



## Sermon

For the week of October 25

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**Monthly Series Theme: Breaking the Huddle... for the Family**

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### **Train a Child in the Way He Should Go**

Ephesians 6:4

*“Fathers, do not exasperate your children;  
instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”*

Have you heard the recent statistics on young people and morality? According to a Barna poll, the younger generation is more than twice as likely as all other adults to engage in behaviors considered morally inappropriate by traditional standards.

For instance, two-thirds of 18-25 year olds have used profanity in public. They are nine times more likely than the previous generation to have engaged in sex outside of marriage, six times more likely to have lied, almost three times more likely to have gotten drunk, and twice as likely as to have observed pornography and to have engaged in acts of retaliation.

“We are witnessing,” the researcher said, “the development and acceptance of a new moral code in America. Mosaics (*the younger generation*) have had little exposure to traditional moral teaching and limited accountability for such behavior... The consistent deterioration of the Bible as the source of moral truth has led to a nation where people have become independent judges of right and wrong, basing their choices on feelings and circumstances. It is not likely that America will return to a more traditional moral code until the nation experiences significant pain from its moral choices.”

What happens when we read these kinds of stats? Do we shake our heads and say, “What’s happening to the young people these day?” It’s true, there are more and more young people out there making bad choices. And yes, no one is holding a gun to their heads forcing them to make those choices. They will have to deal with the consequences of their actions. But how many of those bad choices can be traced back to poor or bad guidance. How much of the morality crisis of the young people today stems from the morality crisis of the generation that reared them? Doesn’t the Bible say, **“Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it”**?

As we begin this somewhat uncomfortable task of appraising our own parenting, it’s important to remember who the real enemy is here. Satan has been waging war on the family from the very beginning. The first murder was committed the very first generation after the fall. The Bible is full of horror stories of betrayal, rape and murder that all too often can be traced back to the parent’s moral failings and/or moral cowardice.

Dads, since our text addresses us, we're going to focus on us today. But God help all of us, moms, grandparents, godparents, listen with open and humble hearts and apply his Word to our own lives.

We see a lot of great dads out there today. They're coaching their children's little league teams and cheering for them on the sidelines of the soccer fields. They're taking their little girls to gymnastics and dance. Yet, what if a father did a great job doing all these things for his kids, but failed to take care of the basics, like making sure there's money for food and clothes for his children? We'd begin to question his love for his children, wouldn't we?

Dads, we can give our children every luxury and every opportunity, but if we don't give them Jesus, we have done the cruelest thing imaginable to them. Not only are they completely unprepared for the reality of life in a broken world, but they also completely unprepared for the reality of what they will experience after this life.

In Satan's quest to destroy the family, his modus operandi is to take out the parents first. When parents, especially fathers, are passive in their role as the spiritual leaders of their families, what defense do the children have? Satan knows the statistics better than anyone. He understands that no one has a greater spiritual impact on his children, for good or bad, than their father.

And so dads, we have to understand that when Satan takes aim at the family, we are the first he is going to set his sights on. And his attacks are going to come on all kinds of fronts. We cannot be the spiritual frontline for our families if we are on the weak or injured list. We go to the gym a couple times a week to stay strong physically. We put in those extra hours at work to keep ahead of the competitors. But what are we doing to be spiritually strong for our families?

How many of us fathers end up, not purposely, but nevertheless, MIA dads—missing in action? The demands at the workplace require extra hours. Gotta put them in or you may lose your job. Or by the time we get home we're so tired and stressed out, we don't want to deal with anymore conflict, so we let the children pretty much do what they want.

I wonder how many parents today parent out of guilt? We're so busy juggling work and everything else that we just want the little time we have with them to be "peaceful." So we compromise way too much on things we ought not compromise.

Do you think that sometimes men consider the spiritual training of their children a job for their moms and the church. Send them to the Christian school or Sunday School, drive them to confirmation class, and we're doing our job. But to talk to them about the sin in our own lives and our need for Jesus and for his forgiveness, that's not a man's job.

Turn in your Bibles for a minute to 1 Kings chapter 2. King David, one of the greatest warriors of all time is on his death bed. And these are the words of encouragement he gave to his son Solomon who was about to take his place: ***"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his way, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they***

***walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel (2:2-4).***

Our society and the church show that too many Christian men today are not the David kind of men, but really, (are you ready for this?) spiritual wimps who are not willing to be the men of God they're called to be. Do you want to show yourself a man? Then understand what your children do NOT need.

They don't NEED to be football, basketball, soccer, or gymnastic superstars. Those are all great activities. They strengthen heart, mind, and body. But they will do nothing to bring your child's soul closer to heaven. Fathers, do you want to show yourself a man? Make sure first things are first.

Our children do not need parents who can't demonstrate love, forgiveness and compassion to each other as husband and wife. In our Gospel lesson Jesus clearly expressed God's hatred for the selfishness that leads to divorce and the repercussions it has on the family. Fathers, do you want to show yourself a man? Be Christ to your wife.

Our children don't need parents who have all sorts of rules without love and forgiveness. When I was young most of the time when my parents were angry, I felt that they were angry because I had somehow inconvenienced or embarrassed them. I did not sense that they were angry because they loved me and wanted what was best for me.

That's what Paul means when he says, ***"Fathers, do no exasperate your children."*** To exasperate means to frustrate to the point of anger. So many young people today are frustrated with the church, angry with the church because they see people in the church say one thing and do another. They see a church that says we're all about Jesus, but shows more meanness than mercy. They see a church that's seems to be more about rules than relationship. Fathers, do you want to show yourself a man? Sit at Jesus' feet and learn to become more like him.

Finally, children do not need their parents to pretend to be their friends. We live in a sinful, a spiritually perilous world—a world where parents, where all of us, need to understand when it's time so show tough love. Don't be an Eli who failed to discipline his son and merely stood by and watched as they brought God's judgment down on their heads. Show yourself a man and go on the offensive for your family.

In the 10 Commandments God makes it clear that our children need boundaries. Loving discipline, when called for, is not easy to take or to give. But as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us: ***"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).***

And as Christian parents we understand that heart of discipline is love. The goal of our discipline is to strengthen our child's relationship with the Lord. Our children need to know that they are forgiven and loved in Christ (no matter what). Our goal is to constantly bring our children back to the love God displayed for us when Jesus died on the cross for our sin.

And then, take a look at the end of Ephesians, chapter 6—put on the full armor of God. Our final major goal is to make sure our children are armed to hilt with the Word of God so that they will be able to stand firm in a

world that is tearing them down every day. Correct, encourage and equip. This is the daunting task that God has called us to as fathers.

It's time for a reality check. This is not an easy sermon for any of us—father, mothers or grandparents. Before we even came today, many of us already struggled with guilt. We feel we're not doing everything we could be doing for our children. For others, perhaps maybe you think of something you hadn't realized before. For still others, those whose children are older, this sermon may have stirred up some ghosts. You look back and wish you had done things differently. Perhaps you wonder if you could have had a more positive impact on the spiritual path of your children.

Right now we desperately need to turn back a page to Ephesians chapter 5. As Paul talks there about God's design for the relationship between husbands and wives, he focuses us again on Jesus Christ. Christ displayed the attitude that we so often fail to display in our lives. Jesus put our needs before his own. Take a look at verse 25. Jesus loved us, every single one of us, and gave us his life for us, every single one of us, to make us holy, cleansing us by the washing with water through the word. He went to the cross and paid the price for our sinful and shabby parenting, for our mistakes, our neglect, our failure to show love and forgiveness, whatever it is that is weighing heavy on your heart right now—it's gone, forgiven, forever. And now Jesus presents us, every single one of us, to God without stain, wrinkle, or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In other words, we walk out of this church today completely free from all the parenting guilt baggage we carried in. Tomorrow's a brand new start. We can "***forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead***" (*Philippians 3:13*).

And, to this awesome grace upon grace, God adds still more grace. He promises to work in the lives of our children to undo any negative impact we may have had. At their baptisms, God made a promise, that he would be their true Father, that he would love and pursue them to the ends of the earth, that his love would never give up on them, that he would continually be working to draw them closer to him. God will keep his promise.

So we leave here today clean, forgiven, and empowered by God's Holy Spirit to do what he calls us to do throughout this whole section of Ephesians, to submit to each other in our marriages and to submit to our children out of reverence for Christ.

What are you going to do differently? Pray for God's help and guidance...make sure you're growing yourself...dads take an active role...there are spiritual men available to pray with you this morning and help you figure out what your next steps are...there are books and materials available in the narthex...God bless you as you carry out this awesome call to bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord! Amen.