

Ephesians 6:4 — Teach Your Children

January 8, 2023

Good morning CrossWinds. Let's begin with some good news. You will remember that on Christmas Eve, we took a special offering for ATLAS ministries. They help the poorest of the poor in our community. The good news is we took in \$7,300 for them that evening. ATLAS in Spencer and Spirit Lake will receive those funds this week.

This Sunday is a bit odd. Pastor Jordan and I planned to start a new series this week on Spiritual Health. It is a new year. Everybody is interested in physical fitness. We want to lose a few pounds. We want to get in shape. We want to burn off the Christmas cookies. Rather than looking at physical fitness for the new year, we planned to spend six weeks looking at spiritual fitness. What does it look like to be a healthy Christian?

The way the calendar came together, it didn't seem right to start that series today. This is the last week the Spencer Campus is in their old building. It seemed wise to start the new series next week, the first Sunday the Spencer Campus is in their new building.

I found myself with having a Sunday out of series with no regular topic. What should I teach? As I thought and prayed, I felt I should teach something we haven't talked about for a while and something we need to hear.

The topic God kept bringing to mind was parenting.

I always feel uncomfortable talking about parenting because I feel so inadequate as a parent. When I look back on parenting my kids, there are many things I wish I had done better. Anything I say today as we talk about parenting is

not coming from a pastor who had his act together as a father. Everything I say about parenting comes from the perspective of a fellow struggler turning to God's Word where I am looking for help and guidance, just like everyone else.

I will build this message primarily around one small verse in the book of Ephesians. This is the apostle Paul's instructions on parenting. If you haven't memorized it, I suggest you do.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)

This simple verse has two parts to it. There is a negative part. Fathers do not provoke your children to anger. There is a positive part. Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Paul simplifies parenting down to what we must avoid, which is provoking our children to anger, and what we must do, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. That is parenting in a nutshell. Of course, parenting is far more complex than those two pieces, but if we had to simplify parenting into two pieces, those are the two Paul gives us.

Before we look at this verse, let's begin with some background. We need to acknowledge that parenting today is hard.

Parenting is hard.

Parenting is hard because children are expensive. You need a bigger house, a bigger car, extra clothes, and an expensive medical plan. When your children are teenagers, your food bill is bigger than your mortgage payment. If we want our children to attend college, saving for college seems almost impossible with today's cost of living.

If you are a parent, raising children means you need to set aside your career, your goals, and your vacations because raising kids takes most of your money and time.

Raising children is also a challenge because of all the activities kids are involved in today. There is dance, softball, baseball, wrestling, football, jazz band, pep band, and ice hockey. That is just scratching the surface. Parents are a constant taxi service that brings kids to these things. As I said, modern parenting is hard.

While parenting is hard, even more challenging than parenting children in the modern world is being a child in the modern world. There are massive external and internal pressures faced by today's children.

External challenges make parenting hard.

Life used to be simple. Children grew up on the farm, they were close to home. The family was a tight-knit unit. You ate with your family. You went to a small school down the road. There was little influence from the outside world on the family. Even in urban areas parents, schools, and churches curbed the influence of society on children.

There was incremental learning and exposure to information only when children had grown to have the mental and psychological capacity to handle the more challenging issues of life. In the past, there was controlled exposure to information to children. For example, as a child, I loved building plastic models. Plastic models used to have an age rating on the side of the box. If the models were rated for older than my age, I knew I wasn't getting that model on Christmas

morning. It wasn't age-appropriate. Parents and society limited exposure to challenging and difficult issues for children.

Today sharing only age-appropriate information with children is gone. Neil Postman, a writer, and professor at New York University wrote about the disappearance of childhood in the modern world. Let's start with a fun example he gives to prove his point before we move on to something more serious.

Youth sports eliminated childhood. Instead of children playing hide-n-seek, tag, kick the can or dodgeball with no adult supervision on the playground, now children play adult games. There are uniforms, umpires, referees, and spectators. Not in Iowa, but in Michigan where we came from, children started with full-tackle football in elementary school. As parents, we feel the pressure to start our kids in sports early so they will have the skills needed to win a high school championship. In youth sports, adults are all over the place. Youth sports often are not for the children to learn and have fun but for parents to gloat over their child's success. A 4-year-old winning a wrestling match is often more about a parent's ego than family time together for the joy and development of the child. I am not anti-youth sports. I am simply pointing out that youth sports have become so serious that children are running around facing adult-level pressure to perform.

Television and the Internet eliminated childhood. In the past parents and teachers decided what information children were exposed to and at what age they learned difficult lessons. Today, that protection is gone. Television and the Internet give children uncontrolled exposure to adult information with no plan,

sequence, or restraint. Today boys age 8 and 9 are looking at sick porn on the Internet and becoming addicted to it. That hard-core porn is often young boys' first sexual experiences. It frames their understanding of the opposite sex in a twisted way. Research tells us that young men who frequently watch pornography end up changing the development of their brains. The children who find themselves addicted to adult entertainment are too young to understand the danger. Kids with a smartphone can access anything at any time, all in the privacy of their bedroom. The Internet requires no instruction. It encourages no self-restraint. It doesn't put demands on the mind or behavior. It doesn't develop the intellect. It numbs the mind. The Internet exposes our children to temptations and challenges their minds and emotions are not mature enough to handle. Young children find themselves facing massive adult-level temptations. The Internet and social media fill our children with wrong ideas, wrong attitudes, and a twisted way of thinking about the world.

To give you an idea of how television and the Internet impact children, let me use an older statistic I ran across this week. It is a little dated, but it still makes the point. In 1950, adults committed a serious crimes at a rate 215 times higher than children under age 14. By serious crime, I mean rape, murder, and robbery. In 1950, there were only 170 children in the entire country that committed serious crimes. Between 1950 and 1980, television and other forms of media became a dominant part of American culture, enabling the world to exert greater influence on our children. By 1980, the ratio of adult to juvenile crimes went from 275 to 1 to 5 to 1. For every five major adult crimes, there was now

one major childhood crime. That was an 11,000% increase in major crimes by children under 14 in only 30 years! In 2023 with the Internet, I suspect that ratio is worse.

What made this significant change in childhood behavior? The source I ran across credited television and modern media with exposing children to so much evil at such a young age. The modern media placed ideas in children's minds that they were not equipped to handle. They were only equipped to imitate what they saw, not to evaluate and reject the evil they saw. I told you that parenting children today is hard.

Internal challenges make parenting hard.

While we want to limit our children's exposure to the pressures of a sinful society, that doesn't mean children are born innocent when it comes to evil. The seed of every sin known to man dwells in the heart of every child. It is not the world that messes our children up. Our kids come messed up from the womb. It is not the world that forces our kids to drift morally and spiritually. They do that on their own. The world only helps them go where the sin in their heart wants them to go.

Children are not born seeking God and righteousness. They may be cute and cuddly, but all children come into the world seeking their sinful desires. If you doubt that, what is the first word a child learns to say? It is, "No!" The first thing children tell us is that they do not want to listen to their parents that love them. They want to rebel. If you still doubt the innate sinfulness of every child remember that the heart of your children is no different from your heart. That

should convince you every child has a sinful heart from birth. All that is required for a child to live a tragic life is to let that child run, without correction, after the evil desires in their heart.

Today we hear people talking about murders, such as the guy who killed the four college students in Idaho, and we wonder what his parents did to him that made him turn out to have such an evil heart as an adult. Most of the time the issue isn't what parents did to children that made them turn out so evil. The evil was already in their heart. Most of the time, the issue is what parents didn't do to their children to restrain or stop the evil desires of their hearts.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. Proverbs 22:15 (ESV)

...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Romans 3:10–12 (ESV)

Children can be foolish. All children are sinful. A parent's job is to correct them. That may involve spanking. That is not the only form of discipline, and it is not always the right form to curb a child's sinful desires, but the Bible does not rule that out. A parent spanking in anger is always wrong, but a parenting spanking in correction intended to help children understand the importance of turning away from foolishness and sin may be appropriate. Children need to learn at home with the safety and love of their parents that there are consequences to sin and rebellion. If they don't learn that at home, it will be even harder to learn when they are adults. It will be too late to learn when it comes to eternity, and they face the eternal consequences of the lake of fire for their sin and rebellion.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Psalm 51:5 (ESV)

David says he had a sinful heart from conception. Children are not perfect and innocent. They are born sinners. They have to learn at home when they are young that there are consequences of sin, or they will turn into the rebels and rascals of society when they are older.

While parents must discipline their children and help them understand that there are consequences to sin, ultimately, the only genuine change in a child's behavior doesn't come from parental discipline, but it comes from the gospel. Children need to know when they are young that they are sinners. It is sin in them that produces the evil and rebellious desires of their heart. They need to run to Jesus and be born again. They need to know that the only hope for change in the sinful battles of their heart is Jesus. Only when God gives them a new heart will they begin to find victory over the sinful desires at work within them.

Children are a gift from God.

While parenting children is a very hard thing to do, we need to see our children as gifts from God. That is what they are.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." Genesis 4:1 (ESV)

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." Genesis 4:25 (ESV)

Eve saw her children as a gift from God. God is the one who gives the gift of children.

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.
Psalm 127:3 (ESV)

When you are a parent that wants to pull your hair out because raising children is hard, remember your children are a gift. There are many people out there who wish they could have children but don't. Children, even hard-to-raise children, are always a good gift from God.

Now that we know the difficulty of modern parenting but the goodness of children let's look at what Paul says about parenting in Ephesians 6:4.

Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger... Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)

While this is directed to fathers, understand that this also includes mothers. Sometimes the Greek word translated as fathers in this verse is translated as parents. So while this is directed to fathers, in our context, it refers to both fathers and mothers.

The reason Paul directed his words to fathers is that in Roman society, Fathers held incredible power. It was called *Patria Potestas*. That means the father's power. A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell his children as slaves, he could make them work in the field wearing chains, he could punish his children any way he wanted, including executing them. As long as the father lived — no age limit — there was no limit to the extent of a father's power and control over his children.

When a child was born, that child was placed at the feet of the father. If he picked up the child, it lived. If he turned and walked away, the child was set out in the street to be picked up by people with the worst morals who would raise the

child to be a prostitute or a slave. In the country, unwanted children were abandoned in the woods to be eaten by animals. I know this kind of power is shocking to us. It was shocking to me when I first learned about it.

To show you this was truly the power of fathers in the Roman world, let me quote a letter from a Roman soldier named Hilarion to his wife Alis. It was written in the year 1 B.C. Let me read a portion to you.

Hilarion to Alis his wife. Know that we are still 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 you have a boy child, let it live. If it is a girl, throw it out.

Seneca also speaks of the terrible way children were treated in the roman world.

We slaughter a fierce ox. We strangle a mad dog. We plunge the knife into the sickliest of cattle. Children who are born weak and deformed, we drown.

Paul wrote to people in a city where it was normal for children to be treated harshly by their parents. It was normal for fathers to be abusive and to terrify their children to keep them in line. Paul says, as Christian fathers, we are not that way with our kids. We do not abuse them. We do not terrify them. We are loving and caring with them.

It is easy to think of our world as morally superior to ancient Rome. Lest you think it was only the ancient Romans that were terrible to children, know we aborted 930,160 children in 2020. We abuse and murder far more children than they did. We just murder our children in the womb. That way nobody can hear their screams.

How do we provoke our children to anger today?

Provoking our children to anger through chains and the threat of selling them into slavery is not something we struggle with today. How do we provoke our children to anger today? Here are a few ideas. Maybe you have other ones that I missed.

1. **Spoil them.** Give children everything they want. If you can't afford it, charge it. Spoiling children doesn't teach them to restrain themselves. Spoiling children ruins a child's character. It doesn't develop their character. It doesn't teach delayed gratification.
2. **Nag them instead of disciplining them.** Nagging children is when we keep bringing up a child's failures and mistakes again and again. Nagging frustrates kids. It frustrates adults. Rather than nagging children about the sins of the past of which we continually remind them, it is best to discipline children and then move on. After discipline, forgive them. Don't keep hanging their failures over their head.
3. **Foster dependence on us, instead of independence from us.** This is refusing to give children real responsibility or letting them face real consequences. We want to develop children that can live independently from us so they are not constantly dependent on us. We need to let our children see the real costs of things. We need to help them learn to live on a budget. When they don't pay their bills, we need to let them face the consequences a few times so they learn. They shouldn't learn to live with mom and dad always coming to their rescue.

4. **Criticize our spouse in front of them, so they learn disrespect.** Berating your spouse or your ex-spouse in front of your children angers kids. Don't do it. If you speak in a berating and disrespectful way about your husband either in front of him or behind his back, and your daughter is watching, she will learn to speak to her father in a berating and disrespectful way. Even worse is that when she gets married, she will speak disrespectfully about her husband behind his back. That will make her marriage a disaster, and she learned it by watching you.
5. **Do everything for your children. Don't give them chores.** Don't expect children to contribute to the family and the chores around the home. That will frustrate children because it will be a rude awakening when they get out of the house. Mom and dad doing all the work around the house while the children sit in their room playing video games makes children who are lazy and selfish. Children need to learn responsibility. Maybe it is feeding the chickens. Maybe it is taking out the trash. Insulating our children from chores and responsibilities at home is a disservice to them.
6. **When your child throws a temper tantrum, give in.** That is not good. Giving in to children who throw temper tantrums teaches kids that if they yell loud enough and scream long enough, they can get their parents to do whatever they want. That will frustrate them in the real world. Life doesn't work that way. Children need to learn that they are not in charge at home. Mom and dad are in charge.

7. **Criticize people when at home.** If we walk around the house constantly criticizing people, our children will learn that whenever their brains go idle, they should start criticizing people and bad-mouthing people. Maybe your habit is to berate politicians, coaches, and neighbors. Don't let that be your constant talk at home. This doesn't mean you can't have constructive discussions with your children about why you disagree with politicians or other people and their choices. Those are important conversations. They are constructive conversations. They are not constantly critical, grumbling conversations. That is not the kind of lifestyle we want our children to imitate.
8. **Praise your child for their looks, not their character.** This is especially important for mothers as they raise their daughters. Don't just focus on her looks. Focus on praising her for what is far more important. Her character.
9. **Be an overprotective parent.** Some Christian parents, in attempting to love their children, become overprotective of their children. Their children are given no opportunity to make their own choices. They are given no freedoms. Overprotective parents are often well-intentioned parents, but by allowing their children no freedom, they are setting up a powder keg that will explode when they go to college. They go from no freedom to total freedom and fly off the rails. We can frustrate our children if we become hyper-controlling, overprotective parents.
10. **Showing Favoritism.** Isaac favored Esau over Jacob. Rebekah favored Jacob over Esau. Don't compare your kids to one another. They are unique. Love them the same. If one child feels you love another child in the home

more than you love them, you are in trouble. If children detect favoritism in the family, they will become angry and bitter.

11. **Have unrealistic achievement goals.** Some parents crush their children with pressure to excel in school. They expect straight-A's in school, all-star sports, the best in music, and every other activity. Mothers with unrealistic achievement goals for their children are sometimes called tiger moms. This can lead to extremely frustrated kids. In China and Japan, children commit suicide because they can not keep up with the pressure their parents put on them to be perfect in everything. Anything less than perfection leaves children feeling they are a failure and a disappointment to their parents. Sometimes the truth is that parents want their kids to succeed for their reputation more than they care about their children. We were a wrestling family. We loved taking our kids to wrestling matches. Of course, we wanted our boys to succeed. Many times we would see parents yelling at their children, wagging a finger in the face of their child because they lost a match. That is too much pressure for kids to handle. You can't win everything.

12. **Don't sacrifice for your children.** If you make your children feel like they are an intrusion into your life and an inconvenience to your schedule that is keeping you from doing what you want to do and going where you want to go, you will frustrate your children. I have a friend whose daughter worked as a nanny for a wealthy family. The daughter lived in the home and took care of the children. The nanny did everything the mom should have done. The mom had a nanny so she could go to parties, the office, and out to lunch, without

being held down by her children. This is a recipe for disaster. Her children are growing up knowing their mother has more important things to do than spend time with them. She can pay a nanny to take care of them so she can go out and do what she wants to do. The kids will end up bitter and angry toward her because they will find out they are an inconvenience in her life.

13. Neglect time with your children. The biblical illustration of this is David and Absalom. David was so busy at the office that he spent no time with his son Absalom. He spent no time shaping his heart and making memories with him. Absalom ultimately hated his father and tried to pull off a coup to dethrone his father and take his place. He hated his father so much that he tried to kill him. One of the most important things you can do with your children is take time to make memories with them. You will never regret it.

14. Speak hurtful words to your child. I grew up with people telling me that sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you. That is not true. Words hurt. Hurtful words are remembered, even by adults. If you tell your children they are stupid, those words will be ringing in their ears as long as they live. Whenever they struggle with something as an adult, in the back of their head, they will hear their father's words. You are stupid. When Cindy and I were first married, she would cook green beans and serve them for dinner. She would always apologize for the green beans being overcooked. I would tell her the green beans tasted fine. I didn't know you could overcook green beans. When the overcooked green beans scenario kept coming up in our marriage, we talked about it in greater depth. I learned

that in her house, she helped her mother make dinner. Her job was to cook the vegetables. Whenever she cooked green beans, her father always complained that they were overcooked. To this day, she can still hear his words in her head whenever she cooks green beans.

So we must not provoke our children to anger. Let's look at the second half of this verse that gives us positive instruction for children.

Bring up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

...but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)

We must bring our children up intentionally.

The first thing we should notice is that we need to bring our children up. Children raised to know and love Jesus don't happen automatically because they live in your home. Parents have to bring up children. There is intentionality with this. There is a plan involved. There is a strategy. Parents must intentionally set aside time to read and explain the Bible to their children. Let me share the strategy we used when my kids were young. My favorite time was bedtime when both of our boys were young. They slept in the same room in bunk beds. Cindy and I would sit in the room. We had a children's Bible with many pictures and the biblical text in an easy-to-understand translation on each page. Every night we read the boys a Bible story. With each story, my goal was to see if there was one lesson about God or everyday life I could pull out of the story to focus on with my kids. I tried to state that lesson in a memorable way so the kids wouldn't forget. Then, as our family went about our everyday life, whenever I saw an opportunity,

I reminded them of it to reinforce it. This didn't work perfectly, but sometimes it came together. Let me give you an example.

I remember when we were reading through the story of Achan in the book of Joshua. Israel was commanded to completely destroy the city of Jericho and keep none of the spoils of war for themselves. Achan saw a robe and gold bars in Jericho. He took them and buried them in his tent. He figured nobody would notice they were gone. God noticed. When Israel went to conquer the next city in the Promised Land, the much smaller city of Ai, they were completely defeated. Thirty-six people died. What happened? Eventually, it was revealed that Achan's hidden sin was the source of their defeat and death. The life lesson for the kids was, "Achan stole the bacon, but other people paid. When we sin, other people suffer." Then, as we went through life, and saw someone's sin leading to other people's suffering, we would say, "Achan stole the bacon, and other people paid. When we sin, other people suffer." Regular Bible reading summarized in one sticky phrase that we reinforced in everyday life was the foundation of our plan to raise our kids to know and love Jesus.

Another important part of our plan was ensuring our kids were involved in a mid-week children's program so they could be around other kids their age who were also growing in Jesus. When our children were small, the church we were a part of didn't have a children's ministry. They didn't have a program like the AWANA we are so fortunate to have at CrossWinds. Cindy and I started a children's program at the church we called Club 345. It was for third, fourth, and fifth graders.

As parents, it is our responsibility to bring up our children in the instruction of the Lord. To do that, we need to have a plan.

Christian parents are to address heart problems, not just behavior problems.

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. Mark 7:21–22 (ESV)

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45 (ESV)

With children, it is easy to address behavior but ignore the heart. We think that if we can just change a child's behavior, we have done a good job. That is not true. The Bible is clear that all behavior flows out of the heart. Changing a child's behavior on the outside without addressing the state of a child's heart, which is where the behavior comes from, is only delaying disaster.

The story is told about a little girl on an airplane who kept bouncing on the seat. The stewardess told her she needed to sit down and buckle up. She was such a distraction to others. The girl sat down and buckled up, but then she said to the stewardess, "I may be seated on the outside, but I am still jumping on the seat on the inside!" Her behavior changed, but her heart wasn't changed.

Parents must not just talk to their children about behavior, but about the sinfulness of their hearts which is the source of every action. Parents need to be honest with children about the sin in their hearts. Children need to know that the evil desires of the heart are a struggle everyone experiences. Mom and dad have a sinful heart. Everyone has a sinful heart.

God loves them so much that he sent his son to live the perfect life we could not live. Jesus came to die in our place for our sins and then to rise to new life. Tell your children it is only when we confess our sins to Jesus, ask Jesus to pay for our sins, then ask Jesus to be in charge of our life that we are made into new people. God gives us a new heart when we trust him. That heart wants to please Jesus more than it wants to sin. That doesn't mean we will be perfect people but we will experience a battle inside of us between our old sinful nature and our new godly nature. Having a new heart is the only way to beat the power of sin in our life. That new heart comes from God when we trust in Jesus.

The Bible doesn't say the goal of parenting is to get our kids under control. It doesn't say the goal of parenting is to make sure our kids sit perfectly still in church. The goal of parenting is not for children to have straight-A's in school or be varsity athletes in every sport. The goal of parenting is not that your kids are popular or successful in this world. The goal of parenting is your child's salvation and sanctification. The goal of parenting is not ultimately to control a child's behavior on the outside, but that our children would see themselves as sinners in need of the grace of Jesus. The goal of parenting is that they would trust Jesus and have their hearts changed on the inside.

There are plenty of well-behaved Muslim, Mormon, and atheist kids. Their sinful desires may be temporarily restrained but they are still raging in their heart. They are only restrained out of fear. They have no relationship with God and will spend an eternity without him.

Ephesians 6:4 also tells us we are to bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. There are some important differences between these words.

Discipline is the Greek word *paideia*. This word refers to external motivation for behavior change. It is both punishments for bad behavior and rewards for good behavior. When parents raise children to know the Lord and embrace God's behavior in their life, external punishments for sinful choices and rewards for good choices are part of the child-rearing process. Children need to learn that in life, there are rewards for good behavior and painful consequences for bad behavior.

Instruction is the Greek word *noutheia*. This is referring to instruction by information. It is instruction by word. It is explaining, pleading, and reasoning.

Paul says that when we bring our children up in the Lord, we are to use external consequences and rewards plus informational instruction. Some people think that as we raise children, in Jesus, we just give them *noutheia*, we only verbally teach them about God and his ways. That doesn't always work. For some children, the only way for them is to experience blessings or consequences.

We all know parents who refuse to instruct their children in any way but *noutheia*. Their 6-year-old boy is acting wild. He is a completely out-of-control rebel. He is intentionally spilling red kool-aid on the carpet because he thinks it is fun. Mom sits him down and tries to explain to him why that is wrong. He doesn't care. He doesn't listen. All of mom's words are like a bullet off a rock. As soon as

mom introduces consequences for his actions and she takes away his video game system, he squeals like a stuck pig. He wasn't correctable by instruction at that time in his life. He was only correctable by consequences.

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. Proverbs 13:24 (ESV)

Please don't call me this week and accuse me of child abuse. That is not what I am talking about. This verse reminds us that if we love our children, we will discipline our children. We will introduce them to consequences. That is not because we hate them, but because we love them. Those consequences may need to be a spanking. Those are the Bible's words, not mine. Don't accuse me of child abuse.

One of the best Bible illustrations of a father who would only talk with his children but he refused to take physical action to change the behavior of his children is Eli. We read about him in 1 Samuel 2. Eli's married adult sons were sleeping with the young women that worked at the tabernacle. They were also taking parts of the offerings dedicated to God and grilling them for themselves. This was dead wrong. The Bible tells us Eli talked with them and told them what they were doing was wrong, but he refused to stop them. He refused to discipline and remove them from their position of leadership. As a result, they were struck down and killed by the Lord. If Eli disciplined his children, he might have prevented the death of his children.

What and how should I teach my children?

Deuteronomy 6 gives us instructions on what and how Israelite parents were to teach their children. This chapter provides us with a good template to follow.

Teach them about God.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV)

We are to teach our children about God and what he is like. We are to teach our children about God’s holiness. He is without sin. We are to teach our children how much God loves them and what God has done for them through Jesus. We are to teach our children the truth about God because they won’t learn it on Google.

Teach them that the most important part of life is to love and follow God with all your heart.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)

There are many things in life to love. Many things are important and will captivate our interest. There is school, friends, sports, athletics, marriage, and a career. We must teach our children that the most important thing they must do in their life is to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Trusting in Jesus, following Jesus, and growing to know Jesus is the most important thing they can do in life. Nothing else compares in importance to delighting in God. You don’t care if your child becomes a brain surgeon or sucks septic tanks. If they are not saved by Jesus and walking with Jesus, they missed the most important thing they can do in life.

Teach them to love and obey God's Word.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children,... Deuteronomy 6:6–7a (ESV)

We must constantly teach God's Word to our children when they are young. We are to fill their hearts and minds with Bible stories. They will not understand all God is teaching them, but they will at least have a foundation that the Holy Spirit can use to build their heart. This is one reason I love AWANA. It teaches kids Bible stories. It helps children commit God's word to their hearts when they are young.

Teach them about God by constantly using life as a classroom.

...and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:7b (ESV)

Use all of life as a teaching tool for God's Word. Jesus was a master at this. Read the gospels, and Jesus taught divine truth from water, fig trees, mustard seeds, birds, weeds, bread, grapes, wheat and tares, a farmer's harvest, light, and darkness. Use everything around us in the physical world to teach your children the truth about the unseen spiritual world around them. It will help them learn and remember.

Teach them about God with visuals.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:8–9 (ESV)

When I grew up, I had Bible verses on memory cards. I had Bible verses on my Christian T-shirts. At the time, I thought they were a little cheesy. The good news is I ended up memorizing the verses because I saw them and kept reading them all the time. My mother gave me a bookmark with Matthew 6:33 on it. Every

time I opened my book, I couldn't help but read "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all these things will be added unto you." By constantly seeing that verse, I ended up memorizing that verse. Parents, purchase artwork that has a Bible verse on it. Use that artwork in your home. It will help your kids learn the Bible. Put Bible verses on memory cards and place them on your bathroom mirror. Tell your kids they must keep brushing their teeth until they have read the Bible verse in their minds seven times. Get Bible verses into your children's hearts with visual aids.

Teach them to be wary of the world around them.

And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
Deuteronomy 6:10–12 (ESV)

Teach them that when they leave the house, they must be careful not to forget God. Moses warned the Israelites that when God brought his people into the Promised Land and handed them a very advanced civilization, they needed to be sure that when they saw all the glitz and glamor, they did not forget God. The same is true for our children. When they get out of the house and are busy at college, when they see all the excitement the world offers, remind them not to forget God.

The goal of all parenting is not a perfect child, a well-behaved child, or a star athlete, but a child who is launched into the world and has trusted in Jesus

as his or her savior. While children will struggle with sin, like all of us, if they are born again and bring pleasure to God, that is parental success.

As I was researching this message, I ran across an anonymous letter from a father to his son written in the 19th century. This father's son was a success in the world, but he was not successful in following Christ. The father pleaded with him to turn his heart back to Jesus. The language is a little dated, but it is powerfully written. As we close, let me read it to you.

My dear child, never did I pass a more truly solemn or interesting moment than that in which my first child was put into my arms and when I felt that I was a father...I looked up to heaven and breathed over my baby the petition of Abraham for his son. 'O that Ishmael might live before you.' Recognizing in the little helpless being which had been so lately introduced into our world, there was a creature born for eternity and who when the sun shall be extinguished would be still soaring in heaven or sinking in hell. I returned to my closet for private devotion and solemnly dedicated my child to the God who had given me the precious life. And I earnestly prayed that whatever might be his lot in this world, he might be a partaker of true holiness and numbered with the saints in everlasting glory.

During the days of your infancy, I watched you together with your mother with all the fondness of a parent's heart. We smiled upon you when you were slumbering. We wept over you when you tossed with feverish restlessness and pain. We have been the delighted spectators of your childish sports. We have witnessed with pleasure the development of your intellectual abilities...

But in the midst of all of this, one deep solicitude has taken hold of our minds which nothing could ever divert or abate and that was a deep anxiety for your spiritual welfare, yes for your salvation. You cannot doubt, my child, that your parents love you. In all your recollections, we have a witness to this, we have, as you know, done everything to promote your spiritual welfare and so far as was compatible with this, your pleasure also... And if at any time we have been severe in correction, even this was an intimate form of love. We spared no expense in your education. In short, love and intense love of which you can at present form no adequate conception has been the secret spring of all our conduct toward you...

Almost every parent, has one object which he desires above all on behalf of his children. Our supreme ambition for you is this, that whatever situation you occupy, you may adorn it with the beauty of holiness and discharge its duties

under the influence of Christian principles. Much as we desire your respectability in life, we would rather see you in the most obscure, even menial situation, provided you were partakers of true holiness then behold you on the loftiest pinnacle of the temple of fame, the object of universal admiration, if at the same time, your heart was destitute of the fear of God.”

We presented ceaseless prayer to God for your salvation. As soon as reason dawned, we poured the light of religious instruction into your mind. You can't even remember the time when these efforts began. We instructed and warned and admonished and encouraged you as we laid open to your view the narrow path that leads to eternal life. How could we endure to see our children choosing any other ways than those of wisdom and any other path than that of life? How could we bear the sight to behold you traveling along the broad road that leads to destruction and running with a multitude to do evil?

...How would it embitter our last moments and plant our dying pillow with thorns to leave you on earth in an unconverted state, following us to the grave but not to heaven. Or should you be called to die before us, how could we stand at the dreadful post of observation as you die without one ray of hope to cheer our wretched spirits? How could we have sustained the dreadful thought that the very next moment after you had passed beyond our kind attentions, you would be received to the torments which know neither end nor mitigation.”

So he ends his letter to his son pleading for him to turn to Jesus. The greatest task we have as parents is to work, pray, and lead them to the knowledge of Christ. The issue in parenting is not controlling your children, so they are perfectly behaved, not making sure they are athletic stars or academic successes, but leading them to Jesus and seeing them grow and delight in Jesus, our Savior and Lord.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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