

## A Word For Fathers

*Ephesians 6:4*

The children had been begging for a hamster, and after the usual fervent vows that they alone would care for it, they got one. They named it Danny. As usually happens, two months later when Mom found herself responsible for cleaning and feeding the creature, she located a prospective new home for it. The children took the news of Danny's imminent departure quite well, though one of them remarked, "He's been around here a long time—we'll miss him."

"Yes," Mom replied, "But he's too much work for one person, and since I'm that one person, I say he goes." Another child offered, "Well, maybe if he wouldn't eat so much and wouldn't be so messy, we could keep him."

But Mom was firm. "It's time to take Danny to his new home now," she insisted. "Go and get his cage." With one voice and in tearful outrage the children shouted, "Danny? We thought you said Daddy!"

Paul Harvey once shared a few thoughts on what makes a father:

"A father is a thing that is forced to endure childbirth without an anesthetic. A father never feels worthy of the worship in a child's eyes. He is never quite the hero his daughter thinks, never quite the man his son believes him to be; and this worries him—sometimes. A father is a thing that gets very angry when the first school grades aren't as good as he think they should be. He scolds his son, tho' he knows it's the teacher's fault. Fathers are what give daughters away to other men who aren't nearly good enough, so they can have grandchildren who are smarter than anybody's." (Reprinted in the newsletter of First Baptist Church, Bossier City, Louisiana, June 10, 1980.)

But what makes a real Dad? Here's one that would qualify, in my opinion. Several years ago, one father sent his daughter off to college with a telephone answering machine. He had pre-recorded the outgoing message:

*"Hello. You have reached the residence of Elizabeth Eaton at California Polytechnic State in San Luis Obispo. This is Liz's father speaking. I am a six-foot-four-inch, 276-pound, violent-tempered gorilla. Please keep this in mind when conducting business with my daughter. If your business is friendly and honorable, leave your name and number and she will return your call."*

(Evelyn Rhoades in the May 1990 *Reader's Digest*).

In the closing verses of Ephesians 5, Paul began to deal with the Christian relationships in the home, and the difference Christ should make in a household ruled completely by Him. Last week, we explored the first three verses of chapter six, and we found there that children are to either obey their parents, or honor their parents, depending upon where they are in their own

development. Today we move on to verse four to find God’s instructions for fathers as they relate to their children. Remember that these words make no sense whatsoever without the presence of Christ in the home. Paul was writing to Christian people, so the only place you can fully apply what he taught is in the Christian home.

*“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* The Scriptures do not imply that the mother is left out of this responsibility, but Paul probably put the emphasis here on the father because of the father’s role as head of the family. Take a brief look at the words used in various translations. The KJV reads, “And, ye fathers, **provoke** not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the **nurture** and **admonition** of the Lord.” The NLT reads, “Fathers, do not **provoke** your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the **discipline** and **instruction** that comes from the Lord.”

The Scriptures teach us here that parents have a right to expect their children to obey them and to honor them. But parents also have a responsibility to their children to nurture them, to discipline them, to admonish them. You say, “Well, I do that already.” But do you do it according to what the Scripture teaches?

To nurture and discipline your children requires more than your money, your time and your planning. It will take you, totally involved and totally available to your family and to God. Discipline does not mean that you grab a switch or a belt and start swinging away every time your child does something that makes you mad, or even just yell at them all the time—that’s child discipline according to the flesh. There are many other things involved in nurturing children God’s way. One of the best is to make absolutely sure that they know that you care about them, that you love them—no matter what!

Lily Eskelsen Garcia once wrote that she had always been raised to believe that you should never, never give up a kid. But at one period in her child’s life she was about at her wit’s end. Nothing they did or said would convince that child that he should study and try to improve his grades. She was getting very tired of fighting **for** him, when he wouldn’t fight for himself.

Finally, they were in the school counselor’s office. The boy just was not listening to anything they had to say to him, and let it be known that he simply did not care whether he made good grades or not. After he once again said “I really don’t care,” the counselor replied, “But **I** care. Your mother and father care. We’re trying to help you.”

Lily wrote that something just felt as if someone pulled the plug and everything just drained out of her. So she said, more to herself than to them, “I don’t know how much longer I can make

myself care. I don't know how much longer I can reach out without feeling someone reaching back. At least *trying*. Sometimes I think we'd all be happier if I just gave up trying to help."

She wrote that the counselor understood how she felt, but he wasn't going to let her get away with it. He turned to the boy and said, "You can't let your mother give up on you, kiddo. Tell her you don't want her to give up on you. Tell her."

But, embarrassed, he hesitated. With a little more coaxing, and with his chin on his chest, he whispered, "Don't give up on me, Mom."

Lily finished her article: "Raising kids is such hard work. It's lonely work. You tear your hair out and grow thicker skin and sprout grey hair. But our kids will never make it without us. We're not allowed to give up. So take a deep breath. Grit your teeth. And never give up. Never give up. Never give up." (Lily Eskelsen Garcia is past president of the Utah Education Association. Source Unknown)

**1** If we really do care, and if we are to never give up on our children, then **first of all, we are to nurture our children with love.** It is possible for a father to deal with his child in the wrong way repeatedly, so that the child becomes an angry rebel. That word "provoke" or "exasperate" means to stir up anger that will result in lasting bitterness and resentment. The clearest indication of love for a child is loving and faithful discipline. One psychiatrist told a group of people in a church about a seven-year-old girl whom he had treated as an outpatient. The girl made a statement that struck the psychiatrist as being astonishingly perceptive. Her words were "My mommy doesn't love me. She never spans me."

That matches what the Scripture says in Proverbs 13:24—"*If you refuse to discipline your son, it proves you don't love him; for if you love him, you will be prompt to punish him*" (TLB). Don't misunderstand—the Bible doesn't say that you should spank or beat a child if you love him. What the Bible does emphasize is loving and consistent discipline in all of its forms. The Scripture method of discipline *always* and *always* includes love.

**2** **But then, second, we are to discipline our children with encouragement.** We've all seen the little piece written by Dorothy Nolte years ago entitled, "Children Learn What They Live." If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn...with hostility, he learns to fight...with ridicule, he learns to be shy...pity, he learns to feel sorry for himself. If a child lives with encouragement he learns to be confident...with praise, he learns to be appreciative...with recognition, he learns that it is good to have a goal...with sharing, he learns about generosity, and so on.

If you are mature as a Christian adult, and if you nurture and discipline your children with encouragement, rather than brow-beating them and calling them abusive names, then your children are going to have developed in them the more positive aspects of Christian character.

Much of this depends on the things we say when we talk to them. Fathers especially need to be positive and encouraging in the words they use with their children. They should say things such as “I knew you could do it,” or “Great job!” or “You gave it your best, and I’m proud of you,” or “I couldn’t have done it better myself.” Even when our children grow up and leave home, they are still looking for and needing positive words of encouragement from their fathers.

Dad, if you didn’t receive much of this when you were growing up, it may be a little difficult for you to do this with your kids. But if the cycle is to be broken, it is up to you to break it. Don’t you want your grandchildren to be encouraged and nurtured in the Lord? Then you’ve got to set the example—now—with your children, however old they are. I frequently tell Jennifer that I couldn’t have picked a better son-in-law than Patrick if I had been in charge of it myself, and that she’s doing a great job as a mom. Jonathan’s choice of Kristy as a mate was excellent as well, and nearly every time I see Jonathan I tell him how proud I am of him. And every time I talk to either of my kids they hear me tell them “I love you.” I do love them very much and I am very proud of them, but I also recognize that as their father I have so much power and influence with them, and that I can use that power to bless them or to frustrate them. Besides, blessing them is so much more fun!

But it is extremely “exasperating” to a child to be belittled and put down when he’s done something quite natural for a child to do. There are several ways we might exasperate or frustrate our children. We can smother them and prevent them from stretching out to try new things. We can show favoritism between our children, or by saying things such as “Your big brother never does anything stupid like that!” We can frustrate them by setting unrealistic expectations for them, or by doing the opposite—telling them that they could never achieve thus and so. We can exasperate our children by making them feel as if they are intruding on our time, or by handing out love and kisses when they are behaving well, and withholding affection when they’ve been bad.

**3** **Third, it is also very plain that we are to nurture and discipline our children with example.** Josh Billings once said, “Train up a child in the way he should go and walk there yourself once in a while.” You see, your children are not very likely to obey you if they see a lack of discipline in your own life. For instance, my father’s mother liked to tell the story of how she quit smoking. She had always taught her children to discipline themselves, to not allow themselves to become lazy about anything, or any area of life. But then one day she realized that she could not teach them self-discipline as long as she could not discipline herself in the matter of cigarette smoking. So she quit.

That makes sense, but there are many parents who have not caught on yet to the fact that their children are watching what they do, and are hearing what they say. Children are more apt to follow a parent's example than a parent's advice, and too often, all the child gets is advice with no example. We are setting a bad example for our children when we allow them to sit for three hours at a movie, but don't dare make them sit through two hours of Sunday School and Worship. We are setting a bad example for our children when we give them a quarter to drop in the offering plate, but give them whatever they need to go to the movies. We are setting a bad example for them when we make sure that they do their homework, but we couldn't care less whether they read their Bibles.

Children need and desire loving nurture and discipline from their parents. Children are made very insecure by parents who give half-directions or no directions at all. Children soon lose respect for their parents when they are allowed to do anything, go anywhere, have anything.

And parents, God will hold us accountable for what happens in our children's lives. I don't mean the child who has been taught the difference between what is right and wrong and rebels anyway. I mean the child whose parents have let him have free rein, with no discipline, no example, no encouragement, no love. Becoming accountable means that we say "NO!" to our children about certain things. You must decide what standards you are going to enforce in your home. If you remain true to those standards, you must expect that the difference between your way of life and the world's will become more pronounced as time goes on.

Perhaps today you would like to publicly recommit your life as a child or as a parent as you strive to live by what the Word of God says. I invite you to come forward to make sure that your first steps in this new stage of your life are made before God and others in His family.