along and hang on to the back of the seat; and after a couple times around our cul-de-sac, he was being more biblical than I was—he turns around and says, "Dad, would you let go!" And I did—and *it was amazing!* He took off on his own! He went probably *a hundred feet* before he crashed—and got up and wanted to go again!

You have to strike the balance between protection and *over*protection; it needs *great* wisdom.

Here is another one that will always get you in trouble: Favoritism.

Now I admit: This one applies a lot more to those of you who have more than one child; but if you treat one child in your home in a more special way than another, it is *always* a problem! We saw Isaac favor Esau over Jacob, while Rebekah preferred Jacob over Esau (Gen. 25:28); go read that chunk of the Book of Genesis and you'll see the tragic results of that (chaps. 25-28).

It *never, ever* works! The favored one gets spoiled, and that's bad; the one who *doesn't* get special treatment feels *constant* resentment, and that's bad. Both the favored one and the one who feels like the ugly duckling wind up *damaged*.

And that takes balance, because what if God gives you two children that are *different*? And *they all are!* Even people who raise *identical twins* will tell you how different they are, even though they look so much the same on the outside.

Here's another one to stay away from: Discouragement.

There are *plenty* of circumstances, *plenty* of people in the world who will give your child *many* chances to learn to deal with discouragement—and they need to be able to come to *us* when that happens. But they need to know that *you* are on their team, and *you* are their greatest cheerleader and supporter! They need our praise, our acceptance, our encouragement, whenever possible.

But *make sure* you don't fall into the *next* ditch: *Over*-encouragement.

A lot of people try to fulfill their own dreams in their children. Pushing your child into what *you* want for him or her, instead of encouraging them in *their* desires, is also deadly. Urging your child to play football or to play piano or whatever, even if there isn't interest or desire for it—if there is no fruit from it, it is likely to cause your child to turn bitter.

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Again, I remember Brad. He was eight, and we put him to bed one night—and that's when he would always get most verbal: "Read another chapter, read another chapter, read another chapter"—and we were talking about some things, and he said, "Daddy, thanks for coaching my soccer team. But don't get me wrong—I like that, I like soccer; but *baseball is my life!*" He was eight years old. It took eighteen years for him to outgrow that, and that was because he didn't make it as a pro. He was never going to be a musician! That was what he was going to do! You have to make sure you guide them in the way that God has enabled them, gifted them, planted desires in their heart, presented opportunities to them. But don't try to make them into what *you* want them to be, other than to be godly.

There's another problem: Failure to allow for individuality.

Very similar. No one is a carbon-copy of parents or brothers or sisters. *Never* compare one child to another! I mean, you'll see the differences—but, if you compare one to the other, somebody wins and somebody *loses*; and there should not be any *losers* among your children. Help your children to be the unique people that God created them to be.

Then, there's a horrible one: Neglect or indifference.

Very much colored by our society. I could elaborate a lot, but I would just say—and you would know if you need to be convicted about this: If you are too busy to spend time with *each* of your children personally and regularly, you are too busy to be Spirit-filled, because parents are given to kids to *be* the influence for godliness. Your home is the *strongest* influence on those children!

Here's another one: Bitter words.

You are going to train your children by what you say, for sure; but they are going to observe you, and they're going to watch how you respond to other people and to different situations. Bitterness and anger in your responses *will be* catalogued *and* imitated by your kids—and they may even turn it around on you.

Make sure that when your children learn vile words—and I said "when," not "if"—make sure they do not learn them *from you!* How wonderful if they would have to come *ask* you what that means. And then you have to figure out how to answer the question in a Christ-honoring sort of a way. But let Spirit-controlled speech dominate your home.

And if you had to summarize all of these—probably the most common way to describe how parents fail and *do* "provoke" their "children to anger" or "exasperate" them: it's Inconsistency.

The rules in your home need to be reasonable. They need to be age-appropriate. They need to be circumstantially appropriate; it's going to be different if you live in an apartment on the south side of New York, versus if you live on 80 acres in Montana. They need to be reasonable, and they need to be *enforced* (cf. Prov. 29:15b). Never make a threat that you won't carry through. Never make a promise that you won't make good.

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Now, I've said that. I've made every parent in the room feel horrible. I've made every grandparent in the room rue all the things that they did and didn't do. Hey, we need to be realistic about this, and we need to be *kind* about this.

You know, at any moment, any child is susceptible to going into his or her worst possible behavior. We need to make sure we don't set a standard of perfection that no one can attain. And your kids have this weird sense of how to do things in the most embarrassing-to-you way possible! One of the favorites—they must teach them this *somewhere*: If you are going to *really* go over the top, do it in the checkout line at the grocery store on a really busy day, when Mom's basket is already in but you're not being waited on yet. That's when they will blurt out the things that *you didn't even know they knew!* Or, they will ask you the question about private parts *right there*; and never [whispering], "Psst! Mom!"—it's always at the top of their lungs, right?

Now, remember: As we are talking about doing this, and as we are a *church* family—which is like an extended family, but with stronger connections because we all belong together—remember: All this *presupposes* you are "in Christ"; that you *want* what God wants for your children; that you are training your children what it means to be "in Christ," even if they haven't yet come to the point of recognizing their sin and repenting and turning to Christ on their own.

And this presupposes, further, that you *want* to be "filled with the Spirit," that you *want* to be under the control of "the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16).

So, let's be realistic—about our *own* families, and about our church family. Not only is "perfect" behavior of children *impossible*—they are all depraved, right?—perfect *parenting* is also impossible (Ecc. 7:20).

Now, we are bound to have a great variety of children in the families of our church; just as every one of our families is unique, every one of our circumstances is unique. But remember when we do baby dedication? The parents make their promise to raise their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4, KJV), and we promise as a church family: We accept these children and these parents into our fellowship.

So, let's be kind. Let's be realistic. Let's be *gracious*. Let's be forgiving. Let's be encouraging. Let's be nurturing.

You know, some kids are *very* compliant; sometimes, they are the *sneakiest* ones, but they aren't *hard*. Some are strong-willed, and they will *always* test an authority. Some are *very* advanced—they're always mentioned on Facebook. Some learn and progress more slowly. They will all respond differently to the same situation, to the same discipline; they'll respond differently to parents and differently to teachers. And we need to adapt. This isn't a *formula*; it's not a computer algorithm. It's *real life*, and it needs wisdom. Some kids are mellow, and they sleep well; they *prefer* order and quiet. And God, in His providential sense of humor, likes to send that one *first* into a lot of homes, and *then* give them a different kind—the kind that is wired with only two speeds: "On" and "Off," and no throttle in between.

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There *are* some genetic and biological reasons why some children just really can't sit still; some of them don't *realize* it's possible to sleep past 5:30 AM because—see previous comments—they *will* test your limits of endurance.

All of that is to make a very important point for all parents: There is *no* single correct formula for *how* to apply God's Word in the training of your children. The Word is clear, the goals are clear, the principles are clear; but it needs to be done parent-and-child, child-and-parent. Every day in every situation, you need wisdom; and you need to understand that we "stand" in His "grace" (Rom. 5:2).

There is a lot of wisdom to be gained from observing and asking others who have gone before you about situations you might be facing, but there is, simply, just not one right way. The same parents who have one child who is compliant and easy to train and another one who is extremely active and looks like he has been mainlining caffeine since the cradle—*that's why God gave us a church!* I mean, we can send those kids to VBS! We could wish it was *ever week* in the summer, that they could *burn off* that much energy!

What you do as a parent won't be perfect; mistakes are inevitable (cf. Jas. 3:2). But stay away from the things that you *know* will "provoke them to anger" or "exasperate" them. Remember: Your goal is not to produce a perfect child—you *didn't*, and you *can't*, no matter what stage of it you are at. Your goal is to produce a *disciple* of the Lord Jesus Christ (Prov. 3:1, 5), and for your children to stand *with you* in God's grace (2 Tim. 1:5).

Alright—there is a Negative Instruction.

*Then*, there is a Positive Instruction.

Back to our verse: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but *bring them up...*" That phrase is all from the Greek word *ektrephō*, which occurs only one other time in the New Testament; we saw it recently in Chapter 5, Verse 29, where it has to do with husbands "nourishing" and "cherishing" their wives; we use the word "nourish" there. It means "to nourish up toward maturity," "to supply with food and warmth." And applied to nurturing your children, it means: meet their needs. Just like you feed them and clothe them and bathe them—and count them before you put them to bed at night, to make sure you have the same number as you sent out to play earlier in the day. This is a positive, uplifting thing. Realize: My goal isn't just to have a perfect kid today; my goal is to produce a disciple of Jesus Christ as they go out into the world.

Next in our verse, he gives us two words to help us understand *how* to "nourish" our children toward maturity: they are "discipline" and "instruction." "Bring them up in the *discipline* and *instruction* of the Lord."

First: "discipline"—This a word that has a very broad connotation, the whole process of training and education. Our word "pedagogue" comes from a form of this word. It's the whole cultivation of the mind, developing the morals and the values—the whole process. "Discipline" involves both commands and admonitions, as well as reproof and punishment.

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The root behind the word is the word for "young child": "p-e-d"; I know that in Latin that can also mean "walking" or your "feet," but that's a "young child." A *p-e-d-iatrician* is from two Greek words: a "healer" of "children." A *pedagogue* is one who is a "teacher" of "children."

This is our job. Part of loving a child is providing the nurture of guidance and discipline. Discipline is a mark of true love for your children; so, if you don't discipline, they will get a message about your love (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; Heb. 12:9). According to Hebrews Chapter 12, Verses 5 through 10, discipline is a principle that God has built into *His* relationship with *us*. *We* are accountable to *Him* for *receiving* His discipline, growing by it, and passing that on to the next generation.

The second word there is "instruction"; the word means "training by word." This one has the root "mind" in it; so this one is *far more* verbal and abstract, whereas "discipline" is more hands-on instructional and correction. Verbal instruction can be either positive or negative, like this verse has a negative instruction and a positive instruction.

When you put the two words together: Teach them what to do *and* what not to do; *and* understand: It means what you say, how you instruct. And by the way, I would recommend that parents need to have the same instruction given to them that preachers do: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season"—and when they are testing your limits and when they're not—"reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). Boy, if your kid ever learns something on the *first* time you say it, *praise God!* But you might need to say it another time—or 2, or 73—to teach them.

Then "discipline" is *action-oriented*, whereas "instruction" is *verbal-oriented*. So, parenthood requires giving thorough, careful instruction over the long haul, applied with consistent love and praise and chastening. You have to weave the two together.

And don't miss the last three words of this verse: "Fathers"—parents—"do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction *of the Lord*." You're not just trying to raise a child to do *one thing*; you're trying to raise a child to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15).

You see these people in the Olympics, and I think a lot of gymnastics—I'm not picking on anybody in the room, mind you—but in some countries, your kid is going to be a gymnast, so you turn them over at age six, and they go to the academy for gymnastics, where it's *every day*; yeah, you do some schoolwork as well. And you're watching a 16-year-old girl in the Olympics *who is near the end of her career*, because they just focus on *one thing*. In the world of golf, other countries do this as well: Send your kids to the golf academy.

No, they need the *life* academy! They may turn into a golfer—God have mercy on their soul. They may turn into a gymnast. They may turn into an astronaut. They may turn into a retail salesperson. They may turn into the guy that comes and fixes your air conditioning in July when it's broken—and if you know somebody like that, I know some people who want to meet him right away! The point is: It has to be "the discipline and instruction *of the Lord*."



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The only way to know if you are on target is to relate *all* your "discipline," *all* your "instruction," to the Word of God (Ps. 19:7-11).

I say it all the time: When a child comes into your home, you are receiving a little bundle of depravity on its way to hell (Eph. 2:1-3, 12); and God entrusted them to you, and *their life is at stake*. To build him or her into a productive adult Christian is a *tremendously* high calling—the greatest responsibility you will face on Earth.

And to fail to give your children the knowledge of God's Word, and the ability to view life in light of God's Word—when it comes to spiritual things, that is *criminal negligence* in handling the life that God has entrusted to you (cf. Ezek. 16:21; 23:37; Lk. 12:48b).

Now, understand: You *cannot guarantee the results* (Deut. 21:18). I want to emphasize that loudly: *You cannot guarantee the results*, but you *must* guarantee the process.

When your children leave your influence, they are accountable to the Lord (Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18:20). And you still be their friend, you *still* want to bring them the instruction from the Lord, you *still* want to be their cheerleader, you *still* don't want to discourage them and trample on them, you *still* don't want to ignore them—but the *results* are not your responsibility; the *process* is.

There are some people these days who say that if you really love a child, you will not *need* to discipline him or her. I don't know who thought that up, but I don't think they had kids. That's a *nice theory* to adopt, if you are trying to say what is *easiest* for me today as a parent—I can just turn a blind eye to that. But that whole theory is a *lie*!

You need to produce a *disciple*; and do you understand that the word "disciple" and the word "discipline" have the same root? That's because *they're the same root*—it's to be under the control of the Lord.

Now as we wrap it up, let's go to Proverbs for some practical wisdom in applying these things. I could do a lot more, but let me just pick out a couple of things.

Proverbs 13:24—"He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently."

The word "rod" is not talking about beating that *crushes* a child's spirit; but it *is* talking about *enforcing* the proper boundaries that help a child learn responsibility.

And notice: "He who loves him disciplines him *diligently*." The word "diligently" is from a Hebrew word that means "dawn" or "early morning."

At least two applications—One is: Start at an early age. And the other one is: When there is something that needs to be corrected, correct it as soon as possible; don't put it off (cf. Ecc. 8:11). You don't call your child into the woodshed and say, "Now, Saturday before last, you said, to Mom..." and then you spank them. No, it needs to be *prompt* (cf. Is. 16:5; Mal. 3:5; Rev. 2:16).

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And this changes as a child gets older, both in the form and the timing of the discipline. But the Old Testament—especially in the Book of Proverbs—uses two main words to describe parental correction. It doesn't matter what the Hebrew words are; I would probably just butcher the pronunciation of them, anyway. But one of them is usually translated "discipline"—as in Proverbs 19:18, and I think also in the verse we just read. Proverbs 19:18—"Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death." This is saying: Start young with the discipline of your child. If you didn't—well than, *start now* (cf. Prov. 22:6; 29:17).

Now, what is that about "do not desire his death"? Well, no parent *desires* the death of a child; but that is referring to the Old Testament law under which an older child who was *hopelessly* rebellious—beyond reform—could actually be "stone[d]...to death" (Deut. 21:20). A lot of people don't like to go memorize that verse!

Now, in our area, I promise: It is *not likely* that the elders of the city are going to stone your disobedient teenager. Dirk has been teaching Middle School since before I knew him; I have *never* heard of him stoning a kid to death. I've heard of some kids for which that might have been a *temptation*...

But understand, what we are saying is: Desire their *spiritual life*; don't ignore it. A *life* is at stake here!

Proverbs 22:15—"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him."

That states both the problem and the answer: "Foolishness"—it is "bound up in the heart of" your "child." *Where did they get that?* From their parents—who got it ultimately from Adam, when he plunged the whole race into sin and rebellion (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22a).

"The rod" is God's chosen method of correcting the tendency toward rebellion and disobedience and mockery. By the way: That word that is translated "rod"—it literally means "a stick" or "a weapon." Now, archaeologists haven't found this *yet*, but I'm sure someday they are going to figure out that this was the Hebrew word for "wooden spoon"; that seems to be a really popular one these days.

And I want to comment about the application for you and your child. Some people believe that because of the use of this word "rod," there should *always* be an implement when you apply corporal punishment to your children. I'm not sure you can be really dogmatic about that; but you *can* be sure that God has provided an extra supply of flesh in an excellent place on the body for the use of whatever it was.

I vividly remember my Dad's hands. He had *big* hands; he had *strong* hands. And I remember several things about his hands: One was how big and strong they were. The other one was what wonderful things he could do with them; he was a tinkerer, he was a fixer. When he retired, he did leatherwork artistically. He was an electronics technician, back when it wasn't a matter if sitting at a keyboard; it was a matter of soldering things and putting things together and thinking up things.

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And I *also* remember another application of that hand; it was *not* as wonderful, in the moment (Heb. 12:11)—but it never had to happen twice! He was *accurate*, and he was *quick*, when I needed it. And I think I got away with quite a few times that I needed it and I *didn't* get it, as well.

But understand the principle: The "rod of discipline" deals with "foolishness." It's the same in *our* lives, right? (Prov. 20:30) We are just big enough and responsible enough that it doesn't turn out to be physical, most of the time.

And by the way, I should also add another bit of explanation: This kind of discipline—*clearly* taught in the Bible—includes what we would probably call "spanking," some kind of corporal punishment; and I have to explain: That is *not* child abuse—*unless* you are doing it because of *your* anger; and then, *it is* child abuse. And if you hit a child *in anger*, *you* are the problem in that room! First and foremost, *you* need to stop; *you* need to repent; *you* need to deal with your anger; *you* need to confess to your child—*you* need to let them know that *you* erred; and *you* have a Savior, Jesus Christ; and you want to introduce them to your Savior. So, *child abuse*, when it comes to discipline, is done in anger. And even if you do it "right," but the motivation is *your anger*, you still have the problem (Prov. 16:2; 21:2).

But I also want you to understand: You live in a world in which, more and more, it is assumed that *every act* of corporal punishment is, *by definition*, "child abuse"—and our government is getting more and more intrusive, out of its proper realm into the realm of parenting and discipline and training. And if you are in the stage of young children, you need wisdom; and we will pray for you. But, better to seek that wisdom—and sometimes, maybe choose a different alternative, even if you would rather not, rather than have someone come and take your children away from you. That's the world in which we live.

There is another Hebrew word here. This one is used in Proverbs 3:11-12. (By the way, this is the passage that is quoted over in Hebrews Chapter 12.) "My son, do not reject the discipline of Yahweh or loathe His *reproof*" (Prov. 3:11, LSB). There's the form of discipline that means "to prove, to convince, to convict, or to correct." It primarily involves verbal instruction. See how the Old Testament and the New Testament—they teach exactly the right things? Ephesians 6:4 is elaborated upon several times in the Book of Proverbs.

The next verse: Proverbs 3:12—"For whom Yahweh loves He reproveth, even as a father reproveth the son in whom he delights."

The first Hebrew word ("discipline") has to do with what is done on the outside—correction, if you will; you might even call it punishment, dealing with the act itself. The second word ("reproof") has to do with the inside, the heart—teaching them to choose better.

And would you understand there that "the father reproveth the son in whom he *delights*." God *delights* in making *you* more like His Son (cf. Rom. 8:29). What do we need to do with our children? "Delight" in making them more like the Savior.

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One more—just let this one always apply to your speech toward your child: "A tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but perversion in it breaks the spirit" (Prov. 15:4, LSB).

That sounds like a positive command and a negative command, which is a lot like Ephesians 6:4—the Negative Command and the Positive Command, right? Let your speech be what "brings healing" like "a tree of life."

Bringing up a child "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" is *not* convenient. And it is not easy. Oh, it's *full* of joys along the way—but it's a lot of hard work. It is also the most rewarding task you may ever undertake on Earth.

And remember: A *life* is at stake!

Now, mercifully, I spent all of my time and a little bit more, so I can't elaborate on this, but I want to plant a thought in your mind. I have a feeling I might insert this into this year's "Provoke the Pastor" in the last half of August (see the message "Educational Alternatives" on 8/28/22—Provoke the Pastor #68).

I want to word things a little bit differently than I have in the past: When it comes to your children, you have *no choice* about homeschooling.

Now, we have a position paper on "Educational Alternatives"; I have not revised it for years—I do intend to revise it. And we have always taken the position that we support Christian parents using, from among the choices available to them, whatever means they like for the educational instruction of their children. You may choose homeschooling, you may choose a public school, you may choose a private school with Christian orientation. We support you in every way. But I want to make sure you understand: Wherever your children go to learn reading, math, history, science, whatever; you—you *and only you*—are their Number 1 school on Earth; and *you* have to manage whatever other tools you may use! Whatever school you send them to, when the time comes that they get their books for that you, *you* had better be the first one in that book! *You* had better know what is in there! *You* had better know how to help them understand how they might need to answer the question, and say something like: "Well, *the book* says that three billion years ago, this happened..."—so they can understand: "*That is not true*, but that's what I need to say." Listen: You *are* their school.

Another friend of mine used to be a colleague of Dirk's before he moved away; he was a Middle School teacher. And he had somebody berating him in a Christian setting and saying, "Well, all the Public School teachers and all the Public School stuff you're doing—it's *ruining* our kids!" And he said, "I wish I had that much influence on your kids. But let me tell you how they are when they walk in the door. If *I* had as much influence as *you* think I have, I would fix what you did to them at home!"

Do you understand? The home—Mom, Dad, Husbands, Wives—need to be Spirit-led, "in Christ," to do the "nurture and admonition" of the Lord.

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Let's pray:

*Oh, Father, thank You for Your marvelous "grace in which we stand." None of us would be in Christ today, apart from Your grace. None of us would have grown to maturity, apart from the influence of our parents. For all the parents among us, for all the grandparents among us—especially those with a lot of influence on their grandchildren—we thank You for them. We pray You will strengthen them; encourage them; give them endurance in the process; and above all, that we would be Your instruments to help produce disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ to launch into the next generation for Your glory. We pray for all those kids that were here this week for Vacation Bible School. Some of them heard the Gospel for the first time; we pray that it will take root in their hearts, and Your Spirit would teach them. Some may have heard things for the fiftieth time, and at last grasped what it means to be "in Christ." Some still need to come to understanding. Bless each one. Encourage them. May their homes be different because of the influence on them this past week. Thank You for letting us be a part of Your plan in this process. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*