

Ephesians 6:4

Have you ever noticed how easy it is

To give other people advice on how to raise their children

You can always spot a bunch of things others are doing wrong

And yet you rarely know what to do about your own problems

There are probably more self help books on parenting than any other field

That is because parents want to do a good job

And the baby is not delivered

With an instruction manual on how to put their life together

I think it's safe to say

No parent raising a child on their own resources will do a good job

Some will do better than others

Some will instill character or honesty or other admirable qualities

But none will succeed

To succeed in raising children we need God's help

As Christians we are to be distinct in the way we live

And the way we raise our children

Ps 127 – Children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward.

As those who have been called by God

We need to recognize that all children are a gift from God

God's gift to us

And He has given us the manual on how to raise them

When Paul wrote our text it was revolutionary

Roman law made the father absolute monarch in his home

Children could be sold into slavery disposed of

Or even murdered by their father

Baby girls were not considered as valuable as baby boys

So some daughters were dropped off to become temple prostitutes

Today is not all that different

China has mandated forced abortions
And I would guess that their orphanages are full of girls not boys
But you don't have to go to China to find children devalued
Our own country has made unwanted babies disposable
And this mindset has crept into child rearing
Our country has gone from children being a gift from God
To believing that children are an inconvenience and burden
About 1.5 million babies are murdered each year
Another 1.5 million are removed from their parents because of abuse
We are a society that has placed pleasure and convenience ahead of responsibility
And the country is paying a great price for it
We have devalued parenthood and children
We have defined loving our children as giving them anything they want
Discipline has left the house
And every generation is more wounded and less responsible than the last one
Diametrically opposed to the wisdom of the world is the wisdom of God
Those whom God loves – He disciplines
Not out of anger or frustration but out of love and concern for our well being
God doesn't give us everything we ask for
Because He knows having it would harm us
By inference

God is telling us not to give our children everything they want

But use wisdom in our gifts

Not everything the world lets their children do or have is good
In fact much of it is harmful to the child – we need to be wise
Then **God tells us to discipline our children just as He disciplines us**
Not out of anger or frustration but for our own good
There was a study by Harvard University professors
Which came up with four crucial factors
In predicting children who would not be delinquent

These critical factors for raising good kids are

The first factor is the discipline of the father

It should be fair firm and consistent

Undisciplined children become a shame to the home

Children who are disciplined arbitrarily become angry and rebellious

The second factor is the mother's supervision of the home

She should know where the children are all the time

She should know what they are doing – who their friends are

And she should always be available to them

The third factor is the parents affection

This affection should be evident to the children

The children should never have to guess if they are loved

And affection should also be shown between husband and wife

The final factor is family cohesiveness

That would include time spent together

Our generation came up with the phrase “quality time”

To ease our guilt about how little “real time” we spent with our children

I am not talking about “quality time” – I mean time –lots of time

It takes time with your children to demonstrate love and develop character

Remember it doesn't take a village - it takes two parents to raise a child

If you want to increase your child's chances of becoming a problem

Here is what you need to do

Let him express himself anyway he feels like it

Don't manage his life – after all he is just a young adult

Be sure to give in when he throws a temper tantrum

Believe his lies even when others are telling you differently

Make sure he knows that no matter how he behaves

You are on his side and will support him and get him out of trouble

Criticize others openly and routinely

Give an allowance that comes with no responsibilities

Instead of disciplining him belittle him
Let him know that he doesn't measure up
And enforce the rules only when you're mad
If you work at it you can almost certainly raise a problem
But none of us really want to do that

Let's take a look at the advice Paul gives us
When we look at today's verse
We find there is a positive and a negative aspect to raising children
The negative is this – Do not make your children mad hostile or bitter
You don't want them to turn away from you
So that they might turn away from the things you hold dear
Colossians puts it this way – **Do not provoke your children to anger lest they be discouraged**

The Greek word translated provoke means – to irritate
Don't do things that frustrate or exasperate your children
You have this treasure given you for a little while by God
To train and nurture and teach how to live
Crosby Stills and Nash put it this way
Teach your children well, their father's hell did slowly go by
And feed them on your dreams, the one they picked, the one you'll know by
Can you hear and do you care and can't you see you must be free
To teach your children what you believe in;
To make a world that we can live in
Don't continually frustrate your children
You will lose your ability to influence them in a positive way

John MacArthur lists ten ways you can provoke a child to wrath

1. You can provoke your child to wrath by overprotecting them

By keeping them under your control all the time
By never trusting them – always be suspicious of their motives

Children need room to express themselves and try new adventures

I think one of the problems our children face is this

They don't have experience to know how to handle the outside world

They get into the culture and fall apart

2 you can provoke your child to wrath by showing favoritism

Isaac favored Esau over Jacob – Rebekah favored Jacob over Esau

That tore their family apart and created one big mess

3 You can provoke your children to wrath by setting unrealistic goals for them

Some parents crush their children by adding to the pressure they already face

Pressure to achieve academically – pressure to be good in sports or music

Pressure to be pretty or popular

This added pressure has little to do with the needs of the child

And more to do with the parents own self image

The child often gets the sense that

No matter how hard they try or how much they do

They will never be able to satisfy you

4. You can provoke you child by letting them sin and get away with it

Ultimately they will face the real world where actions generate consequences

And their ability to achieve will be very limited

5. You can provoke your child to wrath by discouraging them

Keep in touch with your child

Understand what they are up against and what they are going through

Always be a listening ear and understanding heart

Reward them with love and honor

Particularly when they achieve the goals you have set with them

If you set goals with them and they work to achieve those goals

Then you act as though it's no big deal

It will lead to discouragement and anger

6. You can provoke your children to anger by failing to sacrifice for them

In other words by making him feel like he is an intrusion in your life

An interruption or a bother

Parenthood costs – it isn't cheap – it takes time and money

Don't give yourself top quality stuff and your kids the leftovers

Whether it's true or not when your child believes he is not important to you

He will begin to resent you

7. You can provoke your child to anger by not letting them be kids

They will make mistakes – they will make messes

Laugh it off – don't laugh at them but laugh with them

Let them make mistakes – don't condemn them

One mistake I consistently see parents make

Is they discipline their children for being childish

Doing things like knocking over their water glass

And they will then let the kid look them right in the eyes and defy them

And do nothing about it

Discipline for disobedience – show them love when they are childish

One of my granddaughters cut the hair of her sisters doll

When mom asked why –

She replied – I wanted to know if the scissors could cut hair

Why did you cut your sister's doll instead of your own

Because I thought they might

8. You can provoke your child to anger by neglect

The story of David and Absalom is a wonderful illustration of neglect

When David didn't fulfill his responsibility as a father and king

His son Absalom executed his wayward brother

David sent Absalom away and then brought him back

But instead of bringing him back into the family

And spending time with him shaping his character

David left Absalom on the outside

As a result Absalom grew to hate David

9. You can provoke your child to anger with abusive words

I counseled a young woman whose husband was abusive

She said that worse than the physical abuse was the verbal abuse

Verbal abuse is a terrible weapon against someone's self esteem

Words of sarcasm and words of ridicule

We say things to our children that we would never say to another person

The home needs to be a safe place for our kids self esteem

10. You can provoke your child to anger by physical abuse

An angry child is quite often a beaten or abused child

Whose punishment comes because the parent is angry

You can say with some certainty that abused children make abusive parents

That is the negative; the positive is this

Bring up your children with discipline and teach them about the Lord

Teach them about the Lord

They won't get there themselves – you have to raise them that way

Proverbs – A child left to himself brings his mother shame

Quite often it isn't what parents do that causes problems

It is what they don't do

“Bring them up” is a call to train your children in the Lord's ways

Proverbs 4 – Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life

The issues of life come out of the heart

Out of the good heart flows one behavior or lifestyle

Out of the corrupt heart flows another

All conduct – moral or immoral – is directly linked to the condition of the heart

Our task as parents is to address the heart condition of our children

If we target behavior only it will correct outward activity

But we will not be addressing the real issues of disobedience and self will

You see - above all else parenting is redemptive

The battleground in a child's development is the heart

The first thing your child needs to know

Is that he or she has a sinful heart

And it is unable to change without Jesus

If your child is continuing in disobedience and deception

It is not lack of maturity or understanding

These activities are coming from what is in their heart

I heard Susan Sarandon on a news program

She said that the world will be a safe loving place if we could just educate everybody

And she meant it – she thinks the problem with mankind is knowledge

But education isn't the problem – Scripture tells us

The heart is more deceitful than anything else and is desperately sick. Who can understand it?

The first task of parenting is not to get them under control

To make them more socially acceptable or raise them with polite behavior

The first goal of parenting is salvation and sanctification

The goal of parenting is to have your child saved from sin and hell

And then to walk with the Lord all of their life

Any objective other than that is less than that

It is behavior modification

Hell is real and our first priority as parents

Is to keep our children out of it and to change their behavior

Not by a set of rules of conduct – all religions have those

We want to change our children

By leading them into a relationship with the living God

So that means we reprove correct and discipline

Lovingly and consistently

But those are the negative side of the tools we are to use to raise children

Our verse also tells us we are to instruct them in the Lord

What are we to teach them

The answer is in Deuteronomy, chapter 6

Hear O Israel, the Lord God is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might

Jesus said the greatest commandment was

To love you Lord with all your heart and soul and strength and the second was similar. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves

The first thing to teach your children is love

Love for God and love for others

If any of us learn love and all that it entails

We will be wonderful citizens and headed for eternal glory

You teach love by introducing them to the God of the Bible

The only true unfailing love in the universe is the love of God

Introduce your children to Jesus

Teach them that He gave up His life for them

It is important for them to know that bottom line - all love is sacrificial

And you teach love by living it

Love is an abstract concept that isn't found much in the world

You can talk about love and what it entails

And it will go in one ear and out the other

It takes a real life demonstration for the truth to be made real to us

Second, teach your children to obey God

The words I am commanding you today shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them to your sons.

Teaching obedience is a two fold process

Set up rules that are real and fair and enforce them

And even more importantly follow the rules yourself

If your children see you pushing the edge all the time they will push the edge

And they will go further than you do

So then teach your children to follow your example

Now training them to follow your good example will take work

They'll pick up your bad habits without any effort at all

I can't tell you how many sitcoms I have watched where the child is bad

And one parent says to the other – usually the husband to the wife - where did they learn that

And the wife is staring right at the husband

It's funny on TV but it is character defeating in real life
Then relate life's adventure to the glory of God
Examples of His handiwork and promises are everywhere

The heavens declare the glory of God

Stare at the stars or a sunset or a rainbow and relate it to God's goodness and faithfulness

When you watch TV together use the good and the bad that you see
For life examples of how to behave and what the world is like
In other words in every situation

Give your children God's perspective

Then show your children just how important your beliefs are by living them

This is the key

What is really important to you will become important to your kids

And they may stray but when life decisions are on the line – they'll have it

Finally teach them to be wary of the world

Take them into the world let them see how bad choices play out

Get them involved in a ministry to help the unfortunate

And then talk to them about what life choices might have brought them to the point of needing help

The world around us is a classroom

Use it to show forth God's goodness and glory

And to teach that the world philosophy is a trap waiting to ensnare the unwary

And those who get ensnared in it are always unfulfilled and lonely inside

Eventually your children will be in the world and on their own

It is important that when they begin to taste and experience it

That they understand that much of it is harmful to them

Susanna Wesley raised 17 children including John and Charles

Her life was so hectic that at times

She pulled her apron up over her head just stood there and prayed

She wrote this

The parent who studies to subdue self will in his child, works together with God in the saving of a soul. The one who indulges self will do the devil's work, makes religion impractical, salvation unobtainable, and does all that is in him to drown his child, soul and body, forever

Don't indulge self will in your children

You will not enjoy your children and neither will anyone else

But more importantly you may be condemning them

Remember

Teach your children well and feed them on your dreams

Can you hear and do you care and can't you see

You must be free to teach your children what you believe in;

To make a world that we can live in