

Ephesians 6:4—And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; (6:4a)

My dad, Glenn Warren, responded to me much like my heavenly Father responds to His children. In fact, when asked why I see God as a loving, compassionate, firm, uncompromising, forgiving Father, I attribute much of it to my relationship with my earthly father. Like it or not, earthly fathers affect a child's view of Father-God. Hence, many children refuse to accept Christ (and the heavenly Father) due to an unhealthy experience with "daddy." In such cases, the only solution is to allow God's Word to reshape and renew one's perspective (Romans 12:1-2). To know the Father's heart through a consistent diet of truth is vital, especially for those whose fathers failed to display God's character and disposition on a somewhat consistent basis—or maybe who were never present at all.

The full counsel of God's Word confirms that the heavenly Father does not provoke His children to anger; therefore, Paul encourages earthly fathers to follow the heavenly Father's example (Ephesians 6:4a—"provoke" meaning "to rouse to wrath, exasperate, anger"). God, for instance: (1) does not have His children on a performance-based acceptance (Titus 3:5; Romans 3:20) (2) sacrifices for them and makes them feel special and wanted (John 3:16) (3) never condemns their person (Romans 8:1), correcting their behavior with a tear in His eye rather than a scowl on His face (Hebrews 12:5-11) (4) never shows favoritism (Galatians 3:28) (5) always makes decisions based on how they will help rather than hinder His children (lives by the principle of the cross in other words—the theme of the 66 books of Scripture).

Obviously, earthly "*fathers*" should "*not provoke*" their "*children to anger*" (Ephesians 6:4).

but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (6:4b)

A father's goal should be to respond to his children as God responds to His own. Because the roadmap for proper parenting is etched in the Word of God, how can fathers expect to fulfill their responsibilities as dads without diligently applying its precepts? For this reason Paul states, "*but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4b).

The phrase, "*bring them up,*" points to more than supplying a child's physical needs. It means "to nourish to maturity, to nurture, to rear up." Thus, it includes "*discipline and instruction*" (Ephesians 6:4b). "*Discipline*" is more related to physical punishment (Proverbs 13:24) while "*instruction*" is training by word, both by encouragement and reproof. The parent must understand that discipline without instruction generally creates anger and confusion within those on whom it is directed. But discipline balanced with proper instruction should yield godliness, character, and integrity. For this reason, Paul states that all such discipline and instruction must be "*of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4b). Only God's Word, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, reveals the proper balance required for effective parental instruction.