



PAUL'S COUNSEL (AND MINE) FOR PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

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I heard recently that Amazon.com has more than 55,000 books on parenting! So where does one begin? I'm no expert, but I want to share with you what I've learned from several sources about how to be a godly parent.

My comments today are by no means exhaustive. Much of what I will share with you is something you've known for years. But perhaps by hearing it again you can be stirred up in your commitment to your children.

As you can see, Ephesians 6:1-4 is concerned with two issues. First, how children are to honor and obey their parents. Second, how fathers and mothers are to be careful lest they provoke their children to anger. In the interests of time, I've decided not to address the exhortation to children and focus entirely on the responsibilities of parents. Although only fathers are mentioned, mothers are included. In both the Jewish and Roman world of that day, fathers were ultimately responsible for the education and discipline of their children.

Four Primary Sources

There are four primary sources on which I have drawn. (1) The Scriptures. Although much that I say does not come from explicit biblical texts, I trust that everything I say will prove consistent with the Word of God. If it isn't, reject it. (2) My dad. My father died at the age of 62, in 1983. He was a banker and a businessman, but he loved the Lord and loved me and my sister in ways that I could never fully articulate. (3) 54 years of pastoral experience in interacting with, encouraging, and counseling other dads. (4) My own experience as a dad and the numerous mistakes I made.

I'm not here talking with you today so you can return to your home or office telling everyone, "Hey, that Storms guy must have been the perfect father to his daughters"! Not by a long shot. Honestly, there are numerous ways in which I screwed up royally! And I'm going to be honest and vulnerable with you in confessing those ways, hopefully so that you won't make the mistakes I did.

I should say, however, that by God's grace and with the help of an incredibly wonderful Christian wife, both our daughters love the Lord.

I know it sounds like a lot in the short time we have, but I want to give you 25 principles that I hope will help you in your role as a parent to your children. There is no particular strategy in the order of the following principles. I simply wrote them down as they came to mind.

(1) Evangelize your children from an early age, but don't browbeat them or try to extract a confession of faith so that others will think highly of you for having children who are believers.

One of the most damaging things you and I can do as Christian parents is to assume that our kids must be Christians simply because we are. It is presumptuous and prideful to think this way, and may prove spiritually devastating to our children.

(2) Don't let your use of technology and social media rob you of face-to-face personal time with your kids. Turn off TV, the internet, your smart phone, and engage them in one-on-one conversation.

I have to confess my abject failure in this regard. My children grew up in the 80's and early 90's, before the Internet was normal, when there were no smart phones. But I spent far too much time in front of the television when I should have been more directly engaged with them in face-to-face conversation and encouragement.

(3) Develop a strategy for educating / catechizing your kids in the truth of God's Word (Deut. 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8).

Here is one more area where I failed my two girls. Praise God that they are both born-again and love Jesus. But I made a terrible assumption during their years of growing up. I tended to think that simply by living with a pastor and his wife, they would imbibe the truths of Scripture by some sort of spiritual osmosis. I didn't need to teach them directly or spend time with them in searching the Scriptures. I mistakenly thought that their presence in my home

every week was enough. It isn't. I mistakenly assumed that their presence in church every Sunday would be enough to give them the knowledge of the Scriptures that they needed. Again, that is a huge mistake for which I am profoundly repentant.

(4) Aim to impart to them wisdom for life and not merely knowledge (Prov. 2:1-10), especially wisdom when it comes to financial responsibility.

My dad was a banker and a loan officer for most of his working life, and he had an incredibly accurate way of assessing if someone was worthy of a loan. In his many years as a banker, he never made a loan that proved bad. He called it common sense, but my guess is that he had the spiritual gift of discerning of spirits or perhaps word of knowledge.

(5) Make every effort and sacrifice to be present at as many events / games / performances as is possible. My dad almost never missed one of my games, even those that were out of town. I know some of you can't do this because of the nature of your work, but strive to be present at every possible opportunity. You have no idea how much it affects your son's or daughter's spiritual growth and sense of identity to know you care enough to make the sacrifice necessary to be present.

(6) The greatest thing you can do for your children is to model for them your love for God. Do everything you can, without showing off, to let them see that God is your greatest treasure, that you value him more highly than your career, more than money, more than football, more than ministry, etc.

Think about the converse. What message are you sending about what is important in life when you spend so much time browsing the internet or watching TV or investing every non-working hour in your hobby?

(7) Be diligent to display a Christ-like love for your spouse. Never speak ill of him/her or criticize them in their presence. I never once heard my dad criticize my mother or speak in a derogatory way to her. I know they had their differences, but they did everything they could to take address their issues behind closed doors.

(8) Let them see your daily devotion to the study of Scripture. Let them see you reading the Scriptures. Let them hear you memorize the text. Although my dad passed away at the age of 62, when I was only 32, my mother died at the age of 100. There were numerous times when she came to visit us that I would find her at midnight in the living room speaking aloud the specific biblical passages that she was memorizing. If a godly mother can do that in her late 90's, as mine did, surely you and I can model this love for God and his Word to our children when we are much younger.

(9) Don't be afraid or hesitant to repent quickly and ask the forgiveness of your child when you make an error in judgment or discipline (Col. 3:12-13).

Many fear that if they come clean with their kids and confess their sins and mistakes that the kids will lose respect for them. They are afraid that the image they've worked so hard to project will be shattered and their kids will no longer be able to trust you. Nothing could be farther from the truth. More times than not they will say to themselves: "Wow. Dad must really care about me a lot if he is willing to own up to his mistakes like that."

(10) Talk often and openly with them about the temptations and pressures they face in today's culture.

I found this especially difficult because I grew up in the 50's and 60's when the worst temptations were beer and pot. Pornography on-line didn't exist. Social media was a couple of decades away from being invented. We had 3 or 4 TV stations at most.

If my father failed in one particular area, it was in speaking to me about sex. He was an extremely reserved and conservative man and he found it difficult to address that subject. I never had "the talk" with him. Whatever I learned it came from my friends. The proliferation of pornography and the emergence of the LGBTQ movement simply don't give you a choice in this matter. ***You have to speak early and often about the pressures they will face.*** They need to know from you that it is safe to come to you and talk about what they are experiencing.

(11) Never ever draw comparisons between your kids and their peers, especially in relation to success in academics, athletics, or physical attractiveness.

In the Empowered Healing & Deliverance ministry at Convergence, we have learned a lot about what we call “word curses.” Most of us have been unwilling recipients of word curses, even though we were unaware of what was being said to or about us and the long-term consequences of such utterances. The reason why many of you will more readily dismiss this potential inroad for the enemy’s influence in the lives of your kids is that you simply refused to believe what was said about you. You recognized it for the lie that it was. You stood firmly in your identity in Christ and were determined not to embrace any such curse as truth.

But not everyone is capable of responding this way, especially a young child, and especially when the word curse comes from the father. Here are a few examples of a word curse.

- “You’re a tremendous disappointment to me. I doubt if you’ll ever amount to much in life.”
- “Why can’t you be like your brother/sister? You’re such a failure!”
- “You’re so stupid!”
- “There’s no way you’re going to succeed later on if you keep screwing things up now. Why can’t you get your act together?”
- “Neither your mother nor I wanted you in the first place. You’ve been nothing but a burden on this family since day one.”
- “It would be nice if I could brag on you. But that will never happen. If you could only be as successful in sports as your friend, Bobby.”
- “I hope you never have children when you grow up. You’d make such a lousy parent.”

The problem comes when such curses become embedded in their minds and they make critical decisions in life based on the misguided notion that they are true. Satan loves nothing more than to exploit these lies and reinforce in their thinking that they are useless to God, an embarrassment to the church, and of no benefit to anyone at all. Over time, they end up failing to seize opportunities for success and pursuing otherwise important relationships because of the tape that runs repeatedly in their heads that if they try they’ll just make a mess of it all and suffer public humiliation. All in all, I’m better off not trying in the first place.

(12) Whatever methods of discipline you choose, do everything you can to be unified and of one mind and one practice.

(13) Beware of two extremes: under-disciplining and over-disciplining. Don’t confuse love with over-indulgence. Consider the error of both Eli (1 Samuel 2:29) and Adrian Peterson!

(14) Never discipline when your anger is evident. I didn’t get a lot of spankings growing up, but after every one of them my dad would take me in his arms and weep and tell me how much he loved me.

(15) Make family meals more than just about eating: ask questions, share your life, encourage them to share theirs.

(16) Don’t bail them out of difficulties or from the consequences of their own bad decisions unless it puts their physical and spiritual welfare at stake.

(17) Strive for visible and vocal unity with your spouse on matters of discipline and rules of behavior. If your spouse has already made a decision concerning a request from a child, even if it is one with which you disagree, insist that the kids abide by it. You can talk about the difference of opinion with your spouse in private.

(18) Plan and come to a decision early regarding their schooling / private vs. public vs. home-schooling.

(19) Pray with them daily. Pray for them openly, where they can hear you.

(20) Don’t be afraid to cause your child short-term discomfort in order to spare them long-term disaster. Or to put it in a slightly different way, don’t ever forget that “love is not enough” (J. D. Greear). Parenting means establishing healthy boundaries for your children, holding them accountable for their choices, shaping their minds and wills, and applying firm but fair discipline.

My mistake with our first-born daughter . . . and how God providentially redeemed my failure.

(21) Don't make the mistake of thinking that because your child is cute and cuddly that he/she is not fallen, selfish, and spiritually dead. See Prov. 22:6, 15.

(22) Never underestimate the life-giving power or, conversely, the death-inducing destruction in the tone of your voice and the look in your eyes when communicating with your kids.

(23) "Do not provoke your children to anger" (Eph. 6:4a). How do fathers "provoke" their children?

(a) First, by setting standards of achievement and behavior that it is impossible for them to meet and then belittling them when they inevitably fail.

(b) We provoke our children to anger when we fail to honor our promises to them. Hypocrisy is the primary culprit.

(c) We provoke them to anger when we shame them in front of their peers with biting criticism.

(d) We provoke them to anger when they meet our expectations or fulfill the goals we set for them and then do not hear words of praise.

(e) They can be provoked and harmed by the mere absence of encouragement and affirmation.

(f) We provoke them to anger when the discipline we impose is disproportionate to the offense they've committed. When they realize that no matter what they do they will never be treated fairly, their hearts turn hard and resentful.

(24) Distinguish between family rules and the Bible. Make sure they understand the difference, for example, between "You must clean up your room before you go to school in the morning" and "You must always speak truthfully and not lie." If you don't differentiate between the two you will likely raise up a legalist who cannot tell the difference between what the Bible commands and what culture does.

Even should you do everything as thoroughly and consistently and lovingly as is humanly possible, don't ever forget that that neither you nor your spouse is ultimately responsible for the decision your children make concerning the gospel or for the life choices that come when they reach adulthood. Otherwise, you will take credit for what God has done should they pursue a godly life or you will suffer false guilt by taking blame for something not ultimately under your control.

(25) There is no more powerful way to influence your children for God and for good than to consistently and frequently verbally bless and affirm them. It isn't enough for you simply to pray for them. By all means, pray for them. Teach them. Encourage them. Set a godly example for them. But nothing will have the impact on their souls more than your sincere, verbal affirmation of them.

What I have in mind is you taking them in your arms, looking them in the eye, and speaking truth to them about who God says they are. The world, the flesh, and the devil are conspiring to convince them that they are useless to everyone, that their value depends on their performance, that their worth is in the hands of other people.

Different people use different terms to describe what I'm talking about. Some call it **affirmation**. Others call it a **blessing**. To bless or to affirm your children is not the same as asking God to watch over them and impart his gifts to them. When you "bless" your child in the biblical sense of that term you are **releasing into their souls the power of the Holy Spirit and the life-changing truth of what God says about them**. You are **imparting** the goodness and favor of God into their lives, and when you do, and as often as you do, they will never be the same.

I'm not talking about the power of positive thinking. When you bless your child, you are not denying that they are broken and sinful and in need of the forgiving grace of God. You are not guaranteeing that they will flourish financially or that they will never get sick or suffer serious persecution and adversity. But you are conveying to them a sense of personal identity and the presence and power of God's Spirit that will empower them to thrive in the midst of the very worst that life may bring their way.

I've often wondered precisely what Jesus did that is described in Luke 24:51, immediately before his ascension into heaven. We read, "While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51, ESV). What was contained in that blessing? I think at minimum there was the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. There was also, in all likelihood, a reaffirmation of his love for them. He undoubtedly would have assured them yet again, in the words of the Great Commission, that he would be with them even unto the end of the age.

Perhaps he would have spoken to them the words that Paul would later include in his conclusion of Romans 8, that nothing could ever separate them from the love he has for them. Perhaps he reminded them yet again not to be enslaved to their past or to let the memory of former failures cripple them as they carried the gospel to the nations.

Are these the sorts of things your children hear coming from your lips? Do you lovingly, gently, but firmly speak the truth of God's Word not simply over them but *into* them? Do you say to them, "You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you" (Phil. 4:23)? Do you tell them no matter what they face each day that God is at work in and through them to do his will (Phil. 4:12-13)? Do you encourage them with the promise of Philippians 1:6, that the God who began a good work in them will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus?

Yes, they can read these things for themselves in their Bibles, and I pray that they will. But there is something uniquely powerful when a mother or a father or both consistently, day in and day out, speak these words of Scripture directly to their children.

You may be afraid that if you constantly remind them of who they are in Christ and how much both he and you love them that they will get puffed up and prideful. No. Not if you couch your affirmation of them in the language of the gospel and remind them that all that God has promised to be for them and do through them is because of his grace in Christ Jesus.

If you withhold your blessings and affirmations of your children, they will grow up emotionally tortured and spiritually paralyzed, fearful that everything the world says about them is true.

Have you ever thought about Paul's opening words back in Ephesians 1:3 where he declares that God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"? This truth did not come as a result of our obedience. Your children are probably already convinced from TV and the Internet and Twitter and Facebook and what their peers tell them at school that they are cursed, not blessed. But Paul says this bestowal of "every spiritual blessing" was given to us before any of us were even born! Listen to how Paul finishes his statement:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3-4a).

The blessings of God were given to us when he elected us in eternity past! ***Blessing always precedes fruitfulness, not the other way around.*** It has been this way from the beginning. In Genesis 1:28 we read that "God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion.'" His blessing preceded and empowered Adam and Eve to fulfill the creation mandate.

When we withhold our verbal affirmations and blessings from our children until they perform well in school or lose weight or excel in athletics or academics or do better than the kid down the street, we instill fear in them, not faith. That will only produce insecurity in their souls, not love.

So let's make sure we know what the blessing of affirmation really means. It is not just words. It is not some Joel-Osteen-effort to drive out the negative. It is to call forth from God and into their hearts his favor and power and grace and promises so that they can become everything God has called them to be.

Let me give you one text of Scripture that isn't technically a blessing, but it is a promise, and it will do more to encourage and uplift your child than almost anything you can say. You all know it well. Romans 8:1 – "There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." Most kids grow up feeling utterly condemned: by their peers, by their siblings, by their teachers, by the world at large, by you, their parents, and yes, even by God. But this promise from Romans 8:1 is unshakeable and undeniable and indescribably faith building and empowering.

Remind them of this verse and its truth when they come home with bad grades.

Remind them of it when they get cut from the basketball team or fail to make the cheerleading squad.

Remind them of this when their boyfriend or girlfriend just broke up with them.
Remind them of this when they don't get invited to the party that everyone else is attending.

Again, I understand the fear that some of you have when you hear me say this. You think I'm telling you to pretend, to play make-believe with your kids and act as if they aren't as awkward and unattractive and unintelligent as they really are. No. Not at all. I'm simply telling you that whether your kid is a national merit finalist or an Olympic athlete, or at best a C- student who can barely chew gum and walk at the same time, your words of affirmation and blessing will remind them that they don't have to be defined by their deficiencies or enslaved to their shortcomings, that they can become massively influential servants of the Lord Jesus, regardless of what talents and giftings he either put in them or chose to leave out.

So, the last thing I want you to think is that I'm recommending you call evil good or that you overlook the sins of your kids and refuse to call them to repentance or decline to hold them accountable for their mistakes. But even when you call them to account, and perhaps impose some form of discipline, you have to cast it in the form of a reminder that it is because they are failing to live up to the high calling of Christ.

Melanie at Kanakuk, in the 50-yard dash . . . dead last . . . by yards . . . crossing the finish line with a massive smile on her face . . . proudly wearing the medal around her neck that read: Participant! Why? Because she knew how incredibly proud her mother and I were of her and how much we loved her and how delighted in her God was, no matter how far behind she finished in the race.

Conclude every prayer that you pray over your children with a heart-felt affirmation and blessing of them. Let your words of affirmation and blessing be the last thing on their mind as they fall asleep, the first thing as they wake up, and the last thing they hear from you as they walk off to school.



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