Preaching Series: The Christ-Centered Family
Sermon Title: Raising Godly Kids, Part Two

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

Introduction: This is the last of six messages in our series, **the Christ-Centered Family**. NEXT WEEK, WE'LL BEGIN A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS THAT I'M CALLING – **WORDS OF WISDOM FOR A WHACKED-OUT WORLD**. But this morning, we're going to look at the second part of the Apostle Paul's instruction on raising godly kids. Last week, we talked about the importance of teaching our children to obey. Now, let's focus on how to accomplish that.

Dr. Paul Meier, in his book **Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development**, points out the tragedy of raising children without Christian standards who do not obey. He does it by providing instruction on **how to raise troubled kids**. Here's a sampling from his many suggestions:

- **Spoil your children by giving them everything they want.** Interestingly, one word that's translated as "**spoil**" in the New Testament means to "**plunder**" (i**.e. take something by force**). When we give our children everything they want, we take from them the value of learning to work for things that are important to us so we appreciate them all the more.
- **When they do something wrong, threaten but never discipline them.**
- **Cripple your children by making all the decisions for them, lest they make some mistakes and grow.**
- **Always rescue your children from the consequences of bad conduct or decision-making.** Don't ever let them reap what they sow.
- **Don't enforce rules.** That way their moral compass will always be off center.
- **Allow your kids to express themselves in any way they choose, no matter how disrespectful.**
- **If they do anything worthwhile around the house, reward them handsomely for it lest they learn responsibility and sacrifice**.

In short, to raise troubled kids we must continue along the path our society has been following for decades. No wonder that in one opinion poll, **70% of the parents said that if they had to do it all over again, they wouldn't have children**! ***Growing godly kids in an increasingly godless culture is not easy***. For many parents, it can be the most challenging experience of their lives. By the way, don't think for a moment that it is only in the last few centuries that parents have found

this task to be somewhat daunting. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he felt the need to provide instruction for parents. Why? Because the culture in which they lived was HOSTILE to the biblical values Christian parents were meant to embrace. **Let's take a moment and consider his instruction**.

What not to do: **Do not provoke your children to anger**. Parents (particularly fathers) must not make unreasonable demands of their children so that they are provoked to anger and lose heart (**Colossians 3:21 -- Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged**—*to lose courage***).** The word here for "**provoke**" means to "**continually incite someone to wrath**." The reason that fathers are singled out is because of **a Roman law** called ***Patrios Potestas***. This declaration gave the father absolute authority in the home. He could sell his children as slaves or consign them to work in his fields in chains. He could punish any member of his family as severely as he desired. **And he had this power as long as he lived**. Typically, newborn children were placed between the father's feet. If the father reached down and picked up the child, the baby stayed in the home. If the father turned and walked away, the child was discarded.

Now Paul introduces a very different way for fathers to relate to children. **He calls on them to be wise and considerate in managing the emotional well-being of their children so that they will not grow up to be angry adults**. I'm sure you agree that the last thing we need is more angry adults especially when we already have an epidemic of anger in our country today. I can't help but wonder what role parents have played in raising such a generation of people. May I suggest a few common mistakes to avoid if you don't want to provoke your children to anger?

- **DON'T OVER-PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN**. Parents who smother their children and prevent them from taking risks only handicap them from developing into mature adults. Sure, every parent is a little fearful when it comes to releasing our protective grip on our children, but when it's for their good, that's what we have to do! Children with helicopter parents are emotionally and behaviorally handicapped when it comes to making it on their own (*Cleveland Clinic, May 25, 2022 – Could your helicopter parenting actually be detrimental to your child's development?*). **As Christians, we must exercise faith in the Lord in all things (Whatever is not of faith is sin – Romans 14:23), especially when it comes to our children. Remember, God loves them more than we do.**
- **DON'T PLAY FAVORITES AMONG YOUR CHILDREN**. Language like, "***Why can't you be more like your brother***?" really hurts! Remember the terrible consequences of favoritism in the family of Isaac and Rebekah (**Genesis 25:28 -**

- Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob). It resulted in heartache and a broken family.

- **DON'T PUSH YOUR CHILDREN TO FULFILL YOUR DREAMS AND AMBITIONS**. One of the surest ways to create bitterness is to force your child to embrace your passion for something that he or she does not share.
- **DON'T WITHHOLD YOUR LOVE AND APPROVAL FROM YOUR CHILDREN.** Be very careful not to point out ONLY wrong behaviors. Also, do not require that your kids perform for your love. IF THEY HAVE TO DO SOMETHING TO GET IT, IT ISN'T LOVE.
- **DON'T MAKE YOUR CHILDREN FEEL LIKE THEY'RE A BURDEN TO BEAR*.*** "***If it weren't for you kids, we could be driving a Mercedes too***!" Children are a blessing from God (**Psalm 127:3 -- Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward**). Any sacrifice we make for them pales in comparison to the value they bring to our lives.
- **DON'T CRITICIZE YOUR KIDS IN PUBLIC*. There is a time for critiquing behavior, but try to do it privately.*** While it may make you feel better to vent your anger on them immediately, your criticism will only embarrass your children and negatively shape the opinion of others regarding them.
- **DON'T NEGLECT YOUR CHILDREN**. David neglected Absalom and he became the greatest heartbreak of his father's life (**See 2 Samuel 13-15**). There is no substitute for TIME and ATTENTION when it comes to raising our children.
- **DON'T USE CRUEL WORDS AND EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE WITH YOUR CHILDREN*.*** Kids cannot only be battered physically, but emotionally as well. Remember that the Spirit-filled person exercises **SELF-CONTROL** (**See Galatians 5:23**).

One of the most humbling experiences of my life was asking one of our children who was beginning to display some unreasonable anger what I might have done to provoke it. Perhaps more of us should ask the same question from time to time.

What to do: There is a positive message in **Ephesians 6:4**. It addresses what we should be routinely doing in our role as parents.

- **Train your children in the discipline of the Lord**. The focus here is on **WHAT WE DO** for our children. The word for **discipline** is the same word used in **Hebrews 12:10** where it is used of God who chastens us to produce holiness. **And so that is also the purpose of discipline when it comes to our children**. It is meant to result in "**the peaceful fruit of righteousness**". Here are a few

thoughts about the benefits of discipline and then some practical suggestions as to how to apply it to your children from author **Gary Ezzo**:

- ***THE BENEFITS OF APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE***.
  - **Discipline communicates love for your children** (**Proverbs 13:24 -- Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him).**
  - **Discipline protects your children** (**Proverbs 23:13-14 -- Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. 14 If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol –** the grave**).**
  - **Discipline brings hope to your children** (**Proverbs 23:18 –** to the child who accepts a parent's discipline **-- There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off). Believe it or not, healthy discipline provides your son or daughter with the expectation of a good life.**
  - **Discipline brings peace to the parents** (**Proverbs 29:17 -- Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart**). I can testify to this. My children are good parents who are passing blessing along to their children and that brings me peace and joy.
- ***THE APPLICATION OF APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE***.
  - **When disciplining, distinguish between immaturity and defiance**. The former is about not knowing, the latter about not doing! There is a big difference between the two.
  - **Discipline should always promote learning**. If this doesn't take place, then correction hasn't happened. Discipline is not an opportunity to vent anger.
  - **The level of discipline should be equal to the severity of the offense**.
  - **Discipline should include a sincere apology to the offended person**. That's how our kids learn the importance of reconciliation.
  - **Discipline should include restitution if a financial loss is incurred.**

Tony Evans, one of the great preachers in America, relates the time his brother, a state champion heavyweight wrestler rebelled against his father. "My father told him to do something. I don't remember what it was, but my brother didn't think he should have to. So, he frowned, shook his head and said, '**No**!' My father took him upstairs, and helped him pack his suitcase. My brother said, **'Yeah, I'm leaving! I don't have to take this!**' And he walked out of the house. Unfortunately, he forgot a few things. He forgot that it was snowing outside. He forgot that he didn't own a car. He forgot that he didn't have a job. About twenty minutes later...knock, knock, knock.

Brother was at the door wanting to come home. My father delivered him to the elements that he might be taught respect (**See Luke 15:11-24**).

- **Train your children in the instruction of the Lord**. The focus here is on **WHAT WE SAY** to our children. The word means "**verbal instruction with a view to correction**." It is the idea behind the entire book of Proverbs, which says that ***a wise child hears and obeys his father and mother***. Note that Paul distinguishes the kind of instruction a parent is to provide. It is "**instruction of the Lord**." It is distinctly Christian in its content. Obviously, this is done not only in the church but even more so in the family. I wonder how many of us take seriously our responsibility to instruct our children in the ways of the Lord. ***The ultimate goal is not that the child will obey the parent, but that through godly discipline and instruction, the child will come to obey the Lord Himself***.

  PARENTS – PLEASE DON'T NEGLECT THIS IMPORTANT DUTY -- In a national survey of **13-year-olds**, **George Barna** reported the following: (**1**) Nine out of ten young people accept the existence of God, the existence of the Trinity, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in genuine disciples of Christ and the fact that every person has an eternal soul. More than **4 out of 5** want to have a close relationship with God as a cornerstone in their lives; (**2**) Yet 75 % of these same 13-year-olds believe that the devil does not exist. He is just a symbol of evil; a good person earns entry into heaven by doing good works; people are morally neutral and make a choice to become good or bad; all of the sacred books from different religious traditions are merely different expressions of the same spiritual truths; and spiritual and moral truth can only be discovered through human reason and personal experience. **This may be the most spiritual open generation in the history of the world. It may also be the least informed when it comes to the Christian faith**!

  I know I've shared a lot of information in this message, but I feel like there are a few more pieces of advice I should share with our parents when it comes to their spiritual development. Here they are:

  - **Talk about the Lord with your children**. The Bible says that there is a two-step process that people go through in becoming a Christian. "**Anyone who comes to Jesus must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him**" – **Hebrews 11:6**. Note that it begins with believing He's real, that He exists. When parents talk about Jesus with their children, they are demonstrating that **THEY** believe He's real. How important do you think that is to their children?

- **Read the Word to your children**. That's what Jewish parents were instructed to do. **Deuteronomy 6:5-9 says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates**". Our kids will know how much we value the Scriptures, not by our words alone, but also by our actions. When we open our Bibles and read it together.
- **Pray to the Lord with your children**. Sure, we should pray FOR our kids, but we should also pray WITH them. Together, we should **ADORE** God for His goodness; **CONFESS** to Him our sins; **THANK** God for His blessings; and ask God for His **SUPPLY** (ACTS). That's how we teach our sons and daughters just how important our relationship with God is!

Conclusion: It's not enough to pray just for God's provision. If this is all we do, our kids will see Him only as the genie in the bottle ready to grant our wishes and that would be a big mistake. **Researcher Christian Smith's book, *Soul* Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers**, concludes that many young American adults have a faith characterized by "**moralistic, therapeutic deism**." According to this view of God, if we live good lives and if we're kind to others, then God will provide "**therapeutic benefits**" to us like self-esteem and happiness. Other than that, God is not involved much in our world. This view of God has a profound effect on prayer. Smith found that American teens personally prayed frequently; 40 percent prayed daily or more, and only 15 percent said they never prayed. However, their motivation for prayer largely focused on meeting their own needs. Some of the teens interviewed said: "**If I ever have a problem, I go pray**." "**It helps me deal with problems. … it calms me down for the most part**." "**Praying just makes me feel more secure like there's something there helping me out**." "**I would say prayer is an essential part of my success**." But Smith also found that many young Americans' prayers lacked any sense of repentance or adoration. Smith writes, "**This is not a religion of repentance from sin**." Again, Smith concludes that this "**distant God**" is "**not demanding … because his job is to solve problems and make people feel good. There is nothing here to evoke wonder and admiration**." Where do our sons and daughters learn to pray in a way that shows us **the greatness of God**? **By praying with their parents who have experienced Him to be all that and more**.