

Dear Parents: You Can Do It!

By Steve Burchett



I saw the cover of a children's book recently that had a blurb on the cover ensuring parents that reading this book to their children would take less than three minutes "so you can get on with your lives." What a despicable view of parenting — as if children are just a hassle to our *so very important lives!*

I'm not about to urge the opposite approach, though, of making everything revolve around our kids. That approach produces entitled, selfish little boys and girls that become entitled, selfish teens and, one day, you guessed it, entitled, selfish adults.

What, then, does successful parenting look like in God's eyes? One critical verse to consider: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). What does this verse (and the surrounding context) teach us about parenting in the way that God desires?

First, *the Lord provides all that parents need to be successful*. For starters, God has provided himself to believing parents. They have a Heavenly Father who loves them and "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us." They are also united to Christ, putting them with Jesus in "the heavenly places" where he is "seated . . . at (God's) right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (1:20-21). And they have the Holy Spirit within them (5:18). Father, Son, and Spirit. That's so much power! Believing parents also have Scripture to guide and comfort them. God has even spoken directly to their children (6:1-3). Finally, don't forget that parents have other believers to counsel and pray for them.

Next to the coffee pot in my kitchen is a humorous little placard that says, "You can do it! — Coffee." The Lord's abundant provision for parents says to them, "You can do it! — Jesus."

Second, *fathers bear the ultimate responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of their children*. This does not mean that there is nothing in Ephesians 6:4 for mothers to obey. Just a few verses earlier, Paul writes, "Children, obey your *parents*" (emphasis mine). However, fathers are addressed directly because they ultimately must answer to the Lord for the upbringing of their children. For some couples, this is more natural because of personality and disposition. In others, though, the wife is more prone to speak and lead,

while her husband is generally quiet and potentially passive. Some fathers, then, are going to have to pick up the pace, whereas some mothers are going to have to restrain themselves and let Daddy lead.

Paul is not implying that a mother has no voice, but she is not to be the leading voice. Yet, if a father is going to be a good leader, he must recognize that his wife is remarkably competent in certain areas that he is not and it would be very wise to let her thrive. For example, my wife has been an amazingly organized and skilled homeschool teacher. If I would have been in charge, the kids would have had so much fun, but I don't think they would have learned very much! I still functioned as the "principal," overseeing matters and handling certain discipline, but I would have been crazy to think I could do better than my wife.

Third, *the Lord has given clear direction for parenting*. Paul says what not to do: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger." He's not talking about causing a child to seethe with anger because you've done the right thing to the child. When that happens, you are just observing a child acting out of his sin nature. There are, however, words or actions that anger and discourage (see Colossians 3:21) a child, such as harshness, or unrealistic expectations, or neglect, or hypocrisy. If you are reading this and convicted, what should you do? Repent and admit your specific mistakes to the child, and ask for forgiveness. Children are remarkably good at forgiving!

And then Paul says to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The fundamental need of a child is a Savior because they are miniature versions of who their parents were before they knew Jesus. A parent's main goal is not to produce obedient little doggies, or well-educated citizens. Children have bad hearts. They need new hearts. So, the Lord must open their hearts to believe, and he uses instruments to achieve his purposes — primarily parents who train their children (includes corrective discipline) and exhort them through practical teaching and necessary warnings. This happens not only through daily interactions and intentional Bible intake at home, but don't forget the significant effect of church life on a child. Parents who prioritize church meetings and body life far more often produce children who do the same.

Fourth, *because the Lord reigns, parents do not have to live in perpetual fear about their children's souls or in constant regret about their mediocre (or worse) parenting*. I was once encouraging parents with the thought that it is the Lord who makes Christians. I mentioned that even if the child is under conviction before bedtime, there's nothing else we can do but tell them about Jesus and plead with them to believe — "And it's always good to pray with them, as well." One lady was shocked, "So you're saying all I can do is just talk with my children about Jesus and urge them to trust in him, and then I'm just supposed to go to bed?" Yes. As others have said before me, the sovereignty of God is a soft pillow. That's true when parents get it right, and it's true when they fail.

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