

The Word to Dads

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, as I step into the pulpit this morning, I want to highlight a couple of things that go through my mind just because it will help you understand the spirit in which I'm speaking here today, and I don't know that this is a good comparison or a good dichotomy to make but I'm going to make it anyway. Sometimes when you step into a pulpit, you're stepping in as a Bible teacher and there is information and doctrine that you need to teach, always hopefully with a pastoral tone, sometimes there's also, you're stepping into a pulpit and you realize that you're here providing pastoral ministry a little bit more than just an emphasis on doctrine, and I don't mean to set those two in antithesis but there's this aspect of communicating truth and doctrine and doing it in a pastoral way. Today, I want to kind of focus a little bit more leaning on the side, step my foot a little bit more into the realm of pastoral care as we speak on our topic here this morning, and to do so that in a way that hopefully will communicate truth at the same time. It's Father's Day and I ask you to turn to the book of Ephesians 6 as I speak as a pastor, as a father as well, to primarily the men in our congregation here this morning. On this Father's Day, we turn to Ephesians 6:4 for our text this morning, taking a little pause for a couple of weeks from our study of Philippians.

This is God's word to dads in Ephesians 6:4,

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now when I was a young dad, when I was a new father, about the only thing that I really had to go on much in my approach to parenting was what I had learned from the knee of my unsaved father, and that was an approach of severity and domination, really. I say that in love and respect for his ministry but he was not a Christian man and so he couldn't, he certainly couldn't be a Christian father in any sense of the term whatsoever. That was my model, that was my pattern when as a young Christian my family started to come, and I remember a particular time when our oldest was maybe one or two years old and there was a very minor thing of discipline and I look back on it and I just wanted to handle that with such severity because that was what I had known. You know, this is how you establish order in your house, is by establishing fear and intimidation and severity and, you know, people fall into line that way. I know I certainly did. As I reflected on that even a little bit in the moment and in subsequent days and months, I just came to realize

that this was not going to work. I was not my father, which, you know, I'm glad for, I guess, and also just that this was not the way that a Christian father should deal with his children; this was not the way that God had dealt with me as a sinner, he had not dealt with me in severity, he had not dealt with me according to strict outward legal obedience, he had dealt with me with mercy that I didn't deserve, he had given me a righteousness that was not my own and I needed to completely rethink the way that I wanted to approach Christian parenting.

Now I stand here today some 25 or 30 years after that particular incident that I'm remembering, and I stand here with a long record of more failures than successes in my parenting and so I want you to know that I openly say that with what I have to say here today so that you understand the spirit with which I'm speaking to you as men, and also to wives and mothers as well in the context of all of this. I speak to you as one sympathetic with your own struggles, one that is sympathetic with the way that you have failed. You know, you've lost your temper just like I have with your kids and you've gotten frustrated and dealt with things in a way that you wish you hadn't done after the fact; some of you look back and say, "You know, I haven't done all that I could do to communicate the faith to my children," and I certainly feel that myself as I stand before you here today. So I just remind you at the outset of what I said to open the service here this morning, is that we are gathered here together today trusting in mercy that we do not deserve and in a righteousness that is not our own. That is our perspective on Christian parenting is that we need grace, that we need mercy, we're on the receiving end of amazing love and amazing grace and that becomes the basis upon which and the source from which we try to parent in our families. So let's look at the book of Ephesians as we've looked at in the past a little bit, you know, it's been five years now since we've taught through Ephesians, but let's remember something important about the context of that passage in Ephesians 6 before we get into the details of what it might mean.

Let me interrupt myself before I go any further, this is something that is just really crucial not only for you as men, not only crucial for your families, but it's also crucial for the life of a healthy church. Scripture makes it plain that the men who elevate and who aspire after church leadership and who are qualified for church leadership, are men who in some ways have learned how to lead their own families. You can read the qualifications of elders and it talks about how an elder must be a man who has led his family well because if he can't lead his own household, how can he lead the household of God, is the idea, and so this is something that is not just a devotional thought for men or even for families, but this is something that is critical to the life of the church. And let me say something else about that and I'm going to talk about these kinds of things quite a bit in three or four months whenever I get around to a series that I'm preparing for. These are the kinds of things that are going to make Christians distinct as our culture continues to rot and fall apart around us. The testimony of Christian families devoted to principles of love that are patterned after the love of Christ are going to stand out in the midst of the perverse and promiscuous society that we have. It's important for us that are older in the congregation, there's something else that I want to say here, there's just all kinds of pastoral things on my mind right now, is that I am very very encouraged about the health of our church by seeing our young people who are devoted to purity in their relationships, to see young

people that are moving into the realms of marriage, to seeing parents who are trying to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, these are really wonderful signs of health that these kinds of motivations and these kinds of life desires are manifesting themselves in the young people around us. That's a very very good sign and that is what you would expect if you are gathering together as people who have truly been redeemed by the Lord.

Now one of the things that that means for us that are on the older side of the spectrum is that it's very important for us whether we have families of our own or not, whether we have children of tender age of our own or not. It is very important for you as members of this church to encourage that as you see it because we have like four or five in a church our size. Well, you know, a rather small congregation over all, we have four or five families that are expecting babies, some of them for the first time within the next six months or so. This is all a wonderful sign of the Lord's blessing on us. It is crucial for us to teach in a way that undergirds and supports that. It is so critical for you adults, you who are longer and further into your life to make these young people, to make these young families the consistent objects of your prayers, the consistent objects of your encouragement to them personally, privately, to help them and to tell them that they're doing a good job because you all know by experience how discouraging parenting day to day can be, right? And so we need to gather together around this in a way that would be pleasing to our Lord and would set an atmosphere where these young people and these young families can flourish in the midst of such a hostile environment that they're going to be raising their own families in, and every one of you has a part to play in that as we fellowship together around the word of God in the days and weeks and months and years to come.

So that's the spirit with which I'm trying to approach these things here this morning, and as we prepare and as we gather steam to look at that passage in Ephesians 6, let me remind you of this: that long before Paul started to instruct fathers on parenting, earlier in the letter he had spoken to all of the Christians about the wonders of God in salvation. The foundation of Christian parenting is found in the foundation of Christian salvation and Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 3, brings these things to light in a way that we need to remember because it would be so easy, and I rather suspect that it happens quite a lot, in a Father's Day message it would be so easy to just list out a number of requirements and things that fathers are to do in a way that leaves them with a burden of guilt for how they have failed, without starting at the source and remembering that we are recipients of mercy that we do not deserve and we rely on a righteousness that is not our own. You must start there to be a Christian father is to remember where God has saved you and how God has saved you.

Look at Ephesians 1:3,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as

sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight

Now let's stop there and just drink from the clear fresh fountain of biblical grace as we begin. Christian fathers, whether your young ones are on your knee or you're further along in life and they're perhaps challenging you with their later years, begin your thinking, you must begin your thinking where Scripture does in your approach to parenting, begin your thinking about life and family with a remembrance of what God has done for you in the Lord Jesus Christ. He chose you. He adopted you. He redeemed you. He forgave all of your sins. Christ suffered in your place at the cross of Calvary. This is the starting point of Christian parenting. It has nothing to do with your children at all, it has nothing to do with you being a father, it starts with you remembering how your heavenly Father has dealt with you in Christ. He has been kind to you. He has been gracious to you. He has loved you with an everlasting love. He has washed away your sins and he has dealt with you and provided you with a righteousness that is not your own and it is on the basis of grace, on the basis of love that God initiated toward you that you have a standing before him to be safe and secure in his family as a Christian bought by the precious blood of Christ, and what that does for you, what that should do in your heart, is sweep you up in a spirit of praise to the God of grace.

Look at verse 6 with me, Ephesians 1, "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Verse 12, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." Verse 14, the Holy Spirit "is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." To the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory. Beloved, what that means as you continue to read through the rest of the book of Ephesians is, is that the praise of the glory of the God who was so gracious to you informs and energizes and animates everything about your obedience and everything else that follows, and it informs and energizes everything about your understanding and everything that Paul says going forward. And what that means in the specific context that we're trying to address here this morning is this, this is a really important pivot point, beloved, very important pivot point: the God who saved you like that chose you, adopted you, redeemed you, indwelt you with the Holy Spirit, the God who saved you like that calls you to parent like this. Go back to Ephesians 6:4 where we see it again, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The idea is to nourish them in the faith. God did not respond to you in anger in your disobedience but rather overlooked your sins, in a sense, passed over them until the time that you came to Christ where they could all be forgiven through faith in your Savior, and that informs the way that you look at the disobedience and the difficulties in parenting, "God has been so gracious to me in my spiritual life, God has been so gracious to me as a guilty sinner before Him, I can only respond to parenting with a spirit that is animated by a like kind of grace. It is not mine to dominate my children. It is not mine to intimidate them because that's not how God dealt with me and, therefore, I won't deal

with my children in that way either." So this is the mindset that informs the way that we approach parenting.

Now as I've said in the past and I'm going to say it again and I really make, a lot of times I kind of go on the verge of apologizing for what I'm going to say, I'm not apologizing here today for anything that I say and I'm not apologizing for the fact that I've said it in the past several times and that I'm saying the same things again, because we need these things by repetition, we need to learn and this is how they sink in. Beloved, the reality is that we all share carnal tendencies on parenting to one degree or another. We all approach parenting with some measure of carnal thinking that has the potential to undermine everything that we're talking about here today. Some parents just want a checklist, "Tell me what to do. I'll check it off and I'll do it," and they approach parenting in an external way thinking that if they have kept the rules that someone else gave to them, they have done their duty. They have no real interest or even understanding, maybe more likely in a gathering like this, no understanding of the preeminent priority of the principles of the heart in parenting. Others, and I say this in love but, boy, does this need to be said, others are not really interested in the spiritual development of their children at all. They're really not. They're too busy with the activities of the week, they are too busy with their careers to care about such things, they're too busy with other things that preoccupy them, and so for parents like that, if the kids will simply stay off of drugs and not get pregnant, they think their parenting is a success while perhaps their child grows more and more in an absence of real knowledge of Christ and with no real affection for Christ or the things of Scripture, the things of the Holy Spirit, no real interest in those things at all. The parents that I'm describing like this don't even care about that. It's not even on their radar as long as their kid is not embarrassing them before others. They're content with an outward morality. Now friends, that's not Christian parenting. That is not Christian parenting at all.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are parents who are concerned about the spiritual well-being of their children and they want their child to come to know Christ. They're interested in that and yet they, there's such a small narrow balance beam to fall off of here, they forget the sovereignty of God in parenting and they think that the salvation of their children depends entirely on how they parent, and if they make a mistake, they've sealed off the kingdom of God from their children so they live under an immense sense of pressure and guilt and worry because they're not sure that they're getting their kids saved. Look, beloved, it is not your job and it is beyond your ability to save the soul of your kid. You cannot save the soul of your kid. Your responsibility as a parent is to live a godly life and trust that the Spirit of God will do a work in your heart because even in a Christian family it takes a supernatural act of God to draw a child to faith in Christ, to draw your loved one to faith in Christ. Jesus said this plainly in John 6, he said, "No one comes to Me unless the Father draws him." So there is no formula that you can follow that will guarantee the salvation of your child and if you forget that, then your Christian parenting is going to be less than what God would have it to be and you're going to be wracked by fear.

Well, beloved, there's one other thing that I can think of and this is just in a brief note of homage to my past, there are others who will publish and give you a spiral-bound notebook of 100 or 200 pages of things to do at every stage of parenting and they'll call it "Growing Kids God's Way," or something like that. We're throwing this out from the past, I see one head nod of recognition, and things that just maybe at times are helpful but are just the whole spirit of it is wrong. Here's what I want to say in response to all of that. Against that whole spectrum from indifference, spiritual indifference to the spiritual well-being of children to obsession with it, from that perspective of, "Give me rules and rules and more rules and I'll grind it out and I'll keep the rules," in the midst of all of that, the word of God speaks with stunning, stunning, stunning, remarkable brevity and clarity. Stunning brevity and clarity.

Look at it there again in chapter 6, verse 4, in this letter that is designed to give a comprehensive view of Christian life from the inspired pen of the Apostle Paul, the word of God in its complete sufficiency, leaving nothing out that we need to know, in the sufficiency of the word of God it says this in verse 4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." I've got to tell you, when I think about some of the thick books on parenting that I've read and all of the hyper-introspection that they call you to, it is like having bricks fall off of your shoulder and chains being broken from your hands, and to have the freedom of the word of God to say, "Here's what you need to know about parenting." This is wonderful to see that Scripture comes to us in simplicity and gives us principles that we can live out and that we can apply according to the context of our own families that God has given to us with the confidence that it will be enough for us to please God if we follow like this. So it's a delight and it's a privilege for me to open God's word, especially to you young families here and those of you that aspire to families that aren't quite there yet, to be able to open this up to you in a way that I trust the Spirit of God will make useful to you.

Now notice here in chapter 6, verse 4, that he addresses fathers. He addresses fathers. Rather than saying parents or saying fathers and mothers, he says fathers here. Paul makes fathers accountable. They had the authority of the household in the first century, and in the abiding relevance of the word of God, there is a particular responsibility that is given to fathers that make this an appropriate text for us to consider on Father's Day here in 2019. Now the principles apply to mothers as well, but men come what we need to see is this, is that men have an elevated accountability before God for the spiritual state of their homes. We take this with a sense of sobriety, with a sense of expectation and hope, but we also realize that there is an accountability for us that we will one day render to God for how we have led our families, and we're passing over just for the sake of time and the subject matter, that Paul's instructions to husbands and fathers actually began back in chapter 5, verse 25, when he addressed them in their relationships with their wives. Scripture joins these things together, we're separating them simply for the sake of analysis and exhortation here this morning.

Let me just say one final word before we get into the text. You moms, you expectant moms, you existing moms, the things that we have to say here, they apply to you even though I'm speaking to the men. It's often going to be the case in a Christian home where

the mother has the predominant influence and has the predominant time with the children as she stays at home with the children and the father goes out to provide for the household, and so this speaks to the moms as well, but fathers, here's the point, this is the standard, this is the atmosphere, this is the environment that you are to be setting in the home by your instruction and by your example. And so let's consider that and, ladies, as I pivot now to speak more directly to the men, what I would ask from you this morning in this hour is this, is that you would be praying for the men in your household even as the word works in your own heart. This is not a time for you as a woman to be thinking about all of the ways that your husband falls short and now you're going to poke him in the ribs and you're going to come away with three or four things to read the riot act to him afterwards. That's not the right spirit at all, and if that's the way that you anticipate a message like this, you should repent of that before we go any further because you as ladies need to respect your husbands and come along them with a supportive spirit in this even as the Holy Spirit is indwelling your Christian husband to help and encourage and point him to greater godliness. Sure, your husbands fall short. You want a Master's class in what it's like to live with a husband that falls short? Talk to my wife. She'll tell you and she'll give you ideas on how to live with that and thrive personally in the midst of it even when your husband is falling short. It is not the time for you to adopt a critical attitude toward your husband as we go through these things. We are all sinners who are trusting in mercy that we do not deserve, and trusting in a righteousness that is not our own, and so we come here seeking the help and the instruction of God by his Holy Spirit through his word as we come to these things here today.

Now one final thing that I want to say. I cannot begin to say everything that I want to say here today, everything that needs to be said. We are hitting this one time and we're moving on to other things in the future. Out in the lobby there are multiple copies of the CD album, "The Parenting Call." I invite you to pick those up. I've highlighted these in past occasions. Pick one up on the way out because it will fill out and round out the things that we can't cover today. Those are in the outer lobby. They are free for the taking. Take them and listen to them, I beg you. As your pastor, I beg you to take those things to heart.

Now with those things said, let's look at our text, Ephesians 6:4, and consider first of all, the realm of parenting, the realm of parenting as we look at Ephesians 6:4. When I talk about the realm of parenting, what I mean by it is this, we're talking about the scope of parenting. The scope of parenting. What is the subject matter, what is the range of life that is covered by Christian parenting, and what we see as we look at Scripture is this – oh, men, this is so very important – parenting is a comprehensive way of life, not a compartment of your adulthood. Parenting is a comprehensive approach to life, not a compartment of your adulthood.

Look at verse 4 with me again as it says in Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." This is a command. These are imperatives from God to Christian fathers in terms of how they are to approach the children that God has given to them, and the commands are in the present tense in the original language. I'm not talking about this is what you do now but this is the

ongoing nature of parenting that God calls us to. It speaks to – watch this, this is really important – this verse speaks to patterns of life during a day and over the course of years. This is the settled way that you think about being a Christian dad. This is the word to dad's in terms of how you are to think, "Fathers, do not be in the habit of provoking your children to anger, but be in the habit rather of bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Deuteronomy 6, beginning in verse 4, and what we find as we think through all of these things rightly, is we find that Scripture is pointing us in the same direction in the Old Testament that we have seen already in the book of Ephesians. Deuteronomy 6:4,

4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

There is this ringing statement of the nature of God and then the implication is given. Speaking to the people of God in response to who God is, in verse 5 it says this,

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

You see that there is this declaration of who God is and then the response is you shall vertically respond to him with a heart attitude of love and faith, and this is the same thing that we're saying from Ephesians, you recognize who God is, what he has done for you in Christ, and you respond with grateful love, grateful faith, grateful obedience on a vertical level that informs the way that you parent on a horizontal level.

Verse 6,

6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

Verse 7, here we go,

7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up.

Look at chapter 11 of Deuteronomy, verse 19. Deuteronomy 11:19. I'll give you a moment as I hear those pages wrinkling. Deuteronomy 11:19,

19 You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Morning, afternoon and evening, these things are on your lips as you're interacting with the young ones that God has given to you. Here's what I want you to see, beloved, what Scripture points us to is more than just a short devotional time as if you could have a devotional time for five or 10 minutes with your family and discharge it and then forget

about it and forget about the way that you're speaking to your kids and what you're communicating to your kids until it circles back around 24 hours later for another five or 10 minute devotional time. Now the devotional times and family worship times are fine, I'm not here to speak against that, but there is something greater, something more transcendent, it is that the word of God would so fill your heart because you've given yourself over to it, that in the course of life it naturally comes out of you. What naturally comes out of you is expressions of your love for Christ, Scripture that you've been thinking about and reading, maybe what you've heard together as a family from the pulpit, and those things become the natural outflow of the way that you speak as you are interacting with the younger people that God has given to you. Beloved, listen, listen, this is so important. This shapes the trajectory of life, especially for you young ones that are on the verge of marriage or just entering into the blessed joy of these things. Scripture pictures Christian parenting as a continual dialogue with your children, a continual ongoing dialogue with your children that is rooted in the character of God and your own love for him. You cannot be a Christian parent if you're not a Christian and you can't parent like a Christian unless you're walking with the Spirit of God day by day, somehow taking God's word into your own heart so that you have something to give out to your children. This is borne out of a genuine love and a genuine faith of your own board your Savior, Christ, and if that's not a vibrant part of it, of your own life, your own inner man, your own heart, then you're stumbling over the first principle of Christian parenting.

You see, in this kind of dialogue you ask questions and you answer questions and sometimes you're waiting for years for the right conversation to come up. I remember one of my offspring, I have six so I have to be careful that I don't identify them, but I remember one of them as a young person, and this was true, what I'm about to say is true, forgive me for illustrating from something in my own life but it's the parenting realm that I have to draw upon, okay? It doesn't do any good to talk about someone else's thing. I remember one of the things, and this is one of the things that you can do as a Christian parent, the very least that you can do, and in some ways the very most you can do, is that your children should be the object of your continual prayers and praying for their salvation, and you're praying for them again and again and again, "God, save them! God, save them! God, have mercy on them like You had mercy on me. God, I can't save them. I'm not qualified to be a Savior. You're the only Savior. You're the only one with the power to do it. God, You save them and bless my interactions with them. Help me, God!" And I remember one child who was at the time obviously not walking with Christ and not really interested in things, but there was a conversation that pivoted and it came to this and I said, "Do you know what? I understand what Paul said about the Jews when he said, 'I could wish myself accursed for Christ if it would result in the salvation of his kinsmen,'" he said in the book of Romans. I said, "That's the way I feel about you. If it would secure your salvation, I would trade my own but I can't do that. I'm glad that I can't do that but that's how I feel about your soul. This is what I want for you." And pleaded with that child at that time, "Come to Christ. Leave behind your rebellion and your indifference and come to Christ," and the Lord finished that work.

Here's what I want you to see, beloved, what we're talking about here is so far more than Bible stories, it's so far more than external morality. Those things are incidental to a

genuine interaction with your child about who they are, who Christ is, their sin and their need for a Savior, and that you actually love them enough to want their salvation to such a point that if they grow up to be a great success, they marry, they do everything externally that honors morality but you know that in your heart they don't love Christ, your perspective on that is one of weeping, "Oh, but God, God, yes, they have but this earthly life is so temporary, God, and if they die without Christ then it's all meaningless. The bigger barns don't matter, God." It's that kind of heart that you bring to Christian parenting that desires to see the reproduction of Christ, so to speak, in their heart because you love Christ and you want to see his glory extended everywhere, particularly to the issue of your own body, and without that there's always seems like something's missing, and if they love Christ, then the other things are secondary by comparison. "Yeah, you know what? I know they're struggling. Yeah, they've got health problems, but do you know what? They love Christ and all is well. It's well with their soul and so it's well with mine."

So you teach repentance and faith and obedience to your children and you talk about it with them. You see, all of this presupposes that you know Christ and that you love Christ and that you are walking with Christ, otherwise you cannot live in obedience to Ephesians 6:4. And I suppose I should go further to say you cannot be a Christian parent at all unless you yourself have humbly repented of sin and received Christ for your salvation. And you young people that are teenagers and all that, it's not too soon for you to be thinking about these things. The events of life will accelerate quickly enough. It's time for you to deal with these things now yourself and Ephesians 6:4 presupposes, beloved, it presupposes, men, that you, yourself, are walking with Christ. It presupposes it.

Deuteronomy 4:9 says this. I'll just read it. You don't need to turn there. It says,

9 Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.

This is a generational thing. We're talking about Christian parenting, I need to start thinking about it more and more about it as a Christian grandparent, which is amazing that my life is that far along. But what you see from that text is you are to be thinking about these things for yourself and as you do, make them known to your sons and your grandsons. This cannot be something that you just externally try to fulfill. All through the Bible it is calling us to a genuine heart response of faith, love and obedience, and to the extent that you're missing that in your spiritual experience, the last thing you need is for someone to come along and say, "Here's a checklist that you need to follow in your Christian parenting. I have all kinds of lists for you that you can implement." And that's the last thing that you need, beloved, if you're missing the heart love for Christ that animates it all. That other stuff is no replacement for it. You can live without the other stuff if you've got the real love for Christ. If you don't have the real love for Christ, this other external stuff does not help at all. It only makes the problem worse because it's

directing you away from the primary commandment of loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.

So Christian dads, perspective Christian dads, let me lay it on the line to you like this. I should preface it. One of the things that I've heard so many times in ministry, Christian or people, I don't want to use the word Christian as an adjective here, hearing people talk like this, "I just want something for my kids. I want my kids to have the word of God. I want my kids to, you know, have the benefit of programs or whatever." That sounds really spiritual and religious but, beloved, I want you to know that is not your first priority in spiritual life. What needs to be coming out of the mouth of every true Christian parent is, "I need the word of God for myself. I need to be walking with Christ. I, myself, need to know Christ better." If you think it's only for your kids and you're bypassing your own soul, you're completely missing the point. You are completely missing the point, beloved. Your first priority is not that your kids would be godly, your first priority is that you would be godly. If you're godly, your parenting will be godly, and if your parenting is godly, your children will be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and if you try to bypass that and just try to delegate it to a church or to a program to fix what you're not doing at home, that doesn't work. No Awana leader or Sunday school teacher can make up in an hour what you're not doing on the other 167 hours of the week. You must embrace this because it's what God's word commands. You must embrace it as a faith love response to the work of Christ on your behalf and to embrace it as what you want to give to your children as well. You must be reading God's word. You must be praying. You must be faithful to Christ in the church.

This is where the word of God points us and so, men, where are your desires? What have you done with grace? Let's not talk about your kids until we've talked about you, right, because the kids see right through that kind of hypocrisy anyway. We're not kidding anybody if it's not real in us first. Let's go to a second point. Let's go to the restraint on parenting. We've seen the realm of parenting, the scope is to be a day by day manifestation of your own walk with Christ, secondly, let's look at the restraint on parenting that Paul gives us. Paul had just commanded children in chapter 6, verse 1, to obey their parents in the Lord for this is right, he now guards family life from imbalance or abuse. Look at verse 4 with me, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger." That's the restraint on your parenting, men, do not provoke your children to anger. You see, you not only need to know what to do, you need to know what not to do and Paul starts with, he starts with, it's interesting to me, he starts there, he starts with this negative command, "do not provoke your children."

Now dads, future dads, you may be the father in the household, you may have the primary place of authority but you've got to understand something absolutely essential, that place of authority does not mean that you get to do whatever you want and get to get whatever you want, that's not why it was given to you, that's not why God establishes spiritual authority in the home. God establishes your position in the home so that you would be a vessel of providing this kind of environment to your family. It's not for you to demand what you want out of those that are around you, it's that you're in a position to

give them what God would have you give to them. God restrains your parenting and tells you, "do not provoke your children to anger."

Now I'm only gonna tap on this but what is it, what is it that provokes and exasperates children? Oh, let me just give you a few things to think about here. Do not be harsh in your rules and in your discipline. Do not ignore your children or mock them, even worse. Don't criticize and diminish their efforts to please you. And men, do not brush off their requests for your time and attention. That will exasperate them no end. It will provoke them to anger. And when your own conduct and attitudes are the source of the anger, what you need to correct is yourself rather than thinking about trying to bring your child into outward compliance. That ain't right.

And men, let me say something else, might as well just be open with all of this, right? Men, somewhere in your approach to life, somewhere in your approach to life this means that you need to be home with your kids. If you have a family with children, then you need to order your life around that reality rather than letting the kids pick up the crumbs as you pursue whatever it is that you're wanting to pursue by way of your career or your hobbies or whatever else it might be. Your hobby is not commanded by God, your parenting is. Your career is not commanded by God but your parenting is. There are times where you turn away from career opportunities, men, if they would threaten your ability to be the kind of dad that God calls you to be, and you say no to secular opportunity for the sake of being the kind of dad that's able somehow, somehow to talk with your children in the morning and in the night. And I take business trips, there are trips that you've got to take. We're not talking about those incidental aspects of having to make a living. That's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is what is the dominant prevailing pattern of your life. And you know, taking your kids to ball games and to be involved in sports is all well and good and great, but it is no substitute for what Scripture calls you to in the Scriptures that we've seen here today. It's no substitute and so do not provoke your children to anger. A dad that somehow has a presence in the home that is manifesting these things that we've seen from Deuteronomy is a dad who's not going to infringe upon that negative commandment very often. Yeah, you'll fall short, we all get that, that's not what we're talking about, we're talking about how you establish priorities and what you structure your life around.

Third and final point: the responsibility of parenting. We've seen the realm, daily life, we've seen the restraint, don't exasperate your children, thirdly, we see the responsibility of parenting as Paul turns from the negative to the positive side in Ephesians 6:4. Look at it with me. He says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Do you see the contrast, the negative command, "do not provoke your children to anger"? But by way of contrast, do this instead, "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." You see, dads, and this is something that every generation needs to hear, perhaps the generations that raised us needed to hear this more, but it applies and it is certainly important for all of us, and for some of us that are further along in life, it may sting a bit to hear what God's word says about this. Men, it is not enough for you to spend all of your time working and then justify it because you're providing for the financial needs of your family, as if that were

the primary object of parenting. Now some dads have to work longer hours than others, we're not talking about that. We're not talking about that. We're not putting regulations on this. We're talking about a mindset. You know, how much money do you need? And understand that your dollars are not going to be a substitute for Christ in the life of your family, and God charges you to bring them up in a particular way.

Look at it there again, "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." God calls you, men, he calls you to set an environment in your home that is seeking your child's spiritual maturity by training, instruction and warning them in the ways of Christ. Your children were born into this world with a serious disadvantage, they inherited sin from you. You owe it to them to try to help them out of what they were born with. They have angry tempers or lazy hearts or selfish desires or disobedient dispositions, what God calls you men to is this, to train them, to teach them and not leave them to their own devices, and even worse maybe, to say, "Well, I'm just going to delegate it to somebody else. I wash my hands of it. Someone else is going to have to do it." You can't be a Christian with a family and think like that. God calls you to teach them the authority of Scripture; for you to somehow communicate to them the fear of God so that they will know their place in God's world; somehow that you are talking with them about sin and their need to repent and trust Christ to be saved from sin and damnation. This is your responsibility before the most holy God of the universe. This is what he saved you in part to do, and a genuine Christian father doesn't view that with resentment, "I don't want to do that," a genuine Christian father says, "God, You've given me some where I can communicate the grace that You've shown me. I can raise others to love You like that with Your help by Your Spirit. Yeah, I want to do that, God. I love these little ones that You've given me. Yeah, they're keeping me awake at night and, yeah, I'm tired of all of the day to day stuff that I have to do with it, but God, in the big picture I embrace the opportunity to have hearts that can be shaped for the sake of Christ."

And look, I know, men, this isn't easy. "Where do I even start?" Well, start here. When I say start here, I mean start here. Start here. Bring them consistently to church, bring them consistently where the word of God is taught and talk to them about what they've heard. Start there. It doesn't need to be complicated. "What did you hear? What did you think? You know, our pastor, I think he keeps repeating something to us. He keeps saying we trust in a mercy we don't deserve and in a righteousness that's not our own. My child, what do you think that means? What do you think mercy is? Why do we need mercy?" Is it because we're sinners, dad? "Yeah, you and me both." What does this righteousness mean? Whose righteousness is he talking about if we can't be saved by our own righteousness? Is he talking about Christ, dad? "Yeah." You see, there's nothing complicated about that. Every one of you can have a conversation like that with the youngest of kids and you as parents have the ability to shape it to what you know about their background and to interact with them on a level that they can understand, and maybe it goes for 90 seconds and then they're off to do something else and that's okay. Teaching them again and again and again and you can start here. You can start here. You cannot guarantee their conversion but you can impart God's word to them and pray that the Holy Spirit would use it in their lives by his grace.

Dad, that's your duty. I'm just pointing that out as a starting point that's attainable. Please go far beyond what I'm illustrating with here this morning. That is your duty. You cannot delegate it even to the church. And dads, let me just say this, I'm mindful that this will go out in other media so I'm going to say it here: it is better for you to teach your kids about Christ, it is far more crucial, it is infinitely more important that your kids would hear about Christ from your lips than it is for them to hear about guns and sports from your lips, right? Guns will not save them in the final day. Sports will not matter when they are before God in judgment. Christ will. Christ can save them. Christ can preserve them. Christ can even give them power to overcome sin in this life. Guns and sports can't do that. I beg you to take that to heart. I'm not opposed to guns, I'm not opposed to sports, we're talking about what the priority is and realizing that one is not a substitute for the reality.

Now let's step back and close this up here. We see the realm of parenting, we see all of these things, and if you're like me, like I started out, we're mindful of how far short we've fallen, and for those of you who have kids and have moved out of the house and they're adults and all that, you say, "You know what? I don't have a chance to do a do-over here. Where does that leave me?" It leaves you right where you've always been as a sinner, going to God and asking for mercy in Christ. "God, I've failed in this way but did not Christ die even for my sinful parenting? Will You not even wash away my sinful parenting and have mercy on me and gives me a sense of peace and just confidence that You'll somehow work this too out for good to Your glory? God, I trust You like that for this." And you confess your sins. What parent doesn't feel the weight of failure? Do you know what? You can go to Christ. Do you know what he did? Do you know what Christ did for you? Christ died even for your sinful parenting. That's awesome. Christ receives you and forgives you and claims you as his own even when your parenting fell short.

Those of you with children still on your knees or still in your womb yet to come, set your course, do this for the glory of Christ, set your course by God's word and not by what your family did or didn't do. If you had a really good example in your dad and in your mom, well, then praise the Lord for that but embrace it because it's God's word, not because it's what you saw in a human. And those of you who have children who know the Lord and all of your aspirations for their spiritual well-being have been fulfilled and you see that being lived out and you're grateful for that, call yourself an unworthy servant who only did what you were supposed to do and give thanks to God for mercy that you did not deserve and for a righteousness that is not your own. And those of you with unsaved children despite your best efforts, don't stop praying. God hasn't written the final chapter yet. Those sons, those daughters, those three sons of yours that are adults and well into life and just dead to the word it seems, don't give up. The Lord who is merciful to you still has the same power to be merciful to them as well.

So that's God's word. That's the word to dads this morning.

Let's pray.

Father, we ask You to have mercy and grace on all of our families. Help us to be the dads and moms that You would have us to be. Forgive us in those many many many places where we have fallen short. We ask You, dear Christ, to do Your perfect work through our very imperfect lives, to lead our children that are represented here this morning, to lead them to a saving knowledge of Christ and a life of service to His most glorious name. We ask these things in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

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