

# Guiding Children with a Father's Influence:

## *Ephesians 6 Perspective*

### The Significance of Father's Influence

We're looking into Ephesians chapter six today, focusing on a verse we covered last week - Ephesians 6, verse four. This verse addresses fathers and presents a fundamental principle that may not be new but is undoubtedly significant. The scripture reads: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath." This point might not provoke laughter, but it holds its importance. We'll discuss this shortly. Instead, bring them up with the Lord's training and admonition.

You're probably familiar with the scenario. As fathers, we all have stories to share about instances when our children made us angry. Let's consider those moments when we felt upset with our fathers or when they faced our ire. There's a universal tendency to feel this way at times. It's often said that a child won't see God as a father figure unless they find some divine attributes in their earthly fathers.

Being a full-time father is a considerable responsibility. It's more than being a part-time dad. The nation itself might hinge on the presence or absence of masculine leadership in countless homes. Recall Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. If Jesus were to share a parable today, it might center on the prodigal father - the parent who's physically present but emotionally absent. Leadership isn't just about authority; it also involves spiritual guidance and maintaining strong marital bonds.

### Guiding Principles for Dads

Among the most valuable legacies fathers can leave their children is a model of love for their mother. This notion is priceless. The Bible warns about the consequences of parental negligence, whether through setting poor examples or mishandling discipline. It goes beyond the "do as I say, not as I do" approach that often frustrates children.

Here are some Biblical stories of a few fathers who didn't measure up. While we may hesitate to label them, their actions had lasting consequences. David's indulgence of Absalom led to tragic outcomes. Eli, the priest, failed to address his sons' misbehavior, causing disgrace and defeat. Isaac's favoritism tore his family apart.

As outlined in the scripture, fathers' primary focus is to avoid provoking their children to anger. This provocation involves a consistent pattern of behavior that builds up resentment, culminating in outright hostility. Our aim is not to push our children toward rebellion or foster pent-up frustration. It's alright to annoy and embarrass our kids playfully. It's part of the joy of parenting. What we mustn't do is provoke them.

Let's examine ways in which we might inadvertently make our kids angry. Remember, this isn't a guide on how to provoke them; it's a list of behaviors to avoid.

## Nurturing Strong Bonds with Time and Encouragement

Neglect is one of the most harmful forms of abuse a child can endure. Indifference is the opposite of love, not hate. Recent studies reveal that foster care placements often stem from parental disinterest. Neglect sends a powerful message that a child is invisible or unimportant.

Recall the song "Cat's in the Cradle." It's a stark reminder that if we don't make time for our children when they're young, they may not make time for us when we're old. This song's essence holds a vital lesson – invest time in your children as they grow up.

Children yearn for their father's attention. However, fathers can often become preoccupied with various tasks, brushing their children aside with promises of getting back to them later. By the time some fathers try to engage, their children have grown up. The baffling question remains – where does time escape to? It's remarkable how swiftly time flies; our children mature and sometimes move out. This transition is natural.

Brook Adams, a grandchild of second president John Adams, documented his boyhood experiences in a diary. At age eight, he wrote about a remarkable day he spent fishing with his father – a memory that resonated throughout his life. This single day had a profound impact on him, shaping his outlook and attitude.

Brooke's father, Charles Francis Adams, in his diary, simply recorded: "Went fishing with my son. A day wasted." To the boy, it was an extraordinary day; to the father, it seemed squandered. However, any time invested in loved ones is akin to money in the bank. The influence of a father on his children is immeasurable. This influence underscores the significance of taking one's role as a father seriously.

Paul's message about family relationships, particularly addressing fathers, resonates with urgency. Children grow up and move on, reinforcing the importance of seizing the opportunity to teach, invest, and admonish. How does a child spell "love"? T-I-M-E. Devoting time to listen and engage in their lives holds tremendous value. Children eagerly respond to this attention, which communicates recognition and acceptance.

Even the smallest actions, such as admiring their Lego creations or coloring pages, can ignite their enthusiasm.

When fathers walk over to admire what their children have built or created, it signifies their interest and acceptance. Ignoring or overlooking their seemingly minor interests, especially by fathers, can make children feel unimportant. Reflecting on my experience, I joined the band in seventh grade, playing the clarinet, an instrument chosen because my brother had one and didn't play it. Although I couldn't play it well, assembling it was a skill I had mastered. I recall proudly showing my parents how I put the clarinet together, and their pride mirrored my accomplishment.

Acknowledging a child's endeavors, even if their significance isn't immediately apparent, can strengthen their sense of importance and self-worth. This practice extends to one's relationship with their Heavenly Father, instilling the value of recognizing and appreciating the efforts of others.

Although it may appear inconsequential to some, whatever holds significance in your life also matters to God. His concern extends even to the seemingly trivial. Nothing is too small to bring before the Lord. The fact that God cares about such minor details reveals His greatness. His willingness to engage with matters of such insignificance underscores His understanding and empathy. The incarnation exemplifies this concept – God becoming a baby. The ability to comprehend and care for the minutest aspects of our lives is a mark of His greatness.

## Avoiding the Pitfalls of Favoritism

Favoritism is a common source of provocation for children. Have you ever fallen into that trap, particularly if you have multiple children? Isaac favored Esau, while Rebecca preferred Jacob. This rivalry caused turmoil within the family and had enduring consequences for their descendants, perpetuating conflicts that continue to affect the Middle East. Comparing children in their presence can lead to resentment and feelings of inadequacy. Such actions foster dangerous competition for parental approval.

When parents exhibit favoritism, children readily adopt this behavior. They might start favoring one sibling over another or prefer one parent. Have you ever asked your children who their favorite parent is? Although it might be light-hearted, it can inadvertently send the wrong message. The Bible records that Israel loved Joseph more than his other children, as he was the son of his old age. He gifted Joseph a distinctive, colorful tunic, making his preference conspicuous.

Joseph's unique tunic acted as a catalyst for jealousy and hatred among his brothers. This preference led to hatred and strained relationships. The brothers' resentment culminated in Joseph's sale to Ishmaelite traders after they faked his death. The lesson

here is that parental favoritism can lead siblings to betray each other or seek their father's blessing through harmful means. Fathers, avoid comparing your children's achievements or abilities, as it can foster unhealthy rivalry.

As fathers, you may eventually have multiple children, each unique and valuable. Love them all equally, appreciating their individuality and celebrating their differences, much as God does with us. Our Heavenly Father doesn't exhibit favoritism; He loves us all the same. Reflect on this incredible truth – God's boundless love encompasses every person, regardless of their qualities. It's a love we're called to emulate, even though it may seem daunting. This is where the Holy Spirit steps in, enabling us to spread His love to others.

Jesus' transformative impact is evident when we allow His influence to extend beyond our hearts. While we often talk about having Jesus in our hearts, it's equally important to let Him flow through our actions, words, and interactions. Allowing Him to work, speak, and minister through us demonstrates His power.

Teach your children that they are unique, fashioned in God's image as individuals. God values them with their distinct personalities. It's true that not everyone will appreciate their personalities, and some may even try to reshape them. Nonetheless, remember that God designed them purposefully.

## Fostering Self-Worth

A third way Fathers can provoke their children to wrath is through discouragement. Colossians 3:21 cautions fathers not to provoke their children lest they become disheartened. Presently, discouragement is prevalent, with many struggling and feeling dejected. Children who aren't regularly complimented or encouraged by their parents can become emotionally fragile, teetering on the edge of despair. If a child consistently hears what's wrong without any recognition of their efforts, they may internalize a sense of inadequacy. Over time, they might believe that they can't do anything right, leading them to question why they should even bother trying.

Encouragement is paramount. Just as children need correction for their mistakes, they equally require acknowledgment for their achievements. Children thrive when they receive approval and are affirmed for their positive actions. Reassurance and affirmation build their confidence and self-esteem. Kids rely on parents for support, with mothers often being their most enthusiastic cheerleaders. Fathers have a unique role in this dynamic too. While mothers are associated with comforting, fathers can bring a different dimension of affirmation and encouragement.

A father's approval is one of the most profound affirmations a child can experience. It's a moment that lingers in the heart, a cherished memory. These instances become

indelible memories, especially when parents are no longer on Earth. Crafting such moments with your children, especially moments of affirmation and encouragement, leaves an enduring legacy. In the grand scheme of life, moments are fleeting. Life is transient, like a vapor, here today and gone tomorrow. Use your time to build these moments with your family.

A father's approval, particularly for a son, holds immense value. It surpasses even the joy of winning the lottery. Reflect on the times Jesus received affirmation from His Heavenly Father – moments when God proudly declared His pleasure in His son. These instances invigorated Jesus, just as they do for any child who receives their father's approval. Jesus' perfect obedience garnered His Father's delight, reminding us that we, too, don't have to be perfect parents. Honesty, humility, and authenticity are vital.

## Embracing Humility Through Accountability

The three simple yet profound sentences that parents often find difficult to say – "I'm sorry," "I was wrong," and "Please forgive me" – carry immense power. These expressions of humility and accountability can bridge gaps and strengthen relationships. When a father humbly admits his mistakes, it conveys a potent lesson to children. Such humility is a testimony of genuine love and authenticity, reinforcing the notion that it's alright to be human and to acknowledge imperfections.

Another crucial lesson can be learned when parents model humility and accountability by uttering the often-difficult phrases: "I'm sorry," "I was wrong," and "Please forgive me." These admissions of imperfection are essential teachings for children, demonstrating that no one is without flaws. We're all in the process of transformation under the construction of the Holy Spirit. Imperfections persist, but acknowledging them is a step toward growth and change. Accepting our limitations is a lesson children need to grasp early in life.

Additionally, this experience of asking for and granting forgiveness cultivates empathy and compassion. A teenager who witnesses their parent expressing regret and seeking reconciliation learns the art of reconciliation for themselves. Revival, often seen as a distant phenomenon, can actually be sparked by these simple acts of humility. History is replete with instances where one person's humility catalyzed powerful revival movements.

## Lessons from God's Love: Emulating Unconditional Affection

Lastly, if you genuinely wish to stir up anger in your children, use love as a bargaining chip. Manipulating your affection based on their behavior creates emotional turmoil. Love shouldn't be treated as a conditional reward or punishment. Consider this: Where

would we stand if our Heavenly Father evaluated our worth based on performance? Thankfully, God's love isn't dependent on our actions. His unconditional love is unwavering, unaffected by our shortcomings.

Remember the sage advice of William Shakespeare, who likened life to a stage where we all play roles. But God isn't a critic like Simon Cowell on "America's Got Talent," appraising our every move. God's love is unconditional and constant. Unlike human judges, He doesn't grade us based on performance. His love is independent of our actions and is based solely on His unchanging character.

## Taking the Wisdom on Ephesians 6 to Heart

This liberating truth can reshape our perspective. God's love isn't a reward for perfect behavior; it's a continuous gift. His love is steadfast, everlasting, and not subject to our failures. It's a love that we can rely on, that offers solace in times of doubt or discouragement. Our Heavenly Father's love is unwavering, an unbreakable bond that assures us we are cherished just as we are.

As parents, we're called to emulate this unconditional love. In our homes, our love should reflect the Father's love. Children may test us, disappoint us, or even hurt us, but they can never sever the love we have for them. God's love perseveres through challenges and difficulties, and so should ours. When you feel overwhelmed or on the verge of giving up, remember that God doesn't give up on us. Just as He walks alongside us in our struggles, let's stand by our children with unwavering love and support.

Ultimately, it's about mirroring God's love within our families. Through our actions, attitudes, and interactions, we can embody the unconditional love that God lavishes on us. As parents, we strive to exemplify God's love to our children, even when they may test our patience. May we remember that our Heavenly Father never gives up on us and let that steadfast love guide our approach as we navigate the joys and challenges of parenting.