

## Bringing Up Children (Ephesians 6:4)

### A. Preliminary thoughts.

1. Children are a blessing, not a curse (**PSA 127:3-5**) and a society that ignores this in trouble from internal chaos and demographic shifts which represent value shifts also.
2. Children need to know that they are dearly loved by parents, safe and secure from danger. Obedience and proper character development are enhanced by these, and our Heavenly Father thus provokes us to love and good works. **1JO 4:16-19; 2CO 5:14-15.**
3. Child abuse is horrible when it exploits or maims the body or the mind but beware of subjective definitions of abuse: wicked children deem Vitamin N (No) abuse while pseudo-science does not deem genital mutilation/gender reassignment surgery abuse.
4. Child beating is not child abuse since “beat” simply means “to strike repeatedly.” One could “beat” a child with a wet noodle and that would hardly be abuse. Nor would it help.
5. Biblical instruction on child training, including child discipline, is neither outdated nor radical. There are modern professional child/family psychologists who affirm the same methods and back it up with data. Consider Dr. James Dobson, Dr. John Rosemond.
6. Children are male or female and are not genetically homosexual or racist. Respect this and don’t confound their development with pseudo-science or bad parenting which warps their image of themselves from God.
7. Children are to be raised by parents in trust for God Who desires a godly seed (**MAL 2:15; PSA 144:11-12**) and godliness is profitable in all things in this life (**1TI 4:8**) since it teaches charity and boundaries by “love thy neighbour as thyself” (**GAL 5:14 c/w ROM 13:10**) and so maximizes positive human interactions.
8. Jesus Christ is the ultimate model of childhood development. **LUK 2:51-52.**

### B. bring up: a. To bring into a higher position; to elevate, raise, rear, build up; to raise to a point or amount, etc. b. To rear from childhood; to educate, breed.

1. This implies that “bringing up” of a child is to raise him from out of a lower state of character to a higher state which one has already attained to, since “bring” means, “To cause to come along with oneself.”
  - a. This is obviously hindered if the parent is not of a higher character, still thinking and acting like a child (an increasing problem in our culture: kidults). Maturity means putting away childish things. **1CO 13:11.**
  - b. Such an effort would be like *the blind leading the blind*. **LUK 6:39.**
2. The children of Israel were “...**brought up** out of the land of Egypt...” (**EXO 33:1**), out of their bondage. Parents need to lead their children out of the bondage of their natural inclinations and imaginations. **GEN 8:21; PRO 22:15.**
  - a. Children will not develop good character without proper guidance. **PRO 29:15.**
  - b. They will not choose healthy diets or habits by nature (**ISA 7:16**) and capitulation to their poor choices generally produces children with unnecessary health trouble and self-destructive traits.
  - c. They will be oppressive by nature. **ISA 3:12.**
  - d. They will assume their demands should not meet with resistance and they will manipulate weak parents accordingly. **1KI 1:6; 1SAM 3:13.**
  - e. Parents should think of themselves as noble liberators who are loosing the child from the grip of a monster called Sin Nature and driving that beast away.
3. In **EPH 6:4**, Paul lays the onus upon fathers. c/w **ISA 38:19; MAL 4:5-6.**
  - a. This underscores the importance of having an engaged father in the home.
  - b. Mothers have critical roles also. **PRO 1:8.**

4. **EPH 6:4** contrasts provoking children to wrath and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
  - a. provoke: To incite or urge (a person or animal) to some act or to do something; to stimulate to action; to excite, rouse, stir up, spur on.
  - b. nurture: Breeding, upbringing, training, education (received or possessed by one).  
b. Moral training or discipline. [O.E.D. cites **EPH 6:4** here].
  - c. admonition: The action of admonishing (putting in mind of duties); authoritative counsel; warning, implied reproof.
  - d. Common sense tells you that children who are tyrannically beaten into compliance or are as demeaned as Jonathan was by Saul (**1SAM 20:30-34**) are likely going to react defensively, angrily. Such parenting is the sin of no "...natural affection..." (**2TI 3:3**). God's children are precious to Him. **ISA 43:4; MAL 3:17**.
  - e. Parents may provoke their children to wrath by *not* bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. A child learns from the school of hard knocks the realities his parents should have taught him and ends up bitter and hateful.
  - f. Parents may provoke their children to wrath by being not themselves regulated by the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and this breeds frustrated anger. NOTE: children will note, inventory and be ready to chamber every bit of "double-standard" ammunition you provide them.
  - g. For some children, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is the very thing that provokes them to wrath, not because the model is wrong but rather the child thinks he is God Whose will is sovereign. Do not fall for this form of idolatry, and administer the antidote early. **PRO 13:24**.

- C. Training has precedence over teaching, especially in very young children. A relatively non-academic parent with good values can reasonably train a child to have good character. Do not idolize education, ignorance or indifference.
  1. NOTE: You will train your child, positively or negatively. This is unavoidable, and you don't need to train him to be a fool since that comes naturally. **PRO 22:15**.
  2. Children are to be trained up in the way they should go (**PRO 22:6**), the ways of God.
  3. train: III. 5. To treat or manipulate so as to bring to the proper or desired form; *spec.* in Gardening, to manage (a plant or a branch) so as to cause it to grow in some desired form or direction... 6. To subject to discipline and instruction for the purpose of forming character and developing the powers of, or of making proficient in some occupation...
    - a. O.E.D. cites **PRO 22:6** as an example of this definition.
    - b. Training a sapling is wiser than trying to train a seventeen-year-old oak tree. Don't let the season of hope slip by. **PRO 19:18**.
    - c. Training is *manipulating*. Make sure that you are the manipulator!
    - d. Do not be conned into thinking that you must wait until your child can intelligently dialogue and reason before you begin to train that child in acceptable behavior by positive and negative enforcement. **PRO 13:24**.
4. Critical principle: positively reward good behavior, never bad behavior. This is basic. **1PE 2:13-14; 1CO 11:17, 22**.
  - a. Praise good behavior and you may expect more good behavior. **MAT 18:3-4**.
  - b. Be wary of praising naturally good looks or talents lest you encourage vanity. **2SAM 14:25; PRO 11:22**.
  - c. It is positive *effort* that should be praised or rewarded. Prizes go to victors, bread to workers. **1CO 9:24; 2TH 3:10**.
  - d. Children need to know the instructive value of losing, of equal opportunity rather than equal outcome. Real life does not give everyone the same trophy.

5. Effective training is realized in two ways:
  1. A positive aspect of bringing children to maturity through good example and advice.
  2. A negative aspect of enforcing order when there is unwillingness to cooperate with parental rule.
- D. The mark of a godly man is that he "...ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (**1TI 3:4**).
  1. Mind that "rule" in the home is given to the parent before all others.
  2. rule: *trans.* To control, guide, direct, exercise sway or influence over (a person, his actions, life, etc.).
  3. control: *trans.* To check or verify, and hence to regulate... To exercise restraint or direction upon the free action of; to hold sway over, exercise power or authority over; to dominate, command.
    - a. command: Simple sense. *trans.* To order, enjoin, bid with authority or influence. Properly said of persons, but also *fig.* of things.
    - b. Consider Abraham, the man of faith and friend of God. **GEN 18:19**.
  4. regulate: *trans.* To control, govern, or direct by rule or regulations; to subject to guidance or restrictions; to adapt to circumstances or surroundings.
  5. subjection: Phr. *in, into, to, unto, under subjection*: in, into, under the dominion or control of a superior power.
  6. gravity: Grave, weighty, or serious character or nature; importance, seriousness.
    - a. There is a time and season for all things. **ECC 3:1-14**.
    - b. But life is not all about mirth and frivolous entertainment. **ECC 7:2-6**.
  7. Mind how that *rule* involves restraining free action. Example:
    - a. The Scripture does not specifically say, "Children shall not scream at the top of their lungs whenever they feel like it (especially in the home or supermarket)."
    - b. But permitting screaming for the sake of screaming is not training a child *in the way in which he should go*. **PRO 17:1; 1TH 4:11; 2TH 3:12; 1PE 3:4**.
    - c. There is a time and place for less restraint: outdoors if it is not robbing others of their own peace and quiet.
    - d. But there are obviously places besides the home or supermarket where unrestrained activity or noise are not appropriate: church, funeral, hospital, doctor's waiting room, courtroom, etc.
    - e. Train children's restraint for the other venues by beginning in the home. Virtually everything of genuine value in life begins in the home.
- E. Remember, you will train your children one way or another. But will you train them in the way they *should* go, as **PRO 22:6** commands?
  1. For example, consider training a small child not to touch something.
    - a. You can keep it within his reach and train him not to touch it by punishing him if he touches it. This obviously does not apply to very dangerous things, especially for a very little child.
      - (1) This teaches him to obey the command not to touch.
      - (2) This teaches him to restrain himself even in the presence of a forbidden object that is accessible.
      - (3) This prepares him for the real world, where things are well within the reach of little children. Likewise it prepares the child for adult life where actions have consequences.
      - (4) Hint: Retailers are not putting things within a child's reach to encourage them in self-restraint or self-denial.

- b. You can put it beyond his reach.
    - (1) This teaches him that is off-limits only if it is out of reach.
    - (2) This does not teach him to respect your command not to touch.
    - (3) This does not prepare him for the real world, where things are well within the reach of little children. Likewise, it does not prepare the child for adult life where actions have consequences.
  - c. A general principle to train into children is that if it doesn't belong to them, it is not theirs to touch or access without permission. This teaches the boundary of respect for other's property.
2. Consider how you are training when you allow a child to get his way by persistent whining. It is the unjust judge who rules thus. **LUK 18:5.**
- a. Tolerating whining is training a child in conduct which God opposes.
    - (1) whine: To utter a low somewhat shrill protracted sound or cry, usually expressive of pain or distress; to cry in a subdued plaintive tone... 2. To utter complaints in a low querulous tone; to complain in a feeble, mean, or undignified way.
    - (2) murmur: To make, produce, or emit a low continuous sound... 2. To complain or repine in low muttered tones; to give vent to an inarticulate discontent, to grumble.
    - (3) See **1CO 10:10; PHIL 2:14; JUDE 1:16.**
  - b. You are training the child that persistent begging and whining pay off.
  - c. The way to end persistent whining is not by rewarding it, but by punishment. If whining occurs when a child is ill, consider circumstances. If it occurs otherwise, demand that it stop immediately and punish if it doesn't. This gives a child a space of repentance. c/w **REV 2:21.**
  - d. Remember, the parent is the one that is supposed be doing the manipulating, not the child!
  - e. Children's concerns should be by respectful entreaty (pleading), not whining. **1TI 5:1.**
  - f. Learn to distinguish between a child's possibly genuine complaint or plea for attention and whining to manipulate you to bend to the child's will.
3. What lesson is a child learning who is given everything he wants when he wants it? Do not be surprised if such a child grows up to be impatient, lazy, in debt.
4. How are you training a child when you do everything for him or let him abandon a task without finishing it? Do not be surprised if he grows up shirking responsibility. You trained him that way.

F. Verbal communication plays an important role in training children.

- 1. Words may build or destroy. **PRO 18:21.**
- 2. Parents (especially the father) are to be managers initiating productivity and creativity. Instruction should be:
  - a. *clear*. Is the instruction expressed as a wish or a command? As a child develops positive patterns, less instruction should be needed.
  - b. *well-defined and within the child's comprehension and ability to perform*.
    - (1) Time limits may be helpful because time passes slowly for a child.
    - (2) A timer or a suitable analog kitchen clock can help even little children gain a perspective on time: "...when the big hand points to ---, you should be all done."
  - c. *certain*. Do not train your child to respond only to increased volume of command. Deliberately delayed obedience should be considered disobedience.

**NUM 14:40-43; PSA 119:60.**

3. Here are five types of parents that fail in verbal leadership.
  - a. *The dishonest parent.* This one doesn't check for results when a command is given. He doesn't mean what he says.
  - b. *The threatening parent.* This one is really offering choices. Is not sitting still for an hour worth more than what Mom or Dad threatened would happen?
  - c. *The exploding parent.* This one merely throws tantrums, causing the child to focus more on the parent's reaction than on the ethic of his own behavior.
  - d. *The disinterested or silent parent.* "Do what you want, just don't bother me." This parent is really telling the child that he/she doesn't really care about him.
  - e. *The gutless parent.* This parent caves in when verbal instruction does not produce obedience in the child and so does not follow up with punishment.
4. Verbal communication is limited in its ability to shape the child's character.
  - a. Very small children are unable to process verbal instruction but they can understand the stimuli of touch and pain.
  - b. Even in children that can understand verbal instruction, that verbal instruction will not drive their inherent foolishness and rebellion away. That will require the use of the rod. **PRO 22:15.**
5. Do you thrive spiritually when God tells you He loves you in spite of yourself? Make sure you tell your children that they are precious to you and your expectations for them are born out of love for them.
  - a. Do not by your words leave your child with the impression that they are beyond redemption or worthless.
  - b. Sometimes a conscience-provoking communication from the parent can be an effective motivator of positive humility and change in a child: "I'm disappointed in you. You could have done much better."
6. There is a time and place for verbal rebuke in the love-driven program. **REV 3:19.**
  - a. Verbal rebuke stands between a wrong done and a painful consequence. It faces the effects of the wrong, points out the dangers and consequences of the present trend and cites an alternative. **GEN 4:6-7.**
  - b. Steer between the extremes of **1KI 1:6** and **EPH 6:4a.**
  - c. Correction must rebuild rather than ruin. Don't let situations go unattended until they become critical and then explode.
  - d. Weigh the contents, circumstances and consequences of a rebuke.
    - (1) A rebuke should not be an adult temper tantrum. Even Jesus Christ's treatment of the moneychangers was a meditated one. **JOH 2:15.**
    - (2) A rebuke should not threaten a child's standing, dignity or right to try again. **COL 3:21.**
  - e. Sometimes love will be tough and not be perceived for what it is. **PSA 141:5 c/w 2CO 2:4.**

- G. The book of Proverbs is eminently important in training children. Refer to it regularly. It was written by the second-wisest man that ever lived (Solomon) and validated by the wisest of all, Jesus Christ. **MAT 12:42.**
1. The O.T. portrays the highest level of development as wisdom whereas the N.T. portrays it as Christlikeness.
  2. To attain unto Christ is to attain unto wisdom, for in Him "...are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (**COL 2:3**).
  3. It has been said that wisdom is the "...capacity of judgment which grows in the spiritual depths of a human being permitting him to use his knowledge, abilities and opportunities in

a way designed by God to be fulfilling and satisfying.”

(Gordon Macdonald, *The Effective Father*, p. 185).

4. Training involves repeated exposure to instruction and experiences until they become ingrained and automatic.
  - a. In a word, this is the development of habits.
  - b. Children are trained to develop habits like orderliness or rising early and reflexes such as vindictiveness or peaceableness.
  - c. Good values need to be trained into a child and blessings should be evaluated in spiritual and relational terms rather than simply material terms.
5. An important area of child training is that of discipline, i.e., making oneself do or endure something tedious or difficult.
  - a. Discipline enlarges a child's capacity to endure or produce.
  - b. Discipline is deliberate stress introduced to stretch the capacity for performance. An example of this might be encouraging a child to run a little further after exhaustion.
  - c. Children should be exposed to fatigue, inconvenience and frustration.
    - (1) Life is not always a convenient or painless experience.
    - (2) Children should learn that feelings do not govern life. If permitted, feelings will limit an individual to subpar performance.
    - (3) Examples of such exposure: walk in the cold, don't procrastinate, do chores even if feeling subpar.
6. Solomon explained that true wisdom, though an enabler of success and prosperity in this world, is superior to material advantage. **PRO 8:10-11 c/w LUK 12:15.**
  - a. Do not smother children with material stuff, especially when such is a reward for bad behavior or habits. You don't want to train a child that life revolves around himself and stuff.
  - b. An empty cardboard box can be filled with imagination.