

“BREAKING THROUGH...A BREAKTHROUGH IN YOUR FAMILY”

Illustration: There was a girl who submitted this story to Reader’s Digest that says, *My 16 year old brother, Ryan, was out late with friends one night when he suddenly remembered it was Father’s Day, and he had neglected to get our dad a card. Well, he ran into a store to find a picked over rack with only two cards left. Selecting one he brought it home and presented it to our father. Upon opening it Dad read this message: “You’ve been like a father to me...” Somewhat puzzled, he looked at Ryan, and Ryan quickly tried to explain, “Well, Dad, it was either that one or the card that said: “Now that I’m a father too...” Well...dads...we haven’t forgotten you this morning...in fact, can we just give our dads a hand...thanks for all the times you have answered the call. Dads, you matter to God and you matter to us. In fact, you matter so much that God has something in His Word today that He wants to say directly to you...so take your Bible and go to Ephesians 6. We are continuing in this series where we’re talking about having a spiritual breakthrough rather than a spiritual breakdown...and today...we want to talk about having a spiritual breakthrough...in our families...and dads...that begins with us.*

Now...we’re going to focus on one verse here in Ephesians 6...verse 4...and a guy by the name of Paul wrote Ephesians and here in verse 4 Paul is right in the middle of addressing a lot of different relationship dynamics...and he really starts all this in chapter 5...but he spends some time talking to husbands and wives and he talks about some different dynamics of that relationship...he addresses some different dynamics about parent and child relationships...and then he takes some time to address the master and slave relationship...and our verse 4 is right in the middle of Paul talking about the parent and child relationship...and he speaks directly to dads...so let’s take a look...verse 4 here in Ephesians 6...Paul says: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4, New International Version) **Illustration:** I read about a dad who made his young son call him every time he went to his best friend’s house just so he would know that his son made it their safe...even though it wasn’t very far away. And one day the young son forgot to call...and so his dad told him that if it happened again he would have to come home and he wouldn’t be able to play at his friend’s house. Sure enough...the next time the son forgot. So...the dad picked up the phone, called the friend’s house once, and then hung up. A few seconds later the dad’s phone rang and it was his son to let him know he had made it to his friend’s house. The dad asked him what took him so long to call...so the son explained that he and his friend had started playing and he just forgot. He said, “But Dad...I heard the phone ring once and I remembered.” “Well...son...I’m glad you remembered...have a great time.” That phone call was a reminder for that little boy that his dad had an expectation of him. Now...dads...this verse that we’re looking at today feels kind of like God calling us on the phone, letting it ring once, and then hanging up...to remind us that we can find his expectation for us and who we are as dads in His Word. And so we’re going to spend the next few moments focusing on this one verse here on Father’s Day.

Now...listen...I’m talking in the context of Father’s Day here today, but no one gets to tune me out...even though our verse starts off by saying, “Fathers...” I’m going to be talking about some good relationship principles for parenting and leading kids...whether we’re talking about leading your own kids or leading some spiritual kids that you get to mentor...okay? But let’s take some time today and talk to dads about this spiritual breakthrough that we can have in our families...because it does begin with us as dads. You can take some notes on the new RCC app if you’ve got it on your mobile device...you can also take notes on the back of your bulletin, too. Let’s dive right in...if you have to have a spiritual breakthrough in your family then...first...

1. DO NOT EXASPERATE.

This is the first step that Paul identifies here in our verse 4...go back to it again...Paul simply says: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children...* (Ephesians 6:4, New International Version) Now...I’m not sure that the NIV here has the best translation...because in the original language this verse more closely says: “Do not provoke

your children to anger.” In other words...we have to take into consideration the feelings and the emotions of our children. This is a really important teaching for us here today...it would have been a really important teaching for the people Paul was writing to back then as well. Back in the New Testament days...the rights of children were non-existent. A father had the most absolute power over his children. He could sell them as slaves, work them in the fields, he could put them in chains if he wanted to. He could even take the law into his own hands and punish them however he wanted to...even inflict the death penalty on his own children! The notion that a father had any sort of obligation toward his children simply did not exist back in Biblical times...so understand what Paul is doing here as he writes to the Ephesians...he’s letting them know that because of Christ...you’re going to need to do things different now...Jesus changes every area and every spectacle of life.

And that’s true for us today, too. Our parenting...whether we’re moms or dads...should be subjected to His grace...our parenting should be brought under the good news of the gospel. When we’re in Jesus the Bible says we are a new creation...right? So...if we’re a new creation then we should parent in a new way...so Paul says, “Don’t provoke your children to anger.” In other words...avoid all severity and unreasonable commands. When the commands of a parent are unreasonable and severe then the spirit of a child becomes irritated...even discouraged. The Bible says: *Fathers, do not embitter your children,* (that word embitter is another word that carries the same meaning as our word for exasperate here in Ephesians 6...Fathers, don’t provoke your children to this anger...) *or they will become discouraged.* (Colossians 3:21, New International Version) How do we make sure that we’re not exasperating our children...how do we make sure that we’re not provoking them to anger...let me give you three things and then we’ll move one...first...

>Avoid anger. Listen...dads...and moms, too...the quickest way that we can provoke our children to anger...the quickest way that we can become severe and give unreasonable commands to our kids is through our own anger. I’ve got five kids...and I’ll admit...I react and respond to my kids in anger sometimes...and that is never a good practice. When your kids see you angry and you respond and react to them in anger all the time then they’ll think it is okay for them to be angry, too. But look at what James says...he says: *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...* (James 1:19, New International Version) That’s hard to do in a lot of situations...isn’t it. I don’t know about you...but it’s even harder for me to do with my kids sometimes. Here’s the thing we have to understand...and if we can get this down...what a spiritual breakthrough we’ll have in our families...but when your kids submit to you out of your anger...when my kids submit to me out of my anger...they submit only because I’m the strongest...not because I’m right...and this isn’t about being the strongest. Angry parents eventually have angry kids. Secondly, avoiding exasperation means that we need to...

>Resist punishment. When it comes to your kids you need to resist punishment. Now...that may sound crazy, but as parents we’re not called to punish our kids...we’re called to train our kids. Do you know what the key ingredient is to making sure we’re training our kids and not punishing our kids? Love. The Bible says: *...love builds up.* (1 Corinthians 8:1, New International Version) We’re called to train our children...not punish them...because when we punish them in our anger we are doing it from a principle of revenge...but when we train them we are doing it from a principle of love. Now...you might sit there and say, “So what are you saying, Ferris? That we just let our kids do whatever they want...that there are no consequences for the actions of our kids?” I’m not saying that at all...I’m saying that what you do when your child does something that needs to have a consequence...it all begins with what emotion you’ve got going on as you do that...if it’s anger...like we just talked about...then you’re punishing and getting revenge...if it’s love then you’re training and building them up. We’re going to talk more about training here in a minute...if you want to avoid exasperation then you also need to...

>Always be in control. You have to always be in control if you don’t want to provoke your own kids to anger and wrath. **Illustration:** I read about a young father in a grocery store who was pushing a shopping cart with his little boy strapped in the front of the cart. And this little boy was having quite the day...pulling cans off the shelves and throwing them to the ground, he was fussing a lot...even screaming and crying at the top of his

lungs at times. The father seemed to be very calm...and as he continued down each aisle, he quietly talked to himself, "Easy now, Donald. Keep calm, Donald. Steady, boy. It's alright, Donald." Just kind of over and over. A mom went by and she was greatly impressed by this young father's calm attitude. She said, "You certainly know how to talk to an upset child—quietly and gently." And then she bent down to the little boy and said, "What seems to be the trouble, Donald?" The father said, "Uh, he's Henry...I'm Donald." Sometimes that's how fatherhood is...right...it makes you talk to yourself. If you don't want to exasperate your children...you have to always be in control. Look at the value God puts on this...the Bible says: *Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.* (Proverbs 16:32, New International Version) It's better to control your temper than conquer a city. If you'll be these things then you won't be exasperating your kids...and that's the first thing Paul says we need to do...now here's what I want you to notice...he tells us one thing not to do...but then he gives us three things to do...he goes on and he says...

2. BE SURE TO NURTURE.

Now...you might be sitting there and you're thinking, "Say what?" Of all the words that I should use on Father's Day...maybe nurturing isn't one of them. That's not a very manly word...is it. But this is what Paul says here in our verse...go back to our verse 4 again...Paul says: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up...* (Ephesians 6:4, New International Version) Paul says, "You've got to bring up your children." Now...dads...here's what I want you to realize...this is a verb. This is an action. In other words...we're expected to take an active role in this. Now...the reason why I say that we're to nurture our children is because this verb that Paul uses here for "bringing them up" literally means to nurture. In fact, when you dig into that particular verb a little bit further it draws this interesting word picture...it's an all-encompassing word that we're to feed and care for our children. Dads...listen...we can't pass the nurturing of our children off to our wives...we can't say, "Well...that's the woman's job," and we certainly can't say, "Well...that's the church's job." You know what His Word is telling us this morning...if you're a dad...it's your job! You're called to nurture your children whether they're 5 months old or 50 years old.

You've got to step up...God doesn't care if you think you're too macho or not...you've got to love your children...you've got to encourage your children...you've got to spend time with your children...you've got to cheer on your children...you've got to inspire your children...you've got to be a spiritual example to your children. You've got to nurture their body and their mind and their soul. Dads...we're to take an active role in shaping who our kids are and what their character will become. Someone has said...listen to this: "What ruins most children is not what their parents do to them, but what they do not do for them." Here's what I want to encourage you to do for them...whether you're a new dad and you're just getting started and you're still trying to figure it all out or whether you're an empty nester and your kids are grown and gone...here's what I want to encourage you to do...as you nurture them...lead them to Christ. Paul said it like this in the New Testament...he said: *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* (1 Corinthians 11:1, New International Version) Dads...your kids are following you somewhere...my kids are following me somewhere...so where are we leading them? Are we leading them to Christ...are we leading them to love the way Jesus loved...are we leading them to serve the way that Jesus served...are we leading them to compassion the way that Jesus had compassion...are we leading them to forgive the way that Jesus forgave? Are we leading them to value people the way Jesus valued people. With every word that we say and with every decision that we make and with every moment of correction that we hand out as we bring them up...are we leading our kids to Christ? As you bring them up...as you nurture them and lead them...where is it that you're leading them to...we need to be leading them to Christ. In fact, Paul goes on in our verse 4 to help us get an even better grasp on this...as we bring them up and nurture them...we also need to...

3. INSTILL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

Now...I'm about to go to a place that can be a little touchy for us as parents...and especially as dads...here this morning, but Paul takes us here in our verse 4...so we need to go there. I want us to go back and look at verse 4 again because Paul is going to tell us how we are to nurture and bring up our kids...look at what he says...he says: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the*

Lord. (Ephesians 6:4, New International Version) He says, “You bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” In other words...you instill in your children spiritual disciplines. We’re to bring up our children in a way that the Lord approves. This is what you have to do, dads...you have to teach your children...you have to train your children in the ways of the Lord. You have to talk to them about Jesus...even when they don’t feel like talking about Jesus. You have to get them to church...even when they don’t feel like going to church. You need to be opening the Word with them...even when they don’t feel like opening the Word. I said a moment ago that I’m getting to a little bit of a touchy spot here for us as parents...and here’s why I say that. I’ve had many, many parents who have come to me in my 24 years as a pastor and they sit in my office and talk about the challenges they are having with their kids. And their kids aren’t in church and they aren’t in the Word and they aren’t participating in service projects and they aren’t cultivating any sort of relationship with Jesus...they have no spiritual disciplines in their life whatsoever...and the parent will tell me this. And I’ll suggest to the parent that that is their role...that they need to be talking to them about faith and about Jesus and getting them to church and serving with them in some sort of project...and the parents will look at me and say something to the effect of, “Well, I don’t want to talk to them about it and I don’t want to push it on them because if they feel like it’s forced on them then they won’t want to have anything to do with it when they’re older so I’m leaving them alone and letting them decide about that.”

I’m just going to be real candid here for a second...okay...and I say this in all love...but if we leave them alone when it comes to Jesus and faith and spiritual disciplines...they’re not going to want to have anything to do with it when they’re adults. I’ve never really understood why we’re so hesitant to instruct our kids in the faith...but we instruct them in everything else. We don’t leave our kids alone about Liquid Drano and just hope that they don’t drink it. We don’t leave our kids alone about the hot stove and just hope that they don’t touch it. We don’t leave them alone about looking both ways before they cross the street and just hope that they always look both ways. We don’t leave them alone when they bring home a bad report card and just leave it to chance that their grades will somehow get better...that they’ll make the decision on their own to just start studying one day. If we won’t leave school grades to chance...then why do we leave our kids having a relationship with Jesus and living with spiritual disciplines to chance?

God’s plan has never been for us as parents to leave our kids alone in raising them in the training and instruction of the Lord. Look at what Moses said...centuries ago to the Israelites...he said: **Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4—9, New International Version)** Does that sounds like we’re supposed to be silent with our kids when it comes to faith. Does it sound like we shouldn’t talk to our kids about spiritual disciplines because we don’t want to be overbearing and force it on them? Just in case you didn’t catch it here...look at Proverbs 6...it says: **My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. (So there’s this assumption that as parents we are instilling spiritual teaching and discipline in our kids’ lives...) Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life... (Proverbs 6:20—23, New International Version)** Friends...this is about heart-training. Bringing our kids up in the instruction and training of the Lord isn’t about seeing that they outwardly conform to some list of rules...that’s punishment...remember...we just talked about avoiding punishment a second ago...right? This isn’t about punishment...this is about heart-training. Talking to our kids about faith...talking to them about their relationship with Jesus...talking to them about the Word of God...instilling in them spiritual disciplines...it’s about heart-training. It’s about being a beam of light for our children...a beam of light to lead them to the true light of Jesus.

Friends...we want to be a community of disciples here who love God...so instill in your kids this discipline of loving God with all that they are and with all that they have...all the time...instill in them that He is number one

in their life. We want to be a community of disciples who grow in our faith...instill in them the discipline of being in God's Word...and not just reading it but doing what it says...God has laid out for us exactly how He wants us to live...it's not about having a good life...it's about having the best life...that is found in His Word. We want to be a community of disciples who serve others...instill in them the discipline of looking beyond themselves and reaching out to meet the needs of others. Let me give you a very practical way that you can do this...and I really want to encourage you to do this...go to the back of the room...to our resource table back there and you can pick up a summer serving guide. This guide has all kinds of different ways that you can serve together as a family this summer...we've done all the hard work for you...what number to call, who to talk to, what they're looking for people to do...we've done all that for you...all you need to do is call and say, "I'm going to be there." Instill in them the discipline of looking to the needs of others. And then we want to be a community of disciples who go and tell others about Jesus. Instill in them the discipline of realizing that we have good news and that they can see what Jesus has done in their life...and that they are called to share this good news and what Jesus has done in their life so others can have what your kids have. Let me simply close by saying this...if we take a hands off approach to this in our kids' lives...someone else will come along and take a hands on approach...and it may not be the direction we would want them to go.

[BAND COMES OUT AND PLAYS] **Illustration:** [SHOW PICS] I was reading this past week about Sherpa guides. The Sherpas are a unique people who have lived for generations in the national park surrounding Mt. Everest. Every year there are climbers who try to scale the famous mountain...and every year those climbers put their lives in jeopardy from many dangers...frigid temperatures, monsoon-category high winds, altitude sickness...I was reading in this article that altitude sickness has caused more climber deaths than anything else. But even the most experienced climbers do not try to tackle Everest alone...so they hire these Sherpa guides. And because the Sherpas have been living in the area for so long they have developed a genetic ability to function at very high altitudes...so altitude sickness is not a problem for them. These guides have also climbed Everest numerous times so they are experts when it comes to knowing weather patterns and the best time to climb. But these Sherpa guides can also do something else...they can help those in their care pause and take in the many breathtaking peaks, vistas, and valleys as they're making their way to the top to plant their personal flag on its summit. Dads...we have a lot in common with these Sherpa guides. Our children need us...whether they would admit it or not...whether they act like it or not...they need us. Like inexperienced climbers on Mt. Everest need Sherpas...our kids need us to guide them and to help them avoid the perils and the unwise decisions of life. But...they also need us to help them appreciate the wonders that await them on the upward journey of fulfilling God's purpose in their lives. Let's take a couple of moments to pray for dads...and then we'll wrap up. [PRAYER...INVITE]