Fathering – Ephesians 6:4

Mission Moment – Jason and Nissae – PNG – Almost finished with NT.

We are talking about fathering today. Before we talk about what God calls fathers to, we need to be honest about the brokenness in our fallen world. There are many of you momma's who have raised your children without a godly father in the home. Men, none of us have been perfect fathers. So, let's take our realities to God and ask Him to help us.

My prayer today is that this message helps fathers get some victory today in their parenting. Wive's go ahead and put your hand on his shoulder right now and let's pray for him.

1. **The Father's Calling: Shepherd, Not Tyrant** (Eph 6:4a) -
    a. **Reject Tyranny** - In first-century Roman culture, the *roman law* gave a Roman father absolute legal authority over every member of his household — including the power of life and death.
        i. Discipline was often harsh, arbitrary, and shame-based, with fathers expecting compliance through fear rather than love.
        ii. **Reject this way of fathering - The gospel when understood and applied always brings good news and flourishing into the Christian home**. God is not a tyrant.
    b. **Embrace Shepherding** – "Bring Them Up"
        i. **Nourish, Cherish, Guide** - This is Shepherding language. It is the same word used in Eph. 5:29 of how a husband "nourishes and cherishes" his wife as his own body — conveying tender, watchful care.
            - It implies not just meeting physical needs but providing holistic formation — physical, emotional, and spiritual — over the full arc of a child's development.
    c. **Lead Spiritually** - Fathers are called to be the lead shepherds of their homes. Mothers are helpers.
            - Shepherd – Shepherding has direction. Your job is to shepherd your children "in the Lord." Point them to Christ.
            - Reveal - The most fundamental task of a father is to reveal God's Character to His children through his own life.
            - Steward - A father is a steward of the souls God has given to him. Your kids are God's kids first. You will be held responsible — not to save your children (only Christ can do that), but to faithfully point them to Him.

Our calling as Fathers is to shepherd our kids like Christ and toward Christ. Paul starts his teaching with a warning about the dangers of poor shepherding.

2. **The Father's Dangers: Provoking (Eph 6:4a)**
    a. **What provocation looks like** –This word is often used in the Old Testament for Israel provoking God—not just irritating Him, but deeply offending Him through sin. *Paul is not talking about occasional frustration—it's about* ***patterns that wound the soul.***
        I. Absenteeism – Can look like two things – Physical Absence and Presence but not engagement.
            - David was present but absent - indifference toward Absalom (2 Sam. 14–15)— the father who is present in the house but absent in the soul of his child.
            - Scripture calls us to more than just being nearby, but deliberately "bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" with our eyes, ears, and hearts fully present. God is present and engaged in the lives of His children.
        II. Permissiveness – God is not permissive. He disciplines His children out of love.

- Eli 1 Sam. 3:13–14 – Would not discipline his children. Led to His children rebelling against God. Fathers are to be gentle, like God, <u>but we cannot let our gentleness slide into permissiveness.</u>

III. Favoritism – Jacob and His twelve sons (Genesis) – He favorited Joseph. Jacob's favoritism provoked his sons to hate their brother, Joseph. God loves all of his Children equally.

IV. Conditional love - Making a child's worth conditional on performance or meeting your standards crushes the spirit and makes it hard to know what real love is (unconditional.) God's love is unconditional. He loves His children even when we don't meet His expectations.

V. Harsh/Critical - When a father's voice is constantly rough and unkind, when a father consistently points out failures without encouragement, when a father keeps records/receipts of his children's missteps, his children won't just struggle with dad—they begin to struggle with God. God is not harsh or critical. He speaks the truth in love. He forgives are sin and keeps no record of wrong.

b. **What provocation produces** – the two ends of the damage are: explosive, outward anger/resentment (Ephesians) and collapsed, inward despair (Colossians). Both are the fruit of habitual fatherly provocation.

I. Anger - refers not to a flash of irritation <u>but to a deep-seated, simmering, brooding anger.</u> This is not the anger that flares up and cools off. Paul is talking about the kind of anger that grows roots — that becomes a child's settled posture toward God, authority, and life.

- We are seeing a generation of angry young men. Many counselors trace that anger back to broken relationships with father.

II. Despair - Colossians 3:21 adds an important phrase: "lest they be *discouraged*".

- Many young men today fall into despair because of how their father treated them. Despair sets into a child's life when a father is constantly critical or harsh. A father should be an encourager. Many young men are often a shell of who God wants them to be because of how their fathers consistently beat them down.

III. Some of you hear this and immediately think, "I've already blown it." Brother, the fact that you feel that tells me God is at work in you. Don't run from Him — run toward Him. He is not done with you yet. <u>He can and wants to restore your relationship with your kids through your new shepherding practices.</u>

3. **The Father's Practices: Bringing Them up (Shepherding) in the discipline and instruction of the Lord**. Paul is specific about <u>how to shepherd</u>. He says that we should (nourish) our children with **both discipline and instruction.**

a. **Discipline** (paideia) – **Whole-life training**: Teach your kids how to live under God.

i. This word <u>covers the entire range of child-formation. Teaching your kids how to live.</u> We first think punishment, but it cannot be reduced to punishment alone.

<u>ii.</u> In short, Discipline is the whole *curriculum/training* of fatherhood. In everything we do, we are disciplining/training our children to live under God and love him.

iii. A father needs three things to discipline/train their children in the Lord: authority to lead, wisdom to guide, and holiness to model.

- Live in your authority – You gave the authority. God has given it to you. The enemy wants to rob you of it. The enemy wants you to lay down and give it away. If you don't' own your authority you are turning your children over to someone else. It is your job. Paul does not address pastors, teachers, or Sunday school workers — he addresses *fathers*. The responsibility is not transferable. Do not delegate your responsibility to the church, the school system, or the government.
- Wisdom to guide – Very few dad's feel equipped to shepherd the kids well. You can hone your shepherding skills by finding a mentor/discipler/role-model, by making this a part of your growth strategy. Get in a d-group with other men and learn how to shepherd your kids the way Jesus shepherds you.

- Holiness to model – Your life represents God. If we are to shape lives, we have to model holiness. Your kids will catch far more about how you live, than what you said. Kids would rather see a sermon than hear one anyday. Repent and walk with God.

b. **Instruction** (nouthesia) – **Whole-mind training** – Teach your kids how to think like Jesus. *Nouthesia* literally means "putting into the mind". Your job as the lead shepherd of your kids is to train them in how to think like Jesus.
   i. **Scripture shapes/renews our minds - Deuteronomy 6:4-6 – Love God and teach His word diligently to your kids**. Talk about Jesus and scripture as you walk by the way, lie down for bed, when you wake up in the morning. Which means, you better be in the word. Teach them what you are learning. God has given us the scripture so that we would know Him and walk in His ways.

c. **Gospel atmosphere** – The two terms together are complementary and inseparable —<u>Discipline shapes living. Instruction shapes thinking. You need both to shepherd your children.</u>

4. **Six Tools for a Shepherd-Dad** – My goal today is by God's help, to set you fathers up to win. Wherever you find yourself today, here are 6 tools that can help you be the shepherd dad God has called you to be.
   a. **Treasure Christ –** if children only see Christianity as rules and restrictions, they will associate Christ with joyless obligation. Let them see your delight in Christ.
   b. **Lead family worship** — Start with prayer.
      i. **Prayer** - Lead prayer for your family. Teach them to pray. You can do this at dinner, before bed, traveling, morning, etc. <u>Praying together is family worship</u>. Don't wait for the "perfect" time or format. Just do it. You are the shepherd of your home. It won't feel normal or comfortable until you have established it as a normal rhythm in your home. I stop my family all the time for prayer, often it is while a kids has the mouth full, or when they are trying to run off for bed, or just randomly because I want to.
      ii. Let your kids hear you pray for them by name - Children who hear their fathers pray for them by name are learning that God hears, cares, and acts. They experience the heart of our shepherding Father who loves them.
      iii. Praise as give thanks and let your kids hear you praise God and thank Him. Regularly ask your kids what they are thankful to God for and then ask them to thank God.
   c. **Catechize your children** — Raise them up to know God through the use a simple catechism (Westminster Shorter, New City Catechism) with one question per week. Historically, many Christians have treated this like a normal, healthy part of family life — not a burden, but a gift. This is training the mind. By the way, we do this in discovery island with your kids.
   d. **Model repentance**: Fathers who model repentance (including to their own children) teach the gospel by living it in front of them. Nothing dismantles hidden resentment more than a father who says, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" own your sin and name it. Then repent.
      i. **Some of you with kids who have already moved out of the home need to speak with your kids and apologize**. Maybe it's a phone call, but at best it is face to face. Apologize and ask for forgiveness. We all have things we can apologize for.
   e. **Speak their love language -** Get to know your kids. Spend valuable time with them. Be students of them. Know their love languages and send a love letter to them they will receive.
      i. Physical touch – Helps your kids know they are safe and you are strong. Hugs, wrestling, holding hands.
      ii. Words of affirmation – Praise, speak encouragement. This lets them know you see them and they are valuable.
      iii. Gifts – Symbolic love – let's them know you consider them and think about them.
      iv. Quality time – Let them know they matter enough for you to give them your undivided attention by stopping everything else. My pastor at Fellowship before coming here was

Crawford Lorrits, he is an awesome father and understands this well. He once said men, your kids need to be so close to you so often that they know the smell of your deodorant.

v. Service – Help them, do/accomplish something with them/for them. Let's them know you see their needs and care to meet them.

f. **Discipline with gospel clarity -** Law/Grace tension properly held: Children need to know both God's standards and God's mercy.
   i. **Discipline in love, not in anger** — never administer correction while angry. Delay, cool, pray, then discipline.
   ii. **Explain the *why* behind correction** —Children receiving unexplained punishment learn only compliance; children receiving explained correction learn *wisdom*.
   iii. **Bring the gospel into discipline**: Before and After discipline, draw the child back to Christ — "This is sin, this is why we need Jesus. We all need forgiveness. God forgives us, and I forgive you, but there are consequences for our sin." After discipline, tell them you love them and your love for them is not conditional based on behavior.

Conclusion: Dad's you are called to shepherd your children by teaching them how to live and how to think. This is your job.

If you have not shepherded well, by God's grace you can begin today.

Do you know your Good Shepherd? If not, your first step to being a shepherding dad is to become a child of the good shepherd through faith in Christ.

If you are in Christ, you can confess, repent, and move forward, because your Good Shepherd laid down His life for your bad shepherding and walks with you by His Spirit to make you like Him.

Jesus did not die for perfect dads; He died for failing dads. So come to Him, confess, repent, and by God grace choose to live as the shepherd God intends. Jesus desires to make you a good shepherd. Submit to His spirit and watch God bless your children through your care.

Sermon Outline:

1. The Father's Calling - **Shepherd, Not Tyrant**

- **Reject Tyranny**
  Harsh • Fear-based • Controlling
- **Embrace Shepherding**
  Nourish • Cherish • Guide
- **Lead Spiritually**
  - Shepherd their souls
  - Reveal God's character
  - Steward what belongs to God

2. The Father's Dangers - **Provoking Your Children**

- **Absence** – present, but not engaged
- **Permissiveness** – no discipline
- **Favoritism** – unequal love
- **Conditional Love** – performance-based
- **Harsh/Critical** – rough, fault finding, keeping records of wrong

What Provocation Produces:

- **Anger** - Deep, settled resentment
- **Despair** - Discouragement, withdrawal

3. The Father's Practices

- **Discipline** – Teach them how to live
  - **Live in your authority**
  - **Get Wisdom to Guide**
  - **Model Holiness**
- **Instruction** – Teach them how to think
  - **God has given the scripture to shape/renew our minds**.
  - **Duet 6** – Shema life. "Hear"
- **Both Are Needed** - Living + Thinking **Authority** – Lead

4. Six Tools for a Shepherd-Dad

1. **Treasure Christ**
2. **Lead Family Worship**
3. **Catechize Your Kids** (New City Catechism)
4. **Model Repentance**
5. **Speak Their Love Language**
   - Touch
   - Words
   - Time
   - Gifts

    - Service
6. **Discipline with Gospel Clarity**
    - Discipline in love, not anger.
    - Explain the why.
    - Bring the gospel.

Helpful Resources:

- **Bringing up boys – Dr. Dobson. Focused on the challenges and opportunities of raising boys toward responsible, godly manhood in a confusing culture.**
- **Bringing up girls – Dr. Dobson - Focused on the challenges and opportunities of raising boys toward responsible, godly manhood in a confusing culture.**
- **Shepherding a Child's Heart – Tedd Tripp**: Heart-focused guide to parenting that helps you see how your child's behavior flows from the heart and how to bring God's Word to bear with love and clarity.
- **Parenting by God's Promises – Joel Beeke -** A warm, practical book on raising children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," especially strong on using God's promises, family worship, and everyday discipleship.
- **Age of opportunity – Paul Tripp -** A biblical guide to the teen years that reframes adolescence as a gospel opportunity rather than a season to merely "survive," with lots of help for real-life conversations and conflicts.

Ephesians 6:4 — Exegetical, Theological & Pastoral Research.

(Reference are marked in brackets and listed at the end of the document.)

Section 1: Text and Context

Placement in the Flow of Ephesians

Ephesians divides cleanly into two halves: chapters 1–3 (doctrinal: who you are in Christ) and chapters 4–6 (ethical: how that identity shapes every relationship). Ephesians 4:1 launches the second half with "walk worthy of the calling," and the Spirit-filled life commanded in 5:18 is the engine that powers every command that follows — including 6:4. The fill-and-flow structure of 5:18–6:9 means the participial results of Spirit-filling (singing, giving thanks, submitting — 5:19–21) spill directly into the household code. Ephesians 6:4 is not an isolated parenting tip; it is the outworking of a Spirit-dominated father.[^1][^2]

The household code (*Haustafeln*) runs from 5:21–6:9, covering wives/husbands, children/fathers, and slaves/masters — always in that order, addressing the subordinate party first (countercultural in itself), and always grounding each duty in Christ. The code as a whole aims to show how the gospel transforms the most basic relationships of human life, not by abolishing authority but by radically redirecting it.[^3]

Immediate Literary Context (6:1–4)

Verses 1–3 address children (*tekna*), commanding obedience and honor, appealing to both natural law ("this is right") and the Mosaic covenant promise of long life on the land. Verse 4 pivots sharply to "fathers"

(*pateres*), giving one negative and one positive imperative that structurally parallel the entire household code's pattern: authority-bearers are always brought under Christ's lordship and given the harder summons.[^4][^5]

Key Structural Features

- The Greek conjunction *alla* (but/rather) in verse 4 creates a strong adversative contrast between what fathers must *not* do (provoke) and what they *must* do (nourish).[^2]
- Both verbs (*parorgizete* and *ektrephete*) are **present imperatives** — commands to this ongoing, habitual lifestyle, not one-time acts.[^6][^5]
- The genitive phrase "of the Lord" (*kuriou*) governs both *paideia* and *nouthesia*, making Christ the source, standard, and goal of all the training.[^7]

Section 2: Key Greek and Phrase-Level Exegesis

"Fathers" (*pateres*)

Pateres is typically the standard Greek word for a male head of household. Paul shifts here from the word *goneus* (parents, used in v. 1) to *pateres* deliberately, signaling that fathers have a unique, non-transferable responsibility as the leading shepherds of their children's souls. The word occasionally encompasses both parents (cf. Heb. 11:23), so mothers are not excluded, but Paul is particularly calling husbands who head their households to rise to this duty as an extension of their headship from 5:23–25.[^8][^4][^7]

Pulpit line: "When Paul says *fathers*, he does not dismiss mothers — but he is pressing husbands: you are the primary shepherd of your home's spiritual life. Own it."[^4][^7]

"Do not provoke to anger" (*mē parorgizete*)

Parorgizō combines *para* (intensifying: to the point of) + *orgizō* (to be angry) and refers not to a flash of irritation but to a deep-seated, simmering, brooding anger that a child nurtures and does not let die. In the LXX, the verb most often describes Israel *provoking Yahweh to anger* through idolatry — so it carries the sense of moral grievance, not mere momentary frustration. The present imperative with *mē* can be read as "stop doing this ongoing pattern," implying it was already happening among the Ephesian fathers.[^9][^2]

The parallel in Colossians 3:21 adds an important phrase: "lest they be *discouraged* (*athymeō*)." So the two ends of the damage are: explosive, outward resentment (Ephesians) and collapsed, inward despair (Colossians). Both are the fruit of habitual fatherly provocation.[^2]

Pulpit line: "This is not the anger that flares up and cools off. Paul is talking about the kind of anger that grows roots — that becomes a child's settled posture toward God, authority, and life."[^2]

"Bring them up" (*ektrephete*)

Ektrephō (from *ek* + *trephō* = to nourish, rear) is used in Eph. 5:29 of how a husband "nourishes and cherishes" his own body — conveying tender, solicitous, long-term care. Calvin translated this command as "let them be fondly cherished," emphasizing gentleness over severity. It implies not just meeting physical needs but providing holistic formation — physical, emotional, and spiritual — over the full arc of a child's development.[^10][^11][^7][^2]

Pulpit line: "Bring them up suggests the long, patient work of nourishment — like nursing a plant toward the sun over years, not shaping it with a hammer."[^7][^2]

"Discipline" (*paideia*)

Paideia is the broadest of the two terms, covering the entire range of child-formation: education, correction, practice, boundaries, consequences, and modeling. It is used in Heb. 12:5–11 for God's own "chastening" of His sons — so it carries the freight of both training and, when necessary, correction and suffering. MacArthur notes that *paideia* refers to "the systematic training of children," including the notion of punishment from Prov. 13:24, but cannot be reduced to punishment alone.[^12][^2]

The same root (*paideuo*) is used in 2 Tim. 3:16 for "training in righteousness" through Scripture, connecting family *paideia* directly to the ministry of the Word.[^2]

Pulpit line: "Discipline is the whole *curriculum* of fatherhood — everything from bedtime reading to explaining why there are consequences — all aimed at forming a child for a God-glorifying life."[^2]

"Instruction/Admonition" (*nouthesia*)

Nouthesia (from *nous* = mind + *tithemi* = to place) literally means "putting into the mind" — it stresses verbal influence aimed not merely at the intellect but at the will and disposition. Trench's classic distinction is helpful: *paideia* is training by *act*; *nouthesia* is training by *word* — whether encouragement, warning, reproof, or counsel. Piper notes that this word is not the ordinary teaching word (*didaskalian*); it carries the nuance of corrective warning, as in 1 Thess. 5:14 where the idle need *admonishing* (not just teaching). The two terms together are complementary and inseparable — *paideia* without *nouthesia* is actionless structure; *nouthesia* without *paideia* is words without life.[^7][^2]

Pulpit line: "Instruction of the Lord is not just Bible memory and family devotions — it's the ongoing, warm, firm conversation of a father who wants his child to know the *why* behind every 'yes' and 'no.'"[^7][^2]

"Of the Lord" (*kuriou*)

This genitive phrase modifies both *paideia* and *nouthesia*, making the Lord the source, content, and goal of all the training. Piper summarizes it this way: "the *content* of a father's teachings and warnings, and the *method* of a father's modeling discipline, and the *goal* of a father's whole life with his children will be from the Lord, through the Lord, and for the Lord." The Expositor's Greek Testament reads this as a genitive of origin: "the Lord's discipline and admonition — Christian training, the training that is of Christ, proceeding from Him and prescribed by Him."[^7][^2]

Pulpit line: "The Lord is not a footnote in your parenting philosophy — He is the author, the content, and the destination of everything you do to raise your children."[^7]

Section 3: Historical and Theological Background

Greco-Roman Patria Potestas

In first-century Roman culture, the *patria potestas* gave a Roman father absolute legal authority over every member of his household — including the power of life and death. At birth, an infant would be placed at the father's feet; if he lifted the child, it lived; if he turned away, it could be abandoned or exposed. Roman Stoic Seneca records that "children who are born weakly and deformed we drown" — a chilling normality in Paul's world. Discipline was often harsh, arbitrary, and shame-based, with fathers expecting compliance through fear rather than love.[^5][^1][^2]

Paul's instruction was therefore nothing short of revolutionary. By commanding fathers to "stop provoking" (present imperative) and instead "nourish" (a word associated with cherishing), he was fundamentally reorienting the father-child relationship under the lordship of Christ. Léon Morris notes that "in the first-century Roman Empire, fathers could do pretty much what they liked in their families," making Paul's limits on paternal authority a direct challenge to the pagan social order.[^5][^2]

The Gospel Transformation of Authority

Paul does not abolish fatherly authority — children are still commanded to obey (v. 1) — but he radically re-grounds and limits it under Christ. The father is now a steward of souls who belong not to him but to the Lord. The household code as a whole follows the logic of Eph. 5:21: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." The Christ-reference ("of the Lord") at the end of v. 4 is the decisive qualifier: a father may discipline, but only as Christ disciplines — with love, patience, and redemptive intent (cf. Heb. 12:10).[^13][^3][^12]

Reformed and Puritan Covenantal Vision of Fatherhood

Classic Reformed and Puritan theology understood fathers not merely as heads but as *covenant shepherds* of their households — responsible before God for the spiritual condition of their children. The family was regularly described as a "little church" or "seminary of Church and Commonwealth." William Perkins called the family "a little church"; William Gouge called it "the seminary of the Church and Commonwealth"; Richard Baxter described it as "a church — a society of Christians combined for the better worshipping and serving God." Jonathan Edwards framed family worship and order as "some of the chief means of grace" — so central that "if these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual."[^14][^15][^16]

This covenantal framing places enormous weight on the father's spiritual engagement: not merely keeping rules but catechizing, praying, modeling repentance, and leading family worship as the ordinary means by which grace flows to the next generation.

Section 4: Synthesis from Preferred Sources

Precept Austin

Precept Austin's commentary on Eph. 6:4 is one of the most thorough word-study resources available for this verse. Key insights include:[^2]

- The present imperative *mē parorgizete* implies this was an *ongoing pattern* among the Ephesian fathers, not a hypothetical warning — Paul is calling them to stop what they were already doing.[^2]
- The LXX use of *parorgizō* predominantly describes Israel provoking God to anger through idolatry — this gives the word a weight of moral grievance and covenant violation that goes far beyond "making your kid annoyed."[^2]
- *Ektrepho* (bring up) appears in secular Greek papyri in the context of nursing a slave infant — indicating tender, sustained care as part of a committed long-term relationship.[^2]
- The contrast between Eph. 6:4 (provoke → anger/explosion) and Col. 3:21 (exasperate → discouragement/athumia) reveals two types of damage a father can inflict: the child who becomes a time bomb, and the child whose spirit collapses inward into listless despair.[^2]

- The warning about Eli (1 Sam. 3:13–14) is especially pointed: the LXX translates "rebuke" (*noutheteo*, the verbal form of *nouthesia*). Eli *failed* the *nouthesia* — and the consequence was catastrophic.[^2]

Ligonier / R.C. Sproul

Sproul's devotional at Ligonier on Heb. 12:6–7 connects the dots directly to Eph. 6:4: God's fatherly discipline models what earthly fathers should do — loving, holy, corrective, but never abusive.[^17]

- Sproul observes that "some people have a hard time even thinking of God as 'Father' because of the horrible abuse they suffered from their earthly fathers." The earthly father's conduct either opens or obstructs a child's capacity to trust God as Father — a massive pastoral weight.[^17]
- Sproul connects the authority-submission pattern of the household code to the broader NT theology of God's ordering of creation; the father's authority is not raw power but *derivative, covenantal, accountable authority* under Christ.[^18]
- The Ligonier Eph. 6:4 sermon summarizes Calvin's view: "kind and liberal treatment has rather a tendency to cherish reverence for their parents, and to increase the cheerfulness and activity of their obedience, while a harsh and unkind manner rouses them to obstinacy." Fathers must discipline themselves before they discipline their children.[^18]

John MacArthur

MacArthur provides the most extensive systematic treatment of *how* fathers provoke children:[^19][^20][^21]

- Provoking by **overprotection**: Never trusting, never releasing, always restricting — this communicates distrust and eventually produces either rebellion or paralysis.[^19]
- Provoking by **favoritism**: Comparing children, openly or subtly preferring one over another — the Genesis narratives (Isaac/Esau/Jacob; Leah/Rachel) show the multigenerational devastation this creates.[^19]
- Provoking by **pushing achievement**: Making a child's worth conditional on performance crushes the spirit and transfers parents' reputation-anxiety onto the child.[^20]
- Provoking by **not admitting fault**: Fathers who cannot say "I was wrong, please forgive me" model a pride that teaches children God is unapproachable and authority is never accountable.[^2]
- Provoking by **neglect**: David's indifference toward Absalom (2 Sam. 14–15) is the canonical warning — the father who is present in the house but absent in the soul of his child.[^22][^2]
- On *paideia*, MacArthur cites Susannah Wesley: "The parent who studies to subdue [self-will] in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil's work." —.[^2]
- MacArthur summarizes that verse 4 is simple in structure but comprehensive in scope: "What is parenting? Loving your children so that they're not angry with you and bringing them up to know the Lord."[^23]

John Piper

Piper's two-part series on Eph. 6:4 (*Fathers, Bring Them Up* and *More Thoughts for Fathers*) provides the most Piperesque (affection-centered, gospel-saturated) treatment:[^24][^25][^7]

- Piper argues that the root problem of provoking is not behavior management but the father's own *soul condition*: "Fathers cause their children's souls to shrivel into small, hard, angry shells mainly by being like that themselves." Anger is the cannibal emotion — "it eats all the others till none is left. It does this first in fathers, and then this constricted soul is passed on to the children."[^7]

- The remedy is not behavioral technique — it is the gospel: Eph. 4:31–32, "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *as God in Christ forgave you*." The gospel changes the father's soul, which changes the atmosphere of the home.[^7]
- On "of the Lord": Piper writes that the *content*, *method*, and *goal* of all a father's words and ways will be "from the Lord, through the Lord, and for the Lord... the most important thing in raising children is that they come to see Christ, the Lord, as supremely valuable as Savior and Lord and Treasure of life."[^7]
- On fatherhood as God-imaging: "I am drawn to think that one of the meanings of 'of the Lord' is we are to so father that we call attention to and magnify the glory of the fatherhood of God." Earthly fathers are called to *display* the character of the heavenly Father to children who do not yet know Him.[^26]
- On marriage as the nest: Piper argues that the marriage covenant (the flesh-and-blood drama of Christ and the church) is the designed setting for discipleship: "the most fundamental task of a mother and father is to show God to the children."[^27]

John Calvin

Calvin's commentary on Eph. 6:4 is dense with pastoral balance:[^28][^10]

- "Parents are exhorted not to irritate their children by *unreasonable severity*. This would excite hatred, and would lead them to throw off the yoke altogether. Accordingly, in writing to the Colossians, he adds, 'lest they be discouraged.'"[^28]
- Calvin translates *ektrepho* as "let them be fondly cherished" and emphasizes the overall themes of "gentleness and forbearance."[^28]
- He then draws the rein: "To guard them... against the opposite and frequent evil of *excessive indulgence*, he again draws the rein which he had slackened, and adds, 'in the instruction and reproof of the Lord.'" — Calvin refuses to let gentleness slide into permissiveness. The balance is: mild, considerate, Christ-directed, corrective.[^28]
- Calvin sees the phrase "of the Lord" as transformative of the entire mode: the father stands under Christ's authority, and therefore exercises his authority differently — with accountability to God for every act of discipline and every failure of instruction.[^28]

Puritans (Gouge, Baxter, Flavel, Watson)

The Puritans provide some of the most vivid and practically rich material on family religion.[^29][^30][^16][^14]

William Gouge (*Of Domestical Duties*, 1622) treated Eph. 5:21–6:9 in exhaustive detail:

- Gouge called the family "a seminary of the Church and Commonwealth" — if the family fails, society and church cannot be reformed.[^31]
- He emphasized that a father's authority is always *conjunct with love*: "Your authority over your children is much greater; but only such as conjunct with love is needful to their good education and felicity."[^31]
- He was explicit that fathers failing to catechize and instruct their children were neglecting a duty as solemn as a minister neglecting his pulpit.

Richard Baxter (*The Reformed Pastor* and *A Christian Directory*):

- "We must have a special eye upon families, to see that they are well ordered... If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all... You are not likely to see any general reformation till you procure *family* reformation."[^30]
- "A holy family is a place of comfort, a church of God... Oh that God would stir up the hearts of people thus to make their families as little churches!"[^14]
- Baxter prescribed three things for fathers: (1) authority, (2) skill, and (3) holiness and readiness of will — and he insisted these must work together; authority without holiness becomes tyranny, holiness without authority becomes sentimentality.[^29]
- Baxter saw family worship as "woven throughout Scripture" — not an optional spiritual extra but a fundamental covenant duty.[^32]

John Flavel on children and instruction:

- "If you neglect to instruct children in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness?" — This is a pulpit-ready quote.[^33]
- "A man is what indeed he is in his family and among his relations." — Flavel is measuring spiritual authenticity by domestic faithfulness.[^34]

Thomas Watson: While Watson's primary contributions to this passage are indirect (his doctrine of God's fatherhood, repentance, and grace), he represents the Puritan conviction that heart religion must flow from the home outward — counterfeit religion is most quickly exposed by domestic behavior.[^35]

Jonathan Edwards

Edwards provides the most theologically rich framework for *why* family instruction is non-negotiable:[^36][^37][^15]

- Edwards defined the family as "a little church" in which parents "responsibly, intentionally, consistently, and strictly promote religion."[^36]
- In his *Farewell Sermon* (1750), Edwards declared: "Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And *family education and order are some of the chief means of grace*. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual."[^15]
- Edwards said fathers should aim not merely at behavioral compliance but at *affections* — for true religion is primarily a matter of the heart's inclinations toward God: "if parents did what they might do this way, multitudes of souls might be saved by their means."[^36]
- Edwards is described as "a husband and father whose care and oversight of his family was thoroughly spiritual. He took seriously anything that troubled his children... primarily concerned for the condition of their souls, Edwards taught each of his children to earnestly seek salvation, 'to have God our friend, and to be united to Christ.'"[^38]
- The famous Edwards-Jukes contrast illustrates the point: Edwards' family of prayer, Bible-reading, and discipline produced missionaries and ministers for generations; the Jukes household of neglect produced generations of poverty and crime.[^39]
- Edwards warned against mere externalism — children performing religious duties without genuine affection for God — and pressed parents to cultivate "religious affections" in the home by modeling true delight in God.[^40]

Section 5: Biblical-Theological and Christ-Centered Connections

God as Father — The Archetype

The discipline "of the Lord" points the preacher to the character of God as the ultimate Father behind every earthly father's calling. Hebrews 12:7–11 is the essential text: "God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." God's discipline is purposeful (for holiness), loving (not for vengeance), and fruit-bearing ("yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"). Earthly fathers are called to imitate this pattern — not in its perfection (only God achieves that) but in its orientation: always aiming at the child's holiness and flourishing, never at the father's ego or relief.[^41][^13][^17][^7]

Sproul's devotional captures it: "God is a Father who never abuses His children, although He does punish them. He chastens those whom He loves." The Gospel Coalition notes: "Biblical fatherhood is a faithful witness to God the Father. God the Father is involved in our ongoing maturation (John 15:1–2; Rom. 8:28), and therefore fathers glorify the Father as they imitate this behavior."[^33][^17]

Christ as the Content and Model

The phrase "of the Lord" (*kuriou*) is Christological: it is the Lord *Jesus* who defines what godly discipline and instruction look like — one who himself taught with authority and compassion, who rebuked and restored, who spoke truth in love, who did not break a bruised reed (Matt. 12:20). Piper notes: "The discipline and instruction of the Lord takes its cues from the Lord Jesus who lived and died to glorify his Father in heaven." Every father's posture, tone, and goal is measured against Christ's own way of shepherding.[^11][^24]

The Gospel Atmosphere of the Home

The "discipline and instruction of the Lord" cannot be administered well outside of a gospel-saturated home atmosphere. The gospel provides:

- **Law/Grace tension properly held**: Children need to know both God's standards and God's mercy. Instruction that is only law produces either rebellion or Pharisaism; grace without law produces presumption.
- **A culture of repentance**: Paul's anchor in 4:32 — "forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you" — must be the normal air of the home. Fathers who model repentance (including to their own children) teach the gospel by living it.[^7]
- **Christ as treasure, not tool**: The goal is not behavior management but hearts that love Christ. This requires that fathers themselves visibly treasure Christ above reputation, comfort, and achievement.[^7]

Key Cross-References with Notes

Text	**Connection to Eph. 6:4**
Deut. 6:4–9	The Shema — the word on the father's heart first, then taught "diligently" in every moment of the day. The ordinary, relational rhythm of household instruction.[^42]

Text	Connection to Eph. 6:4
Psalm 78:1–8	Multigenerational vision: fathers must pass down "the glorious deeds of the LORD" so the next generation will not forget, will set their hope in God, and will not be like the "stubborn and rebellious generation."[^42]
Proverbs 22:6	"Train up a child in the way he should go" — *paideia* in practice; the directional wisdom of early formation shaping lifelong orientation.[^2]
Prov. 13:24	"He who spares the rod hates his son" — connects *paideia* to loving, purposeful correction; discipline is a *form of love*, not a contradiction of it.[^2]
Proverbs 29:15,17	"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother... Discipline your son, and he will give you peace."[^13]
Hebrews 12:5–11	God as Father who disciplines for holiness; the fruit of discipline is "peaceful fruit of righteousness"; grounds all human discipline in divine character.[^13][^41]
Colossians 3:21	Parallel command: "do not exasperate your children, lest they become discouraged" — adds the note of *athumia* (lost heart, spiritless despair) as the other danger of bad fathering.[^2]
1 Tim. 3:4–5	The elder must manage his household well; family faithfulness is the proving ground for church leadership — the home and the church are not separate spheres.[^33]
Genesis 18:19	God chose Abraham specifically because he would "command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD." Covenantal fatherhood is part of God's redemptive plan.[^2][^43]

Section 6: Common Misapplications and Correctives

Distortion 1: Heavy-Handed, Authoritarian, Shame-Based Parenting

Some conservative and Reformed homes have majored on the negative command ("do not provoke") not at all, and treated *paideia* as primarily punitive. The result is fathers who are feared but not honored — whose children comply outwardly and resent inwardly.

- **The text's corrective**: *Parorgizō* directly condemns this. Harsh, unreasonable, shame-based discipline is itself a form of provoking. Calvin warns: "A harsh and unkind manner rouses them to obstinacy and destroys the natural affections."[^28]
- **MacArthur's list of provocations** includes exactly these patterns: overprotection, favoritism, unrealistic standards, scolding in anger, never admitting fault.[^19]
- **Edwards' corrective**: The goal is not behavioral compliance but transformed affections — a child who fears God's punishment but does not love God has not been properly formed in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord."[^40]

Distortion 2: Permissive, Hands-Off Parenting

The mirror error is fathers who, reacting against harshness, swing to passivity — refusing to discipline, outsourcing all structure, treating children as peers.

- **The text's corrective**: *Paideia* includes correction and boundaries. Proverbs is unequivocal (13:24; 22:15; 29:15). Eli's failure is the canonical warning: he did not rebuke his sons and paid an ultimate price.[^22][^2]
- **Baxter's corrective**: "The common course of parents is to please their children so long... till their wills are so used to be pleased that they are impatient of the least denial." Permissiveness is not kindness — it is negligence dressed as love.[^44]
- **Susannah Wesley** (via MacArthur): "The parent who indulges [self-will] does the devil's work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable."[^2]

Distortion 3: Outsourcing Discipleship to Church or School

A third common failure is treating the church's children's ministry or Christian school as the primary vehicle of spiritual formation, while fathers remain passive at home.

- **The text's corrective**: Paul does not address pastors, teachers, or Sunday school workers — he addresses *fathers*. The responsibility is not transferable.[^2]
- **S. Lewis Johnson** (via Precept Austin): "Never surrender your responsibility to your children. Don't surrender your responsibility to the school... Don't delegate your responsibility to the church — that's a great mistake."[^2]
- **Edwards**: "Family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual."[^15]
- **Baxter**: "What are we like to do ourselves to the reforming of a congregation, if all the work be cast on us alone; and masters of families neglect the necessary duty of their own?"[^30]

Section 7: Pastoral Application for a Mixed Congregation

For Fathers

The first application is direct and unreserved: fathers are called, not suggested, to be the spiritual shepherds of their homes. The present imperative tense means this is a *lifestyle*, not an event. Call fathers to:[^2]

1. **Begin family worship** — even imperfectly. A 10-minute devotional reading Scripture, asking one question, and praying together is family worship. Don't wait for the "perfect" time or format.[^14][^36]
2. **Catechize your children** — use a simple catechism (Westminster Shorter, Baptist Catechism, New City Catechism) with one question per week. The Puritans considered this a non-negotiable duty.[^14]
3. **Confess and repent to your children** specifically when you have sinned against them. Nothing dismantles hidden resentment like a father who says, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?"[^7][^2]
4. **Ask yourself MacArthur's diagnostic questions**: Am I overprotecting? Am I showing favoritism? Am I pushing performance? Am I modeling a double standard?[^19]
5. **Intentional one-on-one time** — walk by the way, sit in the house (Deut. 6:7). Car rides, yard work, and mealtimes are theological classrooms.[^45][^42]
6. **Discipline in love, not in anger** — never administer correction while emotionally reactive. Delay, cool, pray, then speak.[^2]
7. **Explain the *why* behind correction** — this is the *nouthesia* component. Children receiving unexplained punishment learn only compliance; children receiving explained correction learn *wisdom*.[^7]
8. **Make Christ visibly beautiful at home** — if children only see Christianity as rules and restrictions, they will associate Christ with joyless obligation. Let them see your delight in Christ, your prayer life, your joy in Scripture.[^25][^7]
9. **Pray for and with your children by name** — Edwards spent his evenings in prayer and fellowship with his family. Children who hear their fathers pray for them by name are learning that God hears, cares, and acts.[^38]
10. **Bring the gospel to discipline**: After discipline, draw the child back to Christ — "This is why we need Jesus. We all need forgiveness. God forgives us, and I forgive you."[^7]

For Mothers, Single Parents, and Guardians

The text addresses fathers specifically, but the preacher must not leave women and single parents feeling condemned by what they cannot provide. Key pastoral points:

- The command to *nourish and admonish* is not *gender-exclusive* — Prov. 1:8 says "hear your father's instruction, and do not forsake your *mother's teaching*." Mothers are essential; Paul is emphasizing accountability, not excluding mothers.[^46][^8]
- For single parents (especially mothers): The Lord is himself "a father to the fatherless" (Ps. 68:5). The community of elders and spiritual fathers in the church is designed to fill gaps that absent fathers leave (see 1 Tim. 3:4–5 and James 1:27).[^33]
- For grandparents raising grandchildren: Deut. 4:9 explicitly includes grandparents — "make them known to your sons and your *grandsons*." You are not outside this calling.[^2]
- Encouragement: God honors faithful, imperfect obedience to this command. You are not alone, and the Spirit who commands this is the same Spirit who enables it (Eph. 5:18).[^1][^2]

For Teens and Children

Briefly (perhaps a single paragraph in the sermon): This text shows children what a *real father* looks like — purposeful, present, loving, firm. It gives them a framework for understanding both their parents' imperfections and God's perfection. Many teens who are frustrated with their parents are experiencing the gap between the ideal of verse 4 and the reality of a fallen home — and that gap points toward the one perfect Father who never provokes but always nourishes.[^17]

For Those Wounded by Bad Fathering

This text, if preached without care, will crush those who grew up without a godly father — through abuse, abandonment, or neglect. A few brief words in the sermon can provide pastoral cover:

- Acknowledge plainly that many people in the room did not have a father who lived verse 4 — and that the grief and anger they feel is legitimate, not sinful.
- Point to Christ as the one who fulfills what every earthly father fails: he is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8), who never provokes but always nourishes, who disciplines only for holiness and love.
- Reserve detailed counseling for private shepherding — the pulpit can open the door, but this work happens in the pastor's study.

For Elders and Spiritual Fathers in the Church

The father's role in the home overlaps with but does not replace the elder's role in the church. Key connection: 1 Tim. 3:4–5 makes household management the proving ground for eldership. Spiritual fathers in the church — elders, mentors, disciplers — extend the ministry of verse 4 to those who have no father, or whose father has abdicated. This is part of what it means to be the family of God.[^33]

Section 8: Tensions, Hard Questions, and Nuanced Issues

The Line Between Firm Discipline and Sinful Provocation

The question: How do you preach firm, consistent discipline without inadvertently licensing abuse?

- **The text's answer**: *Paideia* is always governed by "of the Lord" — Christ's own character defines the bounds of discipline. Christ does not humiliate, shame, or destroy the bruised reed.[^11]
- **MacArthur's distinction**: The issue is not the severity of consequences but the *spirit* behind them — never in reactive anger, never for the parent's emotional relief, always with the child's flourishing and obedience to God as the goal.[^2]
- **Baxter**: Fathers need (1) authority, (2) skill, and (3) holiness — authority without holiness produces tyranny; holiness without authority produces sentimentality.[^29]
- **Pastoral wisdom**: When discipline is motivated by the parent's anger and administered for the parent's satisfaction, it is provoking. When it is motivated by love for the child's soul and administered in patient consistency, it is *paideia*.

Crushing Guilty Consciences vs. Waking Negligent Fathers

The question: How do you preach this without destroying the already-repentant father while also stirring the comfortable one?

- The text gives both a negative command (stop provoking) and a positive call (start nourishing). Preach both with equal weight, so that fathers who have failed hear the call to repent and begin — not a sentence of condemnation.
- The gospel anchor: "as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32) means that no father's failures are beyond grace, and that the same grace that forgives enables a new beginning today.
- Wayne Barber's honest pastoral note applies: "This doesn't mean a one-time thing... All of us are going to lose it from time to time. We are going to blow it from time to time. But quickly that can be healed by simply asking for forgiveness."[^2]
- James Montgomery Boice (via Precept Austin) warns against over-blaming parents for prodigal children: "Children are their own people... although they may be taught wisely and raised morally... they nevertheless sometimes do go astray, and that is not necessarily the parents' fault." Protect tender consciences from false guilt.[^2]

Addressing Abuse from the Pulpit

- *Do not* attempt to handle abuse cases from the pulpit in detail. The pulpit can say clearly: "Abuse is never discipline. Discipline that demeans, terrorizes, or injures is not the *paideia* of the Lord — it is sin against a vulnerable child, a profound violation of the authority God entrusted."
- Open the door for private pastoral care: name that the room includes those who were not raised this way, and that the church's elders are available.
- Reinforce that abused children are not responsible for their father's sin — this is critical for those who, even as adults, carry shame they should not carry.

Section 9: Potential Sermon Movements and Big Ideas

Proposed "Big Idea" Statements (Choose or Refine One)

1. *"Fathers, the goal of your parenting is not a manageable child — it is a child who loves the Lord; and only a Spirit-filled father can lead the way there."*
2. *"The discipline and instruction of the Lord is the only kind of fathering that produces children who know and love the God who is their Father."*
3. *"Fathers who reflect God's character — loving, consistent, truthful, and redemptive — give their children the clearest picture they will ever have of their heavenly Father."*
4. *"Stop provoking. Start nourishing. Everything depends on which path you choose."*

Possible Sermon Movements

Option A (Two-part: Negative → Positive)

- Movement 1: The danger — *Don't provoke* (What fathers do that destroys children's souls; the types of provoking; the two outcomes: anger and discouragement)
- Movement 2: The calling — *Do nourish* (What it looks like to bring them up in the Lord's discipline and instruction; the Spirit-filled atmosphere of the home)

Option B (Problem → Standard → Resources)

- Movement 1: The failure (what provoking looks like in practice; every father is guilty of something here — this is diagnostic)

- Movement 2: The calling (the rich vision of *paideia* and *nouthesia* — what the Lord's discipline actually looks like; the OT roots; the Christ-centered goal)
- Movement 3: The resources (the gospel as the atmosphere; the Spirit as the power; the church as the community; the Father as the model)

Option C (Christological)

- Movement 1: The Father you may not have had (the ideal vs. reality; pain in the text)
- Movement 2: The Father you are called to be (the command unpacked)
- Movement 3: The Father who never fails us (God as Father in Hebrews 12; Christ as the fulfillment of all fatherhood)

Section 10: Top Quotes and Paraphrased Insights for Potential Use

Source	**Quote / Insight**
Calvin	"Parents are exhorted not to irritate their children by unreasonable severity. This would excite hatred, and would lead them to throw off the yoke altogether... *Kind and liberal treatment has rather a tendency to cherish reverence.*"[^28]
John Piper	"Anger is the cannibal emotion — it eats all the others till none is left. It does this first in fathers, and then this constricted soul is passed on to the children."[^7]
John Piper	"The most important thing in raising children is that they come to see Christ, the Lord, as supremely valuable as Savior and Lord and Treasure of life. Everything is measured by how that might be biblically achieved."[^7]
Jonathan Edwards	"Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ... Family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual."[^15]
Richard Baxter	"You are not likely to see any general reformation till you procure family reformation."[^30]
John Flavel	"If you neglect to instruct children in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness?"[^33]

Source	Quote / Insight
Susannah Wesley (via MacArthur)	"The parent who studies to subdue self-will in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil's work."[^2]

This document stops here, per the preacher's instructions. No sermon manuscript has been written. All of the above is raw material for the preacher's own prayerful study, outline development, and pastoral application.

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