

Note: Some of the material in this message was taken from class notes obtained from Clearcreek Chapel's Counseling Training program.

A month ago to the day (May 25), I was in the Cincinnati airport waiting for a connecting flight to Chicago. Since I had some extra time of my hands before the flight, I took a walk through the complex. As I passed one waiting area, a blaring TV caught my attention. David Robinson, center for the San Antonio Spurs, had just received the MVP award for the NBA, and was being interviewed at center court on national television. I stopped to hear what he had to say. After paying tribute to others that had a part in his award, David Robinson caused my heart to skip with these words, "Most of all I'd like to thank my Lord Jesus Christ for giving me this opportunity to bless Him."

What's your goal in life? Is it to live for Christ? What's your goal as a parent? I don't know anything about David Robinson's parents, but I do know that there could be no greater thrill for a Christ-honoring parent than to hear a son unashamedly exalt Christ like that.

We're going to spend two weeks investigating what the Bible says about the subject of parenting. Ephesians 6:4 will be our key text. This week, we'll consider the goal of parenting. Next week, we'll explore the guidelines for parenting. God's Word addresses both issues in Ephesians 6:4. What is the goal of parenting?

Proposition: According to Ephesians 6:4, if we are to please God as parents, we must have three areas in order.

I. Parenting involves proper attitudes.

A. What's wrong?

1. The impatient parent is wrong.
 - "I have a right to a problem-free child."
 - "This child has no right to bother me."
2. The passive parent is wrong.
 - "My child wouldn't do that."
 - "I know it's wrong, but isn't it cute?"

B. What's right?

II. Parenting involves a proper aim.

A. What's wrong?

1. "I want my child to be a success."
2. "I want a child that won't embarrass me."
3. "I want a well-behaved child."

B. What's right? "My goal as a parent is to raise an independent disciple of Christ who will live life for God, making decisions based on God's Word."

III. Parenting involves proper action.

A. Negatively: We must not exasperate our children.

B. Positively: We must equip our children.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

By the way, for those who don't have children at home and are inclined to think, "This study isn't for me," may I remind you that any topic the Bible addresses is important for us to know. God wants all of us to know what He expects of parents. You may be a grandparent, or a single college student, or an unmarried senior--yet it's vital that all of us know the standard God sets for parents, so we can encourage those who are parents.

This week, we're going to address the subject of "The Goal of Parenting." Paul wrote in Eph 6:4, "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Here's area #1. Parenting that pleases God starts with proper attitudes.

I. Parenting involves proper attitudes.

The matter of attitudes is more implicit than explicit in the verse. Paul addresses "fathers" (certainly includes both "parents" though the word indicates who God holds accountable to take the lead; "fathers" is somewhat like the term "brothers" in v 10).

Do you realize how radical this biblical teaching on parenting was in Paul's day? Callous cruelty prevailed in the Roman Empire. In that day, unwanted babies were commonly abandoned in the Roman forum. Weak and deformed babies were killed. One account stated that when a child was born, it was placed before the father's feet. If the father stooped and lifted the child, that meant he wanted to keep the child. If he turned and walked away, it meant he refused to acknowledge it, and the child could quite literally be thrown out.

Against this backdrop, Christianity offered a liberating alternative. The followers of Christ upheld the sanctity of life. So Paul would write, "Fathers, don't provoke your children." Parenting begins with proper attitudes.

Which raises two critical questions--the first is this.

A. What's wrong?

What's the wrong attitude to have as a parent? There are two wrong, unbiblical, yet common attitudes that tend to be seen in parents.

1. The impatient parent is wrong.

We need to say something at this point that is not politically correct, yet is fundamental to what the Bible says about parenting. Contrary to the tenets of humanism which assert that children are innocent, blameless creatures who go down the wrong path because of a bad environment or poor education, the Bible teaches that our children have a bent to evil from birth. Children are born as depraved sinners. Prov 22:15 says, "Foolishness (apathy towards God) is bound up in the heart of a child." Children are born "turned off" to God. A little one comes into this world with a "heart" problem.

Don't miss this for it's fundamental to the proper goal in parenting. When it comes to raising children, we're not after compliance. We're after conversion--heart change.

Now, what do we mean by the "impatient" parent? Here are a couple of examples.

- "I have a right to a problem-free child."

A parent who has this outlook reveals a deficient view of two matters. First, he has a wrong view of his child. Why would we NOT expect to have problems from children who are born sinners (who are being raised by sinners!)? Second, he has a

wrong view of the home. What is a Christian home, anyway? A home where kids never sin? No. A Christian home is a place where sinners live who deal with their problems in a God-honoring way. An impatient parent sees problems as a bother. A biblical parent sees problems as an opportunity for growth.

- "This child has no right to bother me."

Somebody has defined a "child" as "someone who gets between me and the TV." Some parents view their little one as a nuisance, as a cramp in their lifestyles. That affects the way they discipline. Do you discipline your children because you're irritated with them or because you have a biblical goal in mind? An impatient parent lives for the moment. He blows up. Someone has well said, "It's hard to live at the foot of a volcano."

2. *The passive parent is wrong.*

What does the passive parent look like? You'll hear things like this...

- "My child wouldn't do that."

"My child? A problem in Sunday School? That's impossible. The problem is that his teacher doesn't know how to handle 'special' children like mine." A passive parent skirts the issue of dealing with problems, perhaps out of embarrassment or even laziness.

Another version sounds like this, "Oh, it's no big deal. It's just a passing stage." This phrase is used all the time to excuse sin. "After all, 16 year olds are supposed to be rebellious." Says who? Not the Bible. Sin must always be confronted, never excused.

- "I know it's wrong, but isn't it cute?"

TV has conditioned us to be this way. It tends to make rebellion funny. For instance, there's a family reunion. The mother says to her 2 year old, "Don't throw your food on the floor." The toddler eyes her mother, then her grandparents, and flicks a pea on the carpet. An uncle snickers. The child throws two more peas in the floor. The mother looks at the onlookers, then her child, smiles, and says, "Isn't she cute!"

You say, "Isn't a two year old too young for a lecture?" Yes, but she's not too young to learn there are consequences for willful disobedience. Prov 29:15 says, "A child left to himself brings his mother to shame."

Frankly, a lot of us tend to be passive parents. Our culture encourages this. The dad is sitting in the TV room watching his ballgame. He notices the ceiling light moving, and hears banging coming from the kid's room overhead. What does he do? He yells instead of going upstairs and dealing with the kids who are fighting!

The point is this. Godly parenting begins with having proper attitudes. We've identified two improper attitudes--being impatient and passive. Now a second question.

B. What's right?

What's the right attitude for a parent to have? I remind you of the context of Eph 6. The section goes back to 5:18 where we are commanded, "Be filled with the Spirit." One of the marks of Spirit-filling is solid relationships in the home (5:21). So Paul addresses wives and husbands (in ch 5), and children and parents (in ch 6). Why? The home is a great place to show that our Christianity is real!

The best place to make disciples is in your family. In fact, to would-be church leaders, 1 Tim 3 says, "If you can't make disciples at home, you won't do it at church."

Here's the right attitude. If God has blessed me with children, I must thank Him. I must see my children, not as an end, but as a means (God doesn't tell me to live for my

kids). I must see my children as a means to bring glory to God. God wants to use my children to help me grow. He wants to use me to disciple my children. Proper attitude.

II. Parenting involves a proper aim.

Goals are critical in life--for business people, for athletes, for musicians, and for parents. If we shoot at nothing, we'll hit it every time. What are you shooting at when it comes to raising your children (hopefully, not the children!)?

When it comes to successful parenting, I can't emphasize enough how important it is to have the right goal in mind. "What do I want to see happen in my child's life?" How you answer that will dictate what you do as a parent.

Frankly, lots of parents (even Christian) operate with non-biblical goals (aims) in raising their children. So before we identify the right parental aim, I want to ask this.

A. What's wrong?

What are some wrong aims that many parents have in raising their children? Here are three common, unbiblical goals.

1. *"I want my child to be a success."*

By that the parent means, "I want my son one day to make a six figure salary, a home on the beach, and have 120 people working under him at IBM"--a la Rush Limbaugh (?). Is that a biblical goal? When was the last time you heard a parent brag about the number of people their child SERVED at their job?!

2. *"I want a child that won't embarrass me."*

There are not a few Christian parents that parent with this as their #1 aim. A lot of pastors, unfortunately, fall for this unbiblical goal. I remember painting houses with a PK one summer who told me his dad sat him down once and said, "Son, I want you to realize that with one mess-up, you could ruin my ministry." It may be true that our children can hurt our reputation, but we're living with a wrong aim in parenting if our goal merely is to have a child that won't embarrass us.

3. *"I want a well-behaved child."*

Now you're thinking, "Wait a minute, pastor! What's wrong with wanting a well-behaved child?" Nothing, but it must not be our MAIN goal in parenting. There are any number of ways a parent can get a well-behaved child--and many are unbiblical.

When I was about 9 years old, I met a boy named Tony. He was very well-behaved. He was also lonely, insecure, and frustrated. He had a step-mother who (as I look back) didn't really love Tony. He was a nuisance to her, a bother. He wasn't her own. He obeyed her all right. She yelled at him, whacked him on the head--he was well behaved...as a 9 year old. I wonder what he was like when he was 19 year old.

Listen. God calls Christian parents to operate with a higher goal than these. I'm missing the boat if my highest aim is to raise a child that's a success in the world's eyes, or to raise a child that won't embarrass me, or to have a well-behaved child that won't irritate me. So what aim should we have as parents?

B. What's right?

Ephesians 6:4 tells us. This verse is like a magnifying glass that takes all the "rays" of what the Bible says about parenting, and brings them to one focus point. What's the right goal, the biblical goal God wants us to have? V 4 says to parents, "Pour your

energies with your children into this aim--bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." What does that mean?

Allow me to offer you a simple statement that sums up the biblical goal of parenting. I am indebted to Pastor Tim Pasma for this. Pastor Tim and his wife, who have six children, developed a basic goal that governs everything they do as parents. I have modified it slightly, as follows:

"My goal as a parent is to raise an independent disciple of Christ who will live life for God, making decisions based on God's Word."

Let's break the statement apart and analyze it. My goal as a parent is to **raise**--I don't live merely day to day. I need to have the big picture in mind. To raise an **independent** disciple of Christ--Independent, that is, a child that one day will be able to go out in life on his or her own (Gen 2:24 one who will "leave and cleave"). An independent **disciple of Christ**--not a child who does his or her own thing in life, but one who leaves the nest knowing how to be a follower of Christ. **Who will live life for God**--not for self. **Making decisions**--a wise parent doesn't make all the decisions for he knows he won't always be there for the child; a wise parent prepares the child to be able to make sound decisions in life. How? **Based on the Word of God**--a 2 Tim 2:15 kind of person, a person who solves the problems of life by rightly dividing the Word of God.

That's what my goal as a parent must be--to be a disciple-maker of my children (Mt 28:19). To introduce my children to Christ. To teach my children how to handle the problems of life by properly handling the Word of God. That must be our aim as parents.

This goal is key. My goal as a parent ought to determine everything I do FOR, WITH, and TO my child. Why do I go to the zoo with my child? Merely to have a good time? No, it's to accomplish this goal. Why do I spank my child? To get him to behave? No, it's to accomplish this goal--to raise an independent disciple of Christ who will live life for God, making decisions based on God's Word. My goal is to be an "Eph 6:4 parent."

Now watch this. Once we have a biblical goal in mind, it affects the way we view problems that arise in the home. Why? Because our aim is to deal with problems in order to accomplish this goal.

Last year, 286 million times, an American citizen rented a hard-core pornography video. This year, 62% of all information requests made on the Computer Internet are for pornography (stats taken from "Baptist Church Planters" letter, by Frank Hartwig, 5/18/95). Our kids are being bombarded by sexual temptation. So what do we do as parents? Do we tell them, "You better not embarrass me"? Or, "You better behave yourself"? Or do we use this real problem as a teaching tool to accomplish our goal?

In his book, Love Without Shame, David Wyrzten tells about an opportunity he had to speak to 500 young people. He asked them to write down on a sheet of paper how they learned about sex. Many of their answers were staggering, particularly the following (pp. 10-11):

"How did I learn about sexuality? I didn't know anything about it for the longest time. My parents are very loving. Dad's a preacher. They always showed their love and care towards me. I could have asked my parents about sex but I really never thought about it. My dad did hand me a book about it, but it was boring. I didn't think I needed to worry about it until I got married. Then my first REAL boyfriend came around. He was

older than I. I was this little, innocent girl who attracted this experienced, popular, all-around great, nice looking guy. I thought he was everything. I practically worshipped him. You could almost call him my god.

When the subject of sex came up I told him that I was against sex before marriage. I was naive about what goes through a guy's mind when he thinks about women. One night, before I could say anything, he forced me to have sex. He was a guard on the football team and I'm 5 foot 1 inch and weigh 106 pounds. In the midst of my tears I remember telling him to stop. At the age of fifteen my purity of being a virgin was lost. I felt I had ruined my life forever, so to try to make things okay, I stayed with my boyfriend. During this time my values went down the drain. To make a long story short I became pregnant at sixteen. I did not have the child, so this means I had an abortion, which goes against all of our principles. That is how I learned about sexuality! You could say I learned the hard way."

Those words are heart-wrenching. But they're not an isolated case. According to Wyrzten's survey, twice as many teens said they learned about sex from their peers as from their parents. In fact, the school of experience and pornographic magazines scored higher than parents as sources of sex information.

Thankfully, not all parents pass the buck. One teen wrote, "I learned about sex when my father explained it to me at about 12. I really do appreciate it. He gave me a biblical background on sex. I think because of his love for me this is why I have not, and never will experience sex until marriage (p. 169)." Thank God for parents with right aims.

Some are thinking, "How can I achieve this goal as a parent? What'll it take?" That's a practical question, which brings us to the third vital area for parents.

III. Parenting involves proper action.

I want to introduce this point this week, and then develop it with an entire message next week as we explore, "Two Guidelines for Parenting." As I read v 4 again, notice that parents are given two primary responsibilities--the first is negative, "Fathers, provoke not your children unto wrath." The second is positive, "But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

A. Negatively: We must not exasperate our children.

Someone asked evangelist Grady Wilson (in Hendricks, 67), "Did your mother ever spank you?" To which he responded, "Did she ever spank me? She had a strap in the kitchen which hung under the motto, 'I need thee every hour!'"

Obviously, discipline is vital in parenting. But there's a danger. Parents can "provoke" their children. The NIV warns, "Do not exasperate your children." Colossians 3:21 adds, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

We can exasperate our kids in lots of ways--by setting up rules that are whimsical, by being inconsistent in the way we discipline, by holding back praise when its due, by yelling, and by being hyper-critical of faults. For instance, after the piano recital, do you criticize your child for the 2 wrong notes or commend her for the 175 right ones? What about after the ball game--do you ride your son for the ball he dropped or praise him for

his good attitude when his teammates caught the ball? Some kids grow up knowing, "I can't be good enough to please Dad and Mom." That's exasperation.

B. Positively: We must equip our children.

As v 4 states, "We must bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Simply put, "Make sure your child is equipped to live for the Lord when he/she leaves your home." Is that happening in your home? Parents, are you raising your children with the proper attitude, aim, and actions endorsed in Eph 6:4? Young people, have you responded properly to the training your parents have given you? Do so today.