

Theme: God's "To Do" List for Dads

Text: Ephesians 6:4 (EHV)

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Most men are used to getting "to do" lists from their wives, and they're pretty used to getting them just about any day of the year except for one: Father's Day. However, on this Father's Day our text gives fathers, grandfathers, and fathers to be a "to do" list—not from our wives, but from God!

The first item on **God's "to do" list for dads**, is actually a "don't do!" Paul begins this verse by saying, **"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger" (v. 4a).**

1) Do Not Provoke to Anger

Now, sometimes when we justly discipline our children they are going to become angry. That's going to happen at times and we'll talk about discipline a little later on in the sermon. But when we "exasperate" our children—"provoke them to anger" by *loveless*, persistent, nagging criticism and punishment—they can become bitter, and discouraged and want to give up. They can become depressed and be tempted to do many desperate and hurtful things. Paul puts it this way in **Colossians 3:21: "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."**

Our model for this, and all of the fatherly duties Paul lists, is of course, God our heavenly Father. God did not lose patience with us. He does not "provoke us to anger" or "exasperate" us. He did not wait until we "got things right" before He made us "right" with Him through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus on the cross. He also does not just give up on us when we fail, and fail, and fail again. We are also told in Lamentations, **"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).** Men and especially fathers, do you show this type of mercy, grace, and patience with your children, your wife, and other family members?

2) Provide Nurture

Paul goes on in our text to show a contrast between what we should not do and what we are to do: **"but bring them up" (v. 4b).** The word used here literally means to "*nourish, feed.*" This is the same phrase that is used in **Ephesians 5:29** referring to the husband's role of "nourishing and caring" for his wife. Obviously, here in this verse it is used in both a literal and physical sense, but most importantly, in a *spiritual* sense we are to **"bring them up."** Men, we are called to nourish our wife and children by sharing love and encouragement in the Lord and His Word.

Notice also what's implied by this instruction to **"bring them up."** We are to "bring our children up" because they will not get there by themselves. Dads, you are to take an active role in shaping the character and faith-life of your children. **Proverbs 29:15** says, **"A child left to himself brings shame to his mother,"** but **Proverbs 22:6** says, **"Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it."**

According to a 50-year study of Christian and non-Christian families, most young adults who follow Christ either come from non-Christian homes or from homes where they grew up loving Jesus because their mom and dad loved Jesus. Their parents' faith and passion for Christ permeated their lives and passed on naturally to their kids. Sadly, very few believers came from homes where there was a kind of indifferent, apathetic commitment to Christ. It is sobering, and somewhat frightening, to suggest that the chances are better for a child growing up in a *non-Christian* home to become an active, faith-driven believer than for a child growing up in a spiritually "lukewarm" environment!

Dads, how are you doing on this one? Are you modeling genuine faith in Christ? Does your family clearly and consistently see your love for Jesus in your words and actions? Someone once said, *“One way to correct your children is to correct the example you’re setting for them.”* Are you providing a nurturing atmosphere in your home in which your children can grow up to love and serve Christ? Are you looking for ways to teach and tutor your kids, or are you leaving this for mom to handle—or are you leaving it entirely up to the church and your children’s teacher? Notice, this passage makes it clear that *parents* (especially fathers as the God-appointed head of the household) have the first responsibility for their children’s *spiritual* nourishment and *feeding*.

One of the best things that men can give the children in their lives is TIME. In many households the mother is the one who is able to spend the most time with the children and therefore in some senses bears much of the responsibility of **“bringing up”** the children in a Godly manner. However, this definitely does not diminish or excuse fathers from their responsibility to spend time with and take the lead in making sure that above all the children are **“brought up”** and *nurtured* spiritually. For a child, “love” is spelled: T-I-M-E. My parents had a small decorative plaque hanging in our living room while we were growing up that had a very wise parenting proverb written on it: *“The best thing a parent can spend on their children is their TIME!”*

One pastor tells the story of one night when his son was very young. His son asked him read him a book at bedtime which was too long to read in one sitting. After reading two chapters, he put it down and said, “Well, maybe later we can find out what happens.” His son then told him, “Oh, Mom’s already read me that book twice.” What did his son really want? To hear a story, or to spend time with *dad*? Kids crave—and deserve—our time and attention.

Our children need more than just “time” with their fathers, they need what we might call *“spiritual quality time.”* What we do with our time with our children is actually, in many ways, more important than *how much* time we spend with our kids. That brings us to the final two “duties” on **God’s “To Do” List for Dads.**

3) Train and Instruct

Paul says in the second half of our verse, **“bring them [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (v. 4b).** The Greek word for **“training”** covers everything from *positive instruction* (2 Timothy 3:16 – **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”**) to *discipline* (Hebrews 12:6 – **“because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son”**). The Greek word for **“instruction”** covers everything from *teaching* (Colossians 3:16 – **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”**) to *warning* (1 Thessalonians 5:14 – **“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone”**). These two terms cover everything parents are to do as they *“nourish”* their children spiritually.

God encourages parents, and all believers, to provide this **“training”** and **“instruction”** based on the Word of God! That is what it means most of all to **“train”** and **“instruct”** **“in the LORD!”** It is rooted in God’s Word and follows our Heavenly Father’s *perfect* fatherly example. In His kind of **“training”** and **“instruction”** love and the “positive” elements prevail. Think of how He draws us and all people to Himself by revealing His amazing grace (undeserved, unconditional love)! But if our Father also has to “discipline” us in order to help, He does not hold back from giving us His holy “tough love” and allowing some pain and injecting some discipline in our lives, as we read about in our Scripture reading from **Hebrews 12**. He loves us far too much to NOT discipline us! In the book of Proverbs God also makes it clear that we are to discipline our children if we really love them, **“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24)**. Now obviously God is NOT advocating child abuse—far from it! But He does advocate discipline. Remember again those words of our Scripture reading from

Hebrews, **“No discipline seems pleasant when it is happening, but painful, yet later it yields a peaceful harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:11 EHV).**

It's important to understand the difference between discipline and punishment. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty and focuses on the past. The purpose of discipline is love: To promote growth by correcting behavior and looking to the future. Dads, your kids are looking for you to train them and love them by disciplining them. In God and in His Word Christian fathers and parents have the perfect example to follow in the **“training”** and **“instruction”** of their children.

Thankfully, God our Heavenly Father has provided us with more than just the perfect example of fatherhood. For even with His example we fail at being the men God commands us to be; we fail to be the fathers, mothers, and children God wants us to be as well. Obviously we need more than that. Our Heavenly Father is so good to us that He sent His only Son to live that perfect life in our place; to die and rise again to make us His children. He also works in us with His Word and Spirit to make us better fathers, better mothers, and better children. And so God has become more than just our “Father” in the sense that He's the one who created us and all things. The apostle Paul writes of this in Galatians, **“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Galatians 4:6).** **“Abba”** is the Aramaic word for “father” and it has been stated by some scholars that this phrase, which was used by Jesus when He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, is a phrase of affection toward God our Father. Much like a child crying out, “Daddy, Daddy!” Because of His Son Jesus and the faith His Spirit has created in our hearts He is our *dear* Father. As our perfect, loving Father in heaven He always hears and answers our cries, and the cries of all His children, in the best possible way, at the best possible time!

Men, fathers, grandfathers what are our lives modeling for our children? Our families? Our fellow Christians? There are few things more inspiring on earth than a strong, but caring, faithful Christian man! I am thankful always to God that I have had a number of good Christian men as role models in my life, and most of all that I have had a man like that in my father to model that for me. I'll probably never know how much good that did my life, and maybe more importantly, how much his leadership and example kept me from things in my life that I would sorely regret. Give your children, your grandchildren, the children of this congregation, or any of the children in your life, that kind of example. With our Heavenly Father's help we can! Amen.