

# Parenting God's Way

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I encourage you to keep your Bible open. They're in Ephesians 6. We're continuing our series in God's design for the family. And we've come now to the role of parents. Well, this week I searched the internet for the top books on parenting that are out there.

And it turns out that there's a lot to know about parenting. Lots of people have written lots of stuff about parenting. And these behind me are just some of the books that I discovered that are many considered to be amongst the top 10 parenting books that are essential to read.

So the first is number one Sunday Times bestseller called The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read. And Your Children Will Be Glad That You Did. Then there's Raising Securely Attached Kids.

Using Connection-Focused Parenting to Create Confidence, Empathy and Resilience. Next there's Positive Parenting, An Essential Guide. Ending the Power Struggles and Reconnecting from the Heart.

And then No Drama Discipline. The Whole Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind. Raising a Kid Who Can.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] Simple Strategies to Build a Lifetime of Adaptability and Emotional Strength. Then there's a recent one, The Anxious Generation. How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness.

That sounds important, right? Especially in today's world. And then finally there's Raising a Secure Child. How Circle of Security Parenting, whatever that is, can help you nurture your child's attachment, emotional resilience and freedom to explore.

Has anybody read any of these books? Put up your hand. Anybody? Everybody? No? Well, if ever there's a way to feel like a bad parent, it's realizing all the stuff you haven't read about parenting, right?

And add to this that you only have a limited time to get it right, if you're a parent, before your kids are grown up, out of the house and you've messed them up for life.

Because you haven't read enough and you haven't done the right things. And it seems there's a whole lot that we need to know, right? Because it turns out children are very complicated things.

[ 2 : 2 9 ] And so we need to know a lot about them. And there's a lot written about them. And when I look at this as a parent, I'm going, wow. Okay, that really just illustrates to me all that I don't know.

Well, that's also why I'm relieved that I'm a Christian parent. Because God has already given us all that we need to know about parenting in the Bible.

Because He made our children. He knows how they work better than all of these other authors. And so if we take the time and the effort to understand His profound wisdom in the Word about how to parent properly, we don't have to read all this other stuff.

Helpful as it might be. But God's instructions are primary. And His instructions are actually profoundly simple as well. When we turn and we find out what God says in His Word about how to parent, they're profound but very simple to understand.

In fact, we find almost everything we need to know about parenting, we find in one single verse in the Bible. Ephesians 6 verse 4. And I started this week going, okay, there's only one verse in this section about parenting.

[ 3 : 51 ] Will I have enough to put in a sermon? And it turns out that I don't have enough time to cover everything in this verse.

It reminded me again the amazing thing about the Bible. That you get in no other book. How single verses can be packed with so much profound wisdom, with all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Not just this verse, but so many verses, because it's God's Word. And of course God's Word is going to be filled with amazing knowledge that will take us years to find out by ourselves if we didn't have God's Word.

This is the power and the value of God's Word in our lives. Why we need to sit under it each week. And in this verse, Ephesians 6 verse 4, there is an entire parenting course.

We find more godly wisdom in this verse on parenting than all these other secular books combined. But before we get into it, I want to note two things.

[ 4 : 56 ] Firstly, that it's not only speaking to parents. What we're going to find out in this verse speaks to anybody who kind of takes a parenting role.

Grandparents, other guardians, uncles, aunts. You might find you have a position to influence children. Well, there's principles in this verse that you need to hear.

But also, in the church, as Christians, we often will take the role of absent parents for children who come into our ministries and things. And so, they look to us as kind of the responsible adults in their lives often.

And so, even if you're not a parent, there's a lot to learn from this verse. And also, there's a lot to learn about God and His relationship with you. And so, just because you're not a parent, don't sort of phase out now.

Listen up to what God has to say. And then the second thing I want to note before we get into it is, as I said, there's actually, and I'm serious, there's too much in this verse to cover in one sermon.

[ 6 : 02 ] And that's why I've decided to do it in two parts. And so, we're only doing part one. This week, we're only going to do the first half of the verse. And next week, we're going to do part two.

So, the verse is split into what not to do and what to do. And so, this week, we're looking at what not to do. And next week, we'll look at the positive, what to do.

So, that's where we're going. But the first thing I want you to notice as we start to unpack this verse is it's addressed to fathers. Did you notice that?

It's addressed to fathers. But it actually describes something that is the responsibility of both parents equally, mothers and fathers. Children have just told in the previous verse to obey both mother and father.

And so, what this verse is, is applicable to both mother and father. And yet, it reminds us, and I think the Apostle Paul who writes it specifically is addressing fathers first because, and this is something we need to hear, it is the fathers who bear the primary responsibility before God to raise their children.

[ 7 : 13 ] It always has been this way. In the Old Testament, it was the fathers who had to take the responsibility to raise their children. They are the heads of the home.

And it is ultimately, the buck stops with them as to how their children are raised. And this is important to hear because, especially today, so often, the responsibility of raising children has been relegated to the moms in the home.

The father's out working, and it's the mom who raises the children. That's kind of the gender roles we've inherited. And, you know, the father will come home, and he'll be tired, and he'll be just sitting on the couch.

And it's the mom who has to do all the emotional stuff with the kids. And every now and again, she'll come to the dad and say, Can you please tell your daughter to listen? And then he'll be, Just make sure you just listen to your mother.

And then, you know, it's back on her. And yet, this verse reminds us, No, it is the father who is to take the active primary role in raising his children.

[ 8 : 18 ] Fathers, this is your job. That's what this verse is reminding us. With your wife's support. She can offer support raising your children that you can't do.

Things that women can do that you can't. But you need to lead in the raising of your children. And so listen carefully this morning to what God wants from you.

And the first thing God wants in this verse is actually very unexpected. Fathers, don't stir up anger.

In your children. That's all we're going to look at this morning. Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children. Now, when I first came across this verse as a young Christian parent, it didn't sit right with me.

It didn't sound right. Don't stir up anger in your children. You know, our first response is, Well, if they're angry, that's their problem, right? I can't help that. I'm not responsible for their emotions.

[ 9 : 24 ] Well, according to God, you are. Now, this is not saying, Make sure your children never get upset.

And always pander to their every want. Otherwise, you know, we'll just be raising these spoiled brats. You know, it's not about making sure darling always has what she wants.

No, that's not what this verse is saying. And by the way, children, if you're listening to this, this is not a reason for you to now use this as ammunition and say, Well, you're stirring up anger in me, Dad.

Okay? Okay? Parents, you still have to exercise authority over your children. That's what the Bible says. And inevitably, because they're sinners, they will be upset when they can't do what they want.

We saw this last week. And so this is not saying, Make sure your children never get upset. And yet, it seems in this verse that it's talking about a way to exercise authority as a parent that does not stir up anger unnecessarily.

[ 10 : 32 ] There's a way to exercise authority as a parent which stirs up anger, and there's a way to do it that won't stir up anger. And so we've got to understand what that means.

Another translation, the NIV, I think, says, Do not exasperate your children. And this stirring up anger or exasperating, in the original, it talks about the kind of emotion you experience when authority is used in the wrong way, but you can't do anything about it.

Then you get this exasperation. You felt it, I'm sure, living in South Africa. I think we've all experienced this. We've all been exasperated by some South African government official on a power trip, right?

Whether it's in home affairs or the traffic or the police department. And they're not doing what they're supposed to do with their authority, but you can't do anything about it.

You know what I mean? Have you been in that situation? Have you felt that exasperation? We were once driving through Mpumalanga, and I was stopped by a traffic officer, and they pulled us over.

[ 11 : 45 ] And it became clear quite quickly that he wanted a bribe before letting us go. And at that moment, I just felt, I welled up this anger inside me.

That this is someone who, my taxes that I pay, pay for their salary, and now they're abusing their authority. I wanted to object. I wanted to shout at them. I wanted to say, you're abusing authority.

But I couldn't do any of that, because in that moment, he had power over me. So I just felt this exasperation. Couldn't do anything about it. Unfortunately, we didn't actually pay the bribe, because I just played dumb, and he eventually got exasperated with me, because I wasn't getting that he was asking for a bribe.

And we drove away. But that sense of exasperation, do you know what I mean? That's what I think this verse is talking about. This kind of emotion that arises in children when authority over them is used in the way it shouldn't be, but they can't do anything about it because they're children.

And that can actually easily happen in the home. Because as parents, we can get away with it without even realizing we are, because they have to listen to us, the previous verse, last week.

[ 13 : 03 ] And so we can actually get away with using our authority in the way we're not meant to, and exasperating our children. And that's why we've got to remember, and this verse is here to remind us, that we are not allowed to use our authority any way we want to as parents.

We are exercising mediated authority. We are exercising authority on God's behalf. Not just because of who we are, but because God has given parents His authority, some of His authority to exercise over children.

It's mediated authority, and so we've got to use it carefully. We can't just use it however we want. It's like a manager in a company. A manager over a department.

That manager can't exercise his or her authority over their employees any way they want. Why? Because they're answerable to a director. They're answerable to a boss above them.

And so there's a boss that we answer to, parents. And in the same way, we can't use our authority for whatever we want. But there are, sadly, many ways that parents misuse their authority, even without realizing.

[ 14 : 19 ] And so what are some of the ways we can misuse our authority that stirs up or exasperates our children? Well, I think it's primarily when we let our own emotions determine how we react to our children.

When we're driven, when we let our emotions lead how we parent, that is what stirs up. That is what pours fuel on the fire of existing emotions that are already there, rather than calming the situation down.

So let's consider how that happens. What are some of the emotions that parents can have that tend to pour fuel on the fire? Well, firstly, our own frustrations.

The inevitable frustrations of life. And as parents, we will feel many frustrations of life. Maybe dad's had a really bad day at work.

And he comes home irritated. And the child does something small. And he lashes out. You know the situation? We've all been there.

[ 15 : 26 ] How many times have I told you, go to your room? That kind of situation. Just out of the blue. Because that was the straw that broke the camel's back, is the thing that the kid said.

And maybe they've done something wrong, but the father reacts in a way that he wouldn't have normally. It's actually a thing. It's called emotional transference. There was a famous picture made in the 50s.

Maybe you've seen it. That illustrates emotional transference. So at the top, you've got the boss shouting at the guy. And then at home, he's shouting at his wife.

And then the wife is shouting at the kid. And then the kid's shouting at the cat. You see, this anger is actually overflowed from person to person. And that's the thing. It's very easy for your anger to overflow to the people around you.

But especially children who don't know how to deal with that emotion anyway. And so when it comes from you, they're suddenly going to be stirred up and angry.

[ 16 : 29 ] That's what it means to stir up your children to anger. But you know, children, much as you might believe contrary to this, children are not stupid.

They can tell that dad is angry right now. They can tell that's why he's saying what he's saying. They can tell that mom's angry. They can tell that's why she's lashing out.

That's why she's doing what she's doing. And so that situation, that reaction from the parent is not going to help to change their children's behavior.

Because they know this is not to help me that my parent is reacting this way. This is them out of their emotion. And so what they're going to do, they're not going to stop doing what they're doing wrong.

They're just going to become experts at doing it without you noticing. Because they don't want to trigger you. Okay, so that's one of the first emotions that can cause us to exasperate, stir up anger in our children.

[ 17 : 29 ] Another emotion that can drive our parenting is disappointment. Disappointment. Disappointment. When a child fails at doing what they're meant to do.

Maybe at school. Maybe in a sport that they play. And it's easy as a parent to react from disappointment. You're actually disappointed in them.

They're not what you want them to be. And the way disappointment comes out of a parent is being always critical. Always pointing out whenever the child does wrong.

And often this comes because parents don't want their child to become like them. And so they've got really high unreasonable standards for their children subconsciously.

Because they don't want their children to make all the mistakes they've made. So they're constantly critical. They're constantly pointing out when the child fails. Drawing attention to what they're doing wrong.

[ 18 : 28 ] Well, that can easily exasperate a child. It can discourage them when they constantly hear that coming from their parents. I think that's what was on Paul's mind when he wrote in Colossians 3 verse 21.

Another version of this parenting course. Fathers, do not exasperate your children so that they won't become discouraged. So disappointment can often drive how we parent.

A related emotion that can often lead parenting is our own feelings of inadequacy as parents. When a child is not doing what they should.

Sometimes it actually awakens feelings in the parent that I've failed as a parent. But we don't want to admit that. So what we do is we redirect that to harshness towards our children when they fail.

But actually it's because we feel like failures. Another emotion that can drive parenting is our own impatience. We just want immediate obedience.

[ 19 : 36 ] Just listen to me. I'm your father. You listen to me. Immediately. Now, there's nothing wrong, children, with obeying timorously. When your parents ask you to do something.

But parents, when it's always you just want immediate obedience. No questions asked. Instead of actually working with them so that they can learn good habits.

Actually coming alongside them and making it a project to teach them how to do this well. Every time to do it a little bit better. Become their coach in learning these good habits.

But no, when you're impatient you just want them to obey. And rather than explaining things to them, it's always, Because I say so. Because I say so.

But why, Dad? Because I say so. Now, sometimes you need to. Sometimes there's no time to explain. In which case, because I say so is necessary.

[ 20 : 32 ] But when that's always the answer. When there's no explanation of, well, I'm trying to help you in this. It eventually exasperates the child. When it's always just immediate, because I say so.

And they're not actually getting the help and support they need to overcome their weaknesses. And then there's another emotion that can influence how we parent.

And that is when we feel threatened. And we do sometimes. You know that? Parents can feel threatened by their children. They'd never admit it. But they can. When their own authority is threatened.

When a child disobeys and we feel like we're losing control over the situation. And that'll often come out in this kind of feeling of fear. But it'll be directed and redirected to the child and being harsh.

And so instead of, in those situations, being an ally to our child and helping them overcome their weakness. We see them as an opponent. Someone we need to fight.

[ 21 : 32 ] Someone we need to overpower. Because we feel threatened that we're losing that power. And this is just some of the emotions that can determine how we parent.

The point is, and there's others, but we don't have time to get into all of them. The point is, so much of how we parent can be a result of our own emotions.

Which is wrong. And it's exasperating for children who can tell when we're reacting to manage our own emotions rather than reacting for their good.

And so what God demands of parents in this verse is self-restraint. That's the first thing we need to learn as parents.

How to restrain our own emotions. Self-control. Learning to control our emotions and being aware of them and not letting them drive how we parent.

[ 22 : 35 ] In fact, it is like driving. Having authority as a parent. It's like getting a license, you know, to drive a car. But when you get a license to drive a car, you still can't do whatever you want with that car, right?

You can't now, because you've got a license, drive on the wrong side of the road and drive on the pavement and cross traffic. No, you still have to be responsible. You still have to exercise self-control when you're driving.

Well, when you have a license to be a parent, it doesn't mean you can parent however you want. You still have to exercise self-restraint. And that means being aware of when you're reacting out of emotion.

This is something we all need to learn how to do. Being aware of when our reactions are coming from a feeling, an emotion we have. And so ask yourself. When you're engaging with your child about, you know, something, what they've done, or you're having a conversation, or you're busy parenting them, you've got to ask yourself when you're reacting to them.

Ask yourself, am I reacting out of something that I feel right now? Am I reacting out of my own emotion? And examine your heart in that moment.

[ 23 : 56 ] Ask, am I feeling anger? What is this feeling that's driving what I'm saying now? Is it disappointment? Is it frustration? Is it anger? And if it is, if you realize that you're being driven by an emotion right now, then calm down, first of all.

And ask yourself, what is the best way to react that's best for my child right now? Rather than, what's going to make me feel better?

Because if we don't go through that process of thinking about that, we're always going to default to, I'm going to react in the way that's going to make this emotion feel better, rather than actually, I'm going to react in the way that's best for my child.

But this kind of parenting that God is calling for takes effort. It takes work. It's natural to react how we feel.

That's what we do with our thinking. We react to how we feel. But this kind of parenting where we've got to actually have some self-restraint, that takes effort.

[ 25 : 01 ] It takes thinking. It's much easier to react to how you feel. But it's the very first step in godly parenting, self-restraint.

Committing to this more difficult way of parenting. Considering your own emotions. Considering what is best for your child. Actually thinking about how you're reacting.

It's more difficult. But it is the right way. And not just because it's what God wants.

But it's because that's how He parents you. If you're His child. You see, God is the ultimate parent.

The head of the Trinity is God the Father. Being a parent is ingrained in the identity of God. He has always been a parent.

[ 26 : 03 ] Parenthood itself comes from the heart of God. And it is God in whom all good parenting finds its source. And so if we're trying to parent without listening to God, we are making a big mistake.

God is the ultimate parent. Now you may not have had good earthly parents. And maybe some of that. Maybe you've been in a situation where your upbringing wasn't great. And now that's being transferred over to your children.

I think that's part of what the Bible means when it says, you know, the sins of the forefathers. To the third and fourth generation. Now there's many meanings to that. But I think in some ways there's a principle of just whatever mistakes your parent made is typically the mistakes you're going to make.

And so maybe you've not had good earthly parents to show you how to parent. But that doesn't mean you can't be a good parent. Because if you're a Christian, you have a heavenly parent.

You have a heavenly father. And it's from him that we can learn the best parenting. And it's in the gospel, what God has done, through Jesus Christ, that we experience what it's like to have a good parent.

[ 27 : 18 ] A parent who is, the Bible says, long-suffering with his children. Even when they deeply offend and disrespect him, but he doesn't let his anger drive him.

But he is slow to anger, as he told his people in the Old Testament. When he revealed his name. He is slow to anger.

This is who God is. This is who our Father is. And so instead of lashing out, he patiently bears with the failures of his children. For those in Christ, he literally bears their failures on himself.

He bears our failures and our sins on himself on the cross. That is the heart of the gospel. It's God's patience with us.

It's God being slow to anger and long-suffering and bearing with his children. And because of what Jesus did, God does not oppose his people as enemies.

[ 28 : 30 ] Even when they mess up. Even when they oppose him in sin, he does not oppose his people, but he becomes our ally in Christ and comes alongside us to help us and to change us and works for our good.

As the Bible says, in all things, God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. He is thinking, what is best for my children? Always. He is always thinking that.

He is not thinking, how do I want to react now? He is thinking, what is best for my child? That's what directs how God deals with us. And instead of confronting us with the shame of what we've done and criticizing us and pointing out everything we're doing wrong, he takes that shame away by loving us unconditionally with covenant love.

Maybe you never got that from your parents. But in Jesus, if you come to him, you receive that from your creator.

Your true and your eternal father who wants you to know what it's like to be loved in that way. If you've never done that, if you've never come to submit to Christ and believe in him, then you're missing out on your ultimate parent and the love you were made to have.

[ 30 : 01 ] Don't delay any longer if you still need to take that step and come to Christ. Christ came and he died and he rose again so that you can know your heavenly father intimately and be loved by him.

Don't miss out there. Don't miss out on that. And you know, it's only by having that, it's only by really experiencing that, that you can actually be that kind of parent to your children.

When you hold on to what God is to you in Christ, when that is at the forefront of your mind, when that directs how you react and how you deal with your children and their failures and their weaknesses, when you learn to parent your children the way God parents you, that's when you start getting it right.

Because not only will that prevent exasperating your children, but it's the first way they get to experience the grace of their heavenly father through you.

because just as his authority is mediated through you as a parent, his love and his grace should be mediated through you as well because that's the first contact your children have with their God and their father.

[ 31 : 16 ] That's a big responsibility. responsibility. And after all, that is your ultimate responsibility. That is ultimately what you're there for as a parent to mediate God's grace and His truth to them.

And we're going to learn more on that next week. But just to leave you with this thought that ultimately you are there as a parent not to raise your children your way to become the people you want them to be.

But you are there to raise God's children His way. They are not yours. They are His. And so all that is just from the very first line of this profound parenting course in Ephesians 6 verse 4.



But as I said, that only covered what not to do as a parent. And we don't have time for more. Next week, however, we're going to see the key instructions for what parents are to make sure they are doing.

So do come back and I'll see you then. Let's pray and ask for God's help to put this into practice. Heavenly Father, You You are our parent.

[ 32 : 41 ] You are the ultimate parent. And You want us to experience unconditional love from You.

Thank You for Jesus. Thank You for the cross. Thank You for bearing with our failures. And Lord, help us to respond to the love and the grace and the patience that we've received from You by showing that to our children, by reacting to the gospel through how we parent, how we lead, how we react.

Help us to be aware, Lord, of when we are being led rather than the gospel by our own emotions. Help us to be self-controlled so that we can show our children what You are like through how we parent them.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.