

June 20, 2010

FATHER'S DAY 2010

Jeffery D. Woodhams

I know that many of you are grandparents, great grand parents, or even great-great grandparents. Let me say this to all of the men here today: you are an influence within your own families, and you are an influence on my children. You are showing them that creating a lasting marriage is worth it. You are showing them what it means to be dedicated to the Lord, His church, and His people. You are showing them the importance of investing not just Sunday morning but your whole life into God's service and the service of your country. You are living examples of heroes that they can tell their own children about someday. Is this message for you today? You bet it is!

I'm going to tell you a true story and I want to see if it strikes you as it struck me.

Some years ago, executives of a greeting-card company decided to do something special for Mother's Day. They set up a table in a federal prison, inviting any inmate who so desired to send a free card to his mom. The lines were so long, they had to make another trip to the factory to get more cards. Due to the success of the event, they decided to do the same thing on Father's Day, but this time no one came. Not one prisoner felt the need to send a card to his dad. Many had no idea who their fathers even were.¹

On the surface, it may sound as though the fathers were unimportant to the prisoners; but the real story here is that the fathers failed these men, and that failure had terrible results.

Let me add one more statement here: 95 percent of those on death row *hate* their fathers.² What is also sobering is that "the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that children living in two-parent families who had only a fair or poor relationship with their fathers were at 68 percent higher risk of smoking, drinking, and drug usage than teens having a good or excellent relationship with dads."³ I think there's a pretty clear link between broken men and broken bonds of fatherhood.

This is why it is of utmost importance to be involved with our children and grandchildren and do everything in our power to raise them properly. Let's talk about this today, starting in Ephesians 6:1-4:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

1 James Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 60. From James Robison, *My Father's Face* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1997).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid, 56.

I'm sure the fathers and mothers out there like those first three verses: "Yeah, Junior, you'd better obey! It says so *right there* in the Bible!" Yes, children, you ought to obey your parents; you ought to honor them and make them proud. Now, let me ask you all: how many of you have parents, either alive or in heaven? Okay, so you have parents, and you are their children. Guess what? You still get to honor them and make them proud. You *get to*; I don't say that you *have to* because you *get to*. It's your privilege to make them proud as they watch over you. Isn't that what you want to do? I'm sure you do.

But I digress. Let's carefully consider verse 4 this morning:

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

I'm going to do something I don't normally do this morning. I'm going to ask you to contribute here in a few minutes. I want to know how we provoke our children to wrath. Some translations use words like "exasperate" here. How do we do this? Or, what are the things that exasperate us, even to this day? I'll start the list and then I'd like to ask you to add to it or perhaps share a story that fits here.

I'd say that we can exasperate, or provoke our children to wrath, by mocking them. Nobody likes to be made fun of, but I've heard parents say things to their kids for the express purpose of embarrassing them, calling them names, cussing them out, talking loudly about their lack of intelligence or skills. I had neighbors as a child who would pull their car into their driveway, honk their horn, and then start cursing at their kids at the top of their lungs, calling them all kinds of names that I can't repeat here. There is something very, very wrong with that.

I'd also say that we can provoke our children by constantly jumping to conclusions and putting them on the defensive: "Why did you do that? What's wrong with you?" No investigation, no real interest in finding out the truth, just looking for a scapegoat. We can provoke kids by accusing them, or automatically assuming the worst about them.

We can provoke kids by lying to them. Few things can hurt a child like making promises that you don't intend to keep. Sure, kids will understand when things don't work out as planned once in a while; but a pattern of lies leaves a lasting impression and destroys trust. When I was in college, I spent a summer working in the Baptist Children's Home in Elkhart, Indiana. One of the worst behaviors I observed while I was there wasn't from the children; it was from their fathers. Two fathers in particular were notorious for promising that they would come get their kids on Friday or Saturday or whenever, and the kids would be excited about it. The day would finally arrive, and they'd get ready and pack their clothes, but time and again these fathers just simply wouldn't show up. Folks, that will tear your heart out. A week would go by, dad would call, make another promise, and repeat the cycle. That is provoking children.

Ignoring children leaves deep, deep wounds. Some fathers get so absorbed in their work that they have no time for their kids. I want to read this to you, and then I want to give some of you a chance to talk. This is from a book called *Bringing Up Boys* by James Dobson:

I was talking recently to such a person—a fifty-eight-year-old man who described the unhappy memory of his father. His dad had been a minister who was consumed by work and other interests. The father never came to sporting events or any other activities in which his son was a

participant. He neither disciplined nor affirmed him. By the time the boy was a senior in high school, he was the starting guard on a winning big-school football team. When his team qualified for the state championship, this boy was desperate to have his dad see him play. He begged, “Would you please be there on Friday night? It is very important to me.” The father promised to come.

On the night of the big game, the boy was on the field warming up when he happened to see his father enter the stadium with two other men wearing business suits. They stood talking among themselves for a moment or two and then left. The man who told me this story had tears streaming down his cheeks as he relived that difficult moment of so long ago.⁴

We can’t afford to ignore our children.

Now, let’s give some of you a chance to describe what it means to provoke children to wrath, or to tell a story that fits here.

...

Thank you. Let’s turn back to that key verse in Ephesians 6:4 and finish it out: *but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*. What we find is that the first part of the verse gave us the negative —“Don’t provoke your children to wrath.” Now it turns to the positive: “Here is what you should be doing.” That set up in itself is a good lesson in child rearing, in that we want to keep the positives and the negatives together.

This part of the verse tells us what to do, but how do we do it? We need to know what *nurture* and *admonition* are, and once we know that, we will be well on our way to knowing how to bring up our children and grandchildren. The NIV falls flat here, stating that we are to bring them up in the “training and instruction of the Lord.” What’s the difference between *training* and *instruction*? There is a difference, but not the kind of difference intended in the original language. The Amplified Bible tells us to “rear them [tenderly] in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord.” That is much better, but we still have to deal with that word *admonition*.

Let’s make this simple. Let’s describe *nurture* as teaching the things which are healthful and *admonition* as teaching the things which are unhealthful. You might also say that nurture is the “sweet side” and that admonition is the “discipline side.” You have to give both. Some people think, “Well, I love my child too much to discipline him.” I want to make this clear: you can’t have love without discipline. They go together. Children need affirmation, they need sweetness, and they need praise; but they also need boundaries. They need to know that we care enough to stop them from doing things that aren’t in their best interest. They need the sweetness along with the discipline.

Think of a rocket. That rocket needs boost and guidance, just like a child needs boost and guidance. Yes, give that child all the boost you can give it, but point it in the right direction! Boost without guidance equals disaster!

We all know that discipline without love is abuse; but refusing to discipline is also abuse because the child needs to feel that you love him enough to set boundaries for him. That’s why children—get this!

4 Ibid, 56-57.

—that’s why they push the limits at times! You might feel like a failure or that you haven’t done right when your children “act out,” but let me assure you that acting out is the child’s way of seeing if those boundaries are still there, and if you love him enough to intervene.

We are to bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord, the positive with the negative, the praise and affection with the discipline. That’s the formula for a healthy child.

Does this guarantee that children will automatically turn out right? No, but it does increase the odds. Remember that statistic from the beginning? “[T]he National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that children living in two-parent families who had only a fair or poor relationship with their fathers were at 68 percent higher risk of smoking, drinking, and drug usage than teens having a good or excellent relationship with dads.”⁵ What we are doing is increasing the odds that our children will turn out right. Ultimately, the choice is up to them. Our job is to be the most loving, the most honest, the most upright, the most praiseworthy men we can be. If we are the kind of man we ought to be, and if we apply the Scripture to our child rearing, then we drastically move the odds in favor of creating strong, healthy, godly young people.

5 Ibid, 56.