

September 19th and 20th
THE DISCIPLINE OF FATHERHOOD

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

Do you remember the day? I do. Sixteen years ago I became a first time father to four children from Colombia, South America. We could hear our children laughing and playing in the room next to ours as the childcare workers explained to us their history. I barely was listening because I was excited to meet them for the first time. Nothing much can quite compare to the emotions that we have as we become fathers. And nothing can quite compare to the lessons that we learn in the early years. As we left the facility on that day, I was holding Prospero, who was 15 months at the time. Well, as we got into the cab to go back to our hotel, I didn't drop his head down enough and...boom! There goes his head hitting the door! Well, I'm not a quick learner, so guess what happened when we left the car? Yup, you guessed it...hitting his head on the ceiling of the car as we got out of the car! I'm sure you've got your own share of stories also! As we focus on being God's disciplined men that pursue godliness, God calls us to being disciplined fathers and grandfathers. What does this look like?

There are two key areas of Ephesians 6:4...negative and positive. Let's start with the negative. Don't provoke your children to anger. Hmm...I'm especially good at this one. To put it in a nutshell, I can be a control freak. It's not that I'm worried about what people think. I just want my children to do what I say at the exact time that I tell them to do it. You can agree with me that this approach isn't a recipe for good relationships with your children or grandchildren. Instead, God wants us to be patient as He is patient with us. Think about it for a minute. When's the last time that you struggled to obey God or were hesitant to trust Him? God shows patience and compassion toward us as His men, why wouldn't we show the same patience that He so graciously shows us first? It's because we quickly forget how much God has forgiven us. God calls us to tenderness, rather than overstrictness. Kent Hughes describes it well in his "Disciplines of a Godly Man" when he uses the following example: "Rearing children is like holding a wet bar of soap - too firm a grasp and it shoots from your hand, too loose a grip and it slides away. A gentle but firm hold keeps you in control." He's so right! Men, how would your children describe your parenting?

Well, that's the negative, but what about the positive? God calls us here in Ephesians to bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Hughes emphasizes our example before our sons, daughters, and grandchildren. Here's a key point that cuts right to the heart. I'll use the example, since the discipline of marriage was last weekend's devotion. Elton Trueblood states this: "It is the father's responsibility to make the child know that he is deeply in love with the child's mother. There is no good reason why all evidence of affection should be hidden or carried on in secret. A child who grows up with the realization that his parents are lovers has a wonderful basis of stability." Men, what do our children and grandchildren see when they watch how we treat our wives? Do they see men that cherish their wives, or men that take them for granted? Furthermore, our children and grandchildren must see men that are committed to training them. Training looks different at different ages. Conversations with teenagers are hugely different from those talks with a toddler (although the "hangry" attitude is largely the same across all ages). Training involves giving input and wisdom as we shepherd their hearts. As we listen to our children and grandchildren, we can hear times when training words or actions can be used. We must be purposeful to not waste opportunities. Indeed, our children must see a relationship with the Lord that is vibrant and authentic. How do we show this? By praying for our children when we are with them. It's one thing for us to say that we pray for our children...it's quite another thing to actually do it. This is what sets us apart from good fathers that attend games and concerts. There's plenty of men that do that, but can we say that we intercede for our children?

Men, the Lord puts before us a great challenge to shepherd His children. After all, that's what your children and grandchildren are. They are first God's children that He has entrusted to you. How will you handle one of your greatest privileges and responsibilities?

Spend some time thinking about how God wants to use you in your specific place of being a father or grandfather. Pray for your heart and the hearts of other men to be faithful to be God's man as a faithful father/grandfather.

For Further Reading: I Samuel 2:22-36