

INTRODUCTION

It's been some time since I gave a Father's Day message.

I can say that in the last 3 years I have learned a lot and made a lot of mistakes.

I have done some things right but many times they feel short lived.

I have been reading a chapter on Fatherhood from Kent Hughes' book "Disciplines of a Godly Man."

There was a section in that book that I read and I put the book down, walked out of my study, and told my wife I don't want to give a Father's day message.

She, of course, asked "Why?"

I said, well I have been reading a chapter in a book on Fatherhood and I feel like I have done everything wrong.

You know that I have been a father for over 20 years.

I have six kids.

My first crop that Theresa and I call them are 20, 19, and 17.

Our second crop are 3, 2, and 1.....right, blastoff!

That's what it feels like sometimes.

Many times we ask ourselves can we make it another 15 years in our parenting.

Since having the second crop, we have been evaluating our parenting skills.

You see, we starting parenting 20 years ago with no training.

That is, no official training.

Yes, I believe there are things that God instills in all of us, especially moms.

But we still feel inadequate.

And then when you look at the examples, both good and bad, in the Bible on fatherhood, it can be either an encouragement or a discouragement.

If you have been a parent for some time, you probably already have some regrets.

You might have already said, "If I could do it all over again, I would do some things differently."

That's where Theresa and I are at right now in our life.

How do we get past the regrets?

Well, the only thing I know to do is confess and repent and learn how not to repeat them.

If there is anything I have learned, it is what I do not want to repeat.

So, this morning, in honor of Father's Day, I want to give some do's and don't of fatherhood.

Since I am already on the subject of regrets, I will start with the don'ts.

Let me have you turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6 and look with me at verse 4.

Paul began back in chapter 5 and verse 18 to talk about relationships.

He has addressed our relationship to God the Holy Spirit and to one another and then that of wives to their husbands and husbands to their wives and now he is addressing the relationship of children to parents and parents to children.

But in Ephesians 5:18, he shows us the power that keeps these relationships as they ought to be.

He says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Holy Spirit."

And when that occurs then you will speak "to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (v.19).

You will have a melody in your heart (v.19) as well as thanksgiving (v.20).

And you will "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (v.21).

Wives will submit to their husbands (v.22).

Husbands will love their wives as Christ loves the church (v.25).

Children will obey their parents (6:1).

And parents will "not provoke [their] children to wrath, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (6:4).

And slaves (or employees) will "be obedient to those who are your masters (or employers)...with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, to Christ" (6:5).

For all these relationships to function as God intended, you must obey Ephesians 5:18.

You must be filled with the Holy Spirit!

And when you're not the opposite will occur.

Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger."

The word that Paul uses for "Fathers" (pater) in some places has been translated "parents" (Heb.11:23).

But for our attention today, let's look at it with the understanding of "fathers."

What happens when dads are not patient with their sons or daughters, they "provoke [them] to anger."

I remember when I was growing up how angry I was all the time.

My dad worked two full time jobs.

My mom also worked a full time job and I was left with my sister.

You know where this is going? Right?

Me and my sister did not get along.

In fact she always locked me out of the house and that didn't help our relationship.

One day she tried that and I came right back in.

She didn't know that I now had a key.

But if it wasn't something like that it was something else.

It's like many of our kids today.

One minute they are playing great together and the next minute they are at each other's throats.

And you ask, "What is your problem?"

We'll maybe the answer is, "What is our problem?"

Maybe we have "provoked" or exasperated our kids.

We might not mean to do this but nevertheless it happens.

The word "provoke" (parorgizo) that Paul uses here in Ephesians 6:4 "suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment that gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment that boils over in outward hostility.

Such treatment is usually not intended to provoke...anger. Often it is thought to be for the child's good" (John MacArthur, Ephesians, 317).

Paul uses this word to show parents or fathers how they "irritate" or "make mad or angry" their children.

Sometimes the word refers to a lashing, open rebellion, and sometimes it refers to an internal smoldering.

John Piper says, Unrighteous “anger is the cannibal emotion: It eats all the others till none is left. It does this first in fathers, and then this constricted soul is passed on to the children. Anger is absorbed as the dominant emotion and all the tender feelings die.” Unrighteous anger takes two basic forms. One is explosive and reactionary and involves venting one’s feelings (Proverbs 15:28; Ephesians 4:31)...The other kind of anger is more of an inward slow burn...Both of these kinds of anger are of man and are very ungodly.”

Notice the difference between vented anger and the slow burn:

Vented anger is manifested by yelling or screaming, slamming things around, cursing, telling someone off, attacking verbally or name calling.

The slow burn is expressed by clamming up or moodiness, being frustrated, being irritated, being disgusted, glaring, huffing or snorting.

If you’re going to deal with sinful anger in your life you must first understand where it comes from.

Paul lists it in Galatians 5:19-20 as one of “the deeds of the flesh.” It is connected with pride (Prov.21:24), cruelty (Gen. 49:7; Prov.27:34), clamor and evil speaking (Eph.4:31; Col.3:8), strife and contention (Prov.21:19; 29:22; 30:33).

Ecclesiastes 7:9 says it is characteristic of fools. Solomon says, "Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools."

In his book, *The Exemplary Husband*, Stuart Scott gives several important facts about sinful anger. He says:

"Anger is natural to the fallen heart. It always involves thoughts and intentions. It is caused by not being able to attain our prideful and/or selfish goals. It never accomplishes God's righteous ends. It sometimes points to something good and right that should be done about a problem instead it is expressed in our thoughts, body language, speech, and actions. It involves a lack of self-control. It is always accompanied by other sins when it is tolerated, and if not dealt with, it will turn into something worse."

The Scriptures sum it up by telling us 4 things that cause anger:

1. Harsh words

Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."

2. Lack of discretion

Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression."

3. Evil influences

Proverbs 22:24 says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man."

4. Lack of prayer

1 Timothy 2:8 says, "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension."

The most interesting truth about unrighteous anger is it brings its own punishment.

Proverbs 19:19 says, "A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again" (ESV).

So the obvious question is, "How do we do this?" "How do we keep from demonstrating this kind of anger."

First we have to admit we have a problem.

Stuart Scott says, "The first step to solving a problem is admitting that you have one. One of the worst things you can do when you are angry is tell yourself or someone else, 'I'm not angry.' Be careful of renaming anger as being 'frustrated'" (The Exemplary Husband).

Let's begin, as I said, with the "don'ts" or as Paul says in Ephesians 6:4 with the "do not's."

Kenneth Hughes says, "The 'do not' is perfectly clear, because it literally means, 'do not provoke your children to anger so that they begin to seethe with resentment and irritation.'

The New English Bible captures the idea very well: 'You fathers, again, must not goad your children to resentment.'

The directness and simplicity of this 'do not' invites us to do some honest thinking about the ways we goad our children to exasperation" (Disciplines of a Godly Man, 47-8).

So, the first "do not" of fatherhood is: *criticism*.

The Do Not of Fatherhood

1. Criticism

This is usually at the top of most lists as something parents are guilty of.

Fathers who criticize their children often bring them to discouragement.

Winston Churchill had a father, Lord Randolph Churchill, who did not like Winston's looks or voice.

In fact, he did not like to be in the same room with him.

He never complimented him---only criticized him.

Winston later wrote in his biography, "I would rather have been apprenticed as a bricklayer's mate...it would have been natural...and I should have got to know my father."

Fathers who criticize their children often bring them to discouragement.

The parallel version of this “do not” in Colossians 3:21 indicates that children embittered by nagging and deriding “lose heart” (NASB) — like a horse that has had its spirit broken.

You can see it in the way a horse moves, and you can see it in the eyes and posture of a disheartened child.

John MacArthur says, “Parents provoke their children to anger when they constantly criticize them but never reward them, never praise their accomplishments, and never allow them to enjoy their own successes. A child who feels he can never get his parents' approval will soon give up trying to earn it at all. There may be no quicker way to provoke your children to wrath than by perpetually discouraging them. This is easy to do. Always focus on what they do wrong, and never notice what they do right. Always notice their faults, but never say anything about their positive qualities. Ignore their natural gifts and talents, and harp on the things they don't do well. Be constantly suspicious of them.

2. Overprotection

Rebekah may have been guilty of this with Jacob.

If you mother them, fence them in, never trust them, and always wonder whether they're telling you the truth, you'll provoke them to anger.

If you never give them an opportunity to develop independence, you'll provoke them to anger.

In their environment, where everyone else takes certain risks and has certain opportunities, if they are compressed into a confined area, they'll begin to resent you and become angry.

We, as parents, need to understand that our children are people, and little by little they need to face the world and learn how to deal with it.

If we overprotect them they will never learn how to function on their own in this world---they'll never grow up.

3. Favoritism

If you prefer one child over another, this too will provoke your child to anger.

One example of this in the Bible is Isaac favoring Esau over Jacob, and Rebekah favoring Jacob over Esau.

In Genesis 37 we also have an example of Jacob (now called Israel) favoring Joseph.

Just as his father did to him, he now does with one of his sons.

Genesis 37:3 says, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic."

What kind of problems do you think this caused in the home?

Verse 4 tells us.

It says, "His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms."

Jacob didn't hide his favor of Joseph over his brothers. It says "His brothers saw" it.

This caused them to hate Joseph.

This also caused them to hate their father.

Later in the story Joseph's brothers sold him to some traders going to Egypt and they took the coat that their father made for Joseph and dipped it in goats blood to make their father think Joseph was attacked by a wild animal and died.

That's not something you do out of love but out of pure hate.

But before I condemn what Jacob did in causing this hatred in his sons, let's not excuse their sin.

They were responsible for their actions regardless of how they were influenced in life.

Joseph later says to them that they "meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen.50:20).

Before I leave this story about how Jacob showed favoritism towards Joseph, let's notice what the coat meant to his brothers.

It wasn't that they didn't get their own coat too, but that this coat meant Jacob wanted Joseph to some day be the head of the family. This was an appointment for Joseph to be the primary son.

John MacArthur says, "It marked the owner as the one whom the father intended to be the future leader of the household, an honor normally given to the firstborn son" (The MacArthur Study Bible: Genesis 37:3).

Don't ever compare a child with his siblings. You'll discourage him, make him angry, and break his spirit.

Don't say things like "Why can't you be smart as your sister? You always get C's and she gets A's" or "I never have to tell him twice to do anything" or "Why don't you act like your brother?" or "I only wanted two kids; why did you have to come along?"

If you want to destroy your child, just make him feel inferior to everyone else in the family.

4. Pushing achievement

We can push our kids so hard to fulfill goals we never accomplished---that can not only destroy them but also provoke them to anger.

You can push so much that the child will have absolutely no sense of fulfillment; nothing is ever enough.

Many parents pressure their children to excel in school, sports, or other activities, and it causes them to become bitter.

5. Discouragement

If you never give approval, if you never give reward, or if you never honor him, that will provoke him to anger.

If all you ever do is tell him what is bad, not what is good, you will provoke him to anger.

So if you always criticize, overprotect, favor, push achievement, and discourage, you will provoke your child to anger and resentment.

By the way these are not the only ways in which we provoke our children, you can also fail to make sacrifices for them, fail to allow childishness, neglect or withdraw your love for them, and use bitter words and cruelly punish them.

Well that's enough negative stuff, let's now talk about the positive---let's talk about what we are to "do" as fathers.

The Do of Fatherhood

Notice Ephesians 6:4 again. The rest of the verse says, "But bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

The word "discipline" (paideia) means "training, learning, instruction."

This word is used in Hebrews 12:5, 7-8, 11 and is translated "discipline" or "chastening."

There must be rules and regulations that lead to reward or punishment.

The child is rewarded for keeping the rule and punished for breaking it.

To nurture, then, is to train by rules and regulations enforced by rewards or punishments. And, of course, always in a context of love.

Listen to some advice from a mother of nineteen children:

Her name is Susanna Wesley.

She said, "The parent who studies to subdue [self-will] in the child works together with God in the renewing and saving of a soul. The parent who indulges it does the Devil's work; makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and [damns] his child, body, and soul forever" (Susanna: Mother of the Wesleys [New York: Abingdon, 1968], pp. 59-60).

So we are to "discipline," but notice that we are to also bring them up in the instruction of the Lord.

The word "instruction" is the Greek word *nouthesia* which is translated “admonition” in the AV.

It refers to verbal instruction with a view to correct.

This is not what you do to a child; this is what you say to a child. This is counsel.

Ginger Plowman says, “It’s easy for us to tell our children that they have done wrong and chastise them for it, but it takes much more preparation, discipline, understanding, and self-control on our part to actually instruct them according to God’s Word. This approach takes much brain activity that requires us to think through and verbalize that faithful instruction.

This is a tremendous task but the end product is righteousness.

If you want a righteous child, it has to come from what you teach him to do and what you tell him to do.

Paul's use of the word *nouthesia* “does not have as much to do with factual information as with right attitudes and principles of behavior.”

So when you correct your child you must also counsel them as to what God says about this situation in His Word.

Don’t just correct and stop—correct and council from His Word.

That implies you knowing and understanding the Scripture yourself. You must know what it means and how it applies before you can correct and council biblically.

Let me give you some of the "dos" of fatherhood.

They are in no particular order but all are equally important.

We've just noted the need to discipline and instruct your kids in the Lord.

That certainly includes...

1. Pray for your children

This should be a daily activity in your life.

Someone once said that the best way to change someone is on your knees.

That's not just true in your praying for others but also for yourself.

God will change both you and your child as you pray.

You will learn to trust your children to the Lord as you pray because you know they are His anyway and that they have only been entrusted to you.

2. Pray with your children

This too is important because not only are you developing a godly discipline of praying for your kids but you can also teach your children about prayer when you pray with them.

3. Talk to your kids

Include them in your life. This doesn't mean that you dump all your problems on them but that you demonstrate to them how important they are to you.

We have learned that sometimes in the effort to protect our children from certain things we actually made it harder on them because they didn't understand what was going on.

That means then you must also...

4. Listen to your children

Let them share their concerns and cares.

Don't brush them off or push them away but demonstrate how important it is for them to come to you and share their concerns or their hearts.

If you practice this it will pay off later when they're older.

The greatest joy Theresa and I have as parents is when our older children share their lives with us---when they talk to us.

I just pray that I am a good listener to them.

Lastly,

5. Play with your children

Of course, what you do with your children will vary.

With small children you can play games with them.

I like to roll on the floor or run around the yard.

We like to go camping and take them to the playgrounds, the beach, watermarks and go for walks.

With older children it may mean going places with them.

The point is to be involved in their world.

Don't say that just because they are small or have become more independent that they don't want you around.

That's not true!

You will always be their father and mother----parents!

Grow with them.

CONCLUSION

Father's I hope your day is not spent with regret.

I hope this message didn't discourage you like it did me these past couple of days.

One thing is true. We can live with regret or change.

And it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that you can keep from provoking your children to anger and that you can bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

One way to do this is constantly evaluate your parenting.

Identify those ways in which you provoke your child to anger and then repent of it.

Ask the Lord to help you to overcome this behavior in your life and to manifest tenderness and compassion.

It is interesting to note that the words "bring them up" in Ephesians 6:4 means "to nourish or feed," as in 5:29 which has the same Greek words describing how a man "feeds and cares" for his own body.

Calvin translates this as "let them be kindly cherished," and goes on to emphasize that the overall idea is to speak to one's children with gentleness and friendliness.

If you are harsh in your words, ask God to help you replace them with gentle and kind words.

If you are harsh in how you treat your children, ask God to help you to treat them with honor.

And remember, The “do’s” of fatherhood cannot be lived out by proxy.

I agree with Kent Hughes when he says, "You need to participate in putting your little ones to bed and praying for and with them. You need to be at their plays, speeches, recitals, and sporting events. You need to schedule with each of your children regular time alone. You need to take the lead in planning terrific family vacations and in celebrating and cementing family solidarity" (Disciplines of a Godly Man).

Don't say I can't do that-----YOU MUST!

So get in there and get your hands dirty and cherish what God has given you.

As Psalm 127:3 says, "Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward."

Let's pray.