

# **“Ye Fathers”**

## ***The God-given Responsibility of the Father***

### **Ephesians 6:4**

This passage fits within a larger context we might call *“Our Role in Life.”* In Ephesians 5–6, God lays out the roles within the home — husbands and wives, children, and here in chapter 6, fathers.

Some here have already raised their children and are now watching grandchildren grow. Even so, this passage still matters — if not for your own home, then to help guide the next generation.

Notice that these instructions are given specifically to fathers. That is because God has placed upon the father the responsibility for the spiritual direction of the home. As the head of the house, he is accountable to the Lord for what takes place there — especially in the lives of his children. That may run contrary to our culture, but it is clearly the teaching of Scripture and the pattern for strong families.

A father of five came home with a toy, summoned his children and asked which one of them should be given the present. “Who is the most obedient, never talks back to mother and does everything he or she is told?” he inquired. There was silence, and then a chorus of voices: “You play with it, Daddy!”

So, while a mother may carry much of the daily work of raising children, the responsibility ultimately rests with the father to ensure it is done rightly.

In this verse, God gives that responsibility in two directions — what a father must avoid, and what he must actively

pursue.

## I. A PROHIBITION TO HEED

“Provoke not your children to wrath

This portion of the verse is not to be viewed separately from the rest of it. If fathers aren't to "provoke" their children "to wrath," then it must be the way not to do this is to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." In other words, to provoke is the opposite of bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

### 1. The meaning of the command

- a) “Provoke not” (μη παροργίζετε) — to irritate, exasperate, embitter.

We see this in Saul’s treatment of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:30-34.

#### 1 Samuel 20:30–34

<sup>30</sup> Then Saul’s anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious *woman*, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother’s nakedness? <sup>31</sup> For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die. <sup>32</sup> And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done? <sup>33</sup> And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. <sup>34</sup> So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David,

because his father had done him shame.

- b) This is not just anger — it is seen as a settled discouragement.
- c) “Your children” — they are not infants, but school-age children old enough to make a decision for Christ.
- d) “To wrath” — part of the same Greek word from which “provoke not” is translated.

The whole word is speaking of this thought of wrath. It is not necessarily speaking of what we know about being angry, but is dealing with an attitude of mind.

## 2. The way it happens

- a) Inconsistent discipline

There are many fathers who are good fathers, but they don’t discipline and teach their children the way they should, and they’re “exasperating” their children’s ability to learn about the Lord.

- b) Unreasonable expectations

By application, do not aggravate or incite a child to do wrong then punish for an act that you deliberately incited.

- c) Harshness without instruction

- d) Neglect of spiritual leadership (Prov. 4:1-4)

Proverbs 4:1–4

<sup>1</sup> Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. <sup>2</sup> For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. <sup>3</sup> For I was my father’s son, tender and only *beloved*

in the sight of my mother. <sup>4</sup> He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.

### 3. The result if ignored

#### a) Discouraged spirit

Colossians 3:21

<sup>21</sup> Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged.

The word "discouraged" is one that means to be dispirited, disheartened, dismayed.

When a little boy, the son of a Christian merchant in New York, was dying, he said, "Oh, father, don't weep for me! Don't cry, father. When I die, I am going to heaven; and when I get there, I will go right up to Jesus and tell Him that it was through you I came there."

#### b) Hardened heart

#### c) Resistance to truth

## II. A PROCESS TO FOLLOW

"But bring them up..."

As we said in the previous point on this subject, this is a verse teaching one truth by showing what it shouldn't be, as well as what it is. "Provoking" our children to wrath is NOT bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as well as it is raising them wrong.

### A. The personal responsibility

"But bring *them* up" — your children, not someone

else's. Too many fathers (and pastors in particular, it seems) have spent more time helping with someone else's children to the detriment of their own.

## **B. The ongoing nature**

This is not to be occasional — it is continual cultivation.

Deuteronomy 6:7

<sup>7</sup> And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

## **C. The intentional investment**

1. This requires time, attention, and initiative.
2. The whole time our children are under our care there should be an active part we take as parents (especially fathers) in their upbringing in the Bible. If we don't raise them to maturity in Biblical things, then we're provoking them to wrath.

## **III. A PATTERN TO IMPLEMENT**

“In the nurture and admonition of the Lord”

### **A. The discipline of life — “nurture”**

1. This word means training, correction, and structure.
2. This is forming habits, character, and obedience. This is not to be punishment-driven — it is to be formation-driven.

Proverbs 22:6

<sup>6</sup> Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

## B. The direction of truth — “admonition”

1. Literally, “putting into mind” — this is instruction by word. In other words, this is teaching Scripture intentionally.
2. The word “nurture” had more to do with the physical — this has to do with the spiritual.
3. Children must not only be corrected — they must be taught.

### 2 Timothy 3:15

<sup>15</sup> And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

## C. The focus of it all — “of the Lord”

This is the key that ties everything together.

1. This is not moralism, not behavior control, but Christ-centered upbringing.

### Psalm 78:4–7

<sup>4</sup> We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

<sup>5</sup> For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:

<sup>6</sup> That the generation to come might know *them*, even the children *which* should be born; *who* should arise and declare *them* to their children:

<sup>7</sup> That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:

2. We are not just raising children — we are raising them for the Lord.

Conclusion:

What kind of spiritual mark are you leaving on your children?

Your sons are learning manhood from you. I hope they see in you a deep, uncompromising love for God. I hope they see both toughness and tenderness. If they do, then you have served them well; they will be forever grateful.

Your daughters will benefit because they'll grow up with a clear vision of the kind of men who make godly husbands.

There are little eyes upon you,  
And they're watching night and day  
There are little ears that listen  
To every word you say.

There are little hands all eager  
To do the things you do;  
And a little boy who's dreaming  
Of the day he'll be like you.

You're the little fellow's idol,  
You're the wisest of the wise;

In his little mind, about you  
No suspicions ever rise.

He believes in you devoutly,  
Holds that all you say and do  
He will say and do in your way  
When he's grown up just like you.

There's a wide-eyed little fellow  
Who believes you're always right;  
And his ears are always open  
As he watches day and night.

You are setting an example  
Every day in all you do,  
For the little boy who's waiting  
To grow up to be like you.

-- Edgar A. Guest