

**Tuesday 06-23-20**

**SERIES: FAMILY DONE GOD'S WAY**

**SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD**

**TITLE: Parenting to the Fullest Pt. 2**

Today we continue our study of parenting to the fullest by looking at Colossians 3, verse 20 (NIV). Here Paul addresses children, and he says, *obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord*. It's actually pretty straightforward. But now Paul continues to be counter-cultural in another way in verse 21 (ESV).

*"<sup>21</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."*

Is Paul addressing fathers alone or parents in general? Well, there's debate out there by scholars. I believe he's addressing fathers directly, partly because of what we just shared yesterday, about the authoritarian rule of fathers. They could do virtually anything to their children.

I also believe he is addressing fathers, because it enforces what God has established in the home. Ephesians 5:23 (NASB) states, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body." Christ is over the church and the husband is over the family. In other words, someone has to answer to God for the successes and the failures at home. And God has said, husbands – fathers - that's you.

But let me make a sobering statement: As a father, you convey an image of God to your kids.

**How your kids think about you will impact how or what they think and believe about God.**

That's sobering, isn't it? In James Spiegel's book, *The Making of An Atheist*, he discovered a recurring element in the making of an atheist. That element was a fatherless home. In Paul Vitz's book, *Faith of the Fatherless*, the majority of atheists had either no father at home, or their dad was abusive. So for a great many people, how they were raised or not raised by their father impacts their view of God. So again, how we parent impacts how our kids will view God, especially us as fathers.

Paul says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." What does Paul mean, *do not provoke your children*? The Greek word that is used means to exacerbate,

irritate, provoke or prod. It's like an animal locked up in a cage, and the owner daily pokes the animal with a prod. He shakes the cage. He's provoking the animal.

Today we would probably say, "Fathers, don't drive your kids crazy". Don't be a constant nag. If you nag, or you provoke, or exacerbate, or drive them crazy, Paul says the result is that they'll become discouraged. We might say defeated or broken in spirit.

I'm the proud father of 3 boys. Each are so unique and so different. And each has a spirit that is delicate and made by God. So, how I parent them really matters. But because each child is different, how I talk and correct them needs to be different. For example, my oldest son is a rule follower. He just generally hears and obeys. He asks a question, so I answer it, and he says, "Okay."

My middle son is a feeler and a driver. He is full of life and questions. He asks a question. And I'll give him an answer. Sufficient, right? Wrong. He asks another question. So I answer. What does he do? He asks another question! If I shut it down or grow frustrated, I am in danger of crushing his spirit.

Same with discipline. I have to be intentional with pausing and listening to what happened, why it happened, and what's the context, before I make a decision. Now, that sounds standard. Well, to be honest, it's not second nature. But, in general, that's the way to go. I've, unfortunately, disciplined a child wrongly, because I didn't pause and ask questions, and because I did not listen.

With my middle son, it's very important to be understood...even if wrong. Without that clarity with both parties, his spirit will be discouraged.

As I said earlier, though this is written to fathers because of the context of the times, this is solid advice for parents, grandparents, or leaders in general. Don't nag. Don't drive them crazy. Don't poke and prod them. Your provoking will lead them to being broken spirited.

How can we as parents provoke our kids?

Parents can be **overprotective**. Some might say legalistic. They have rules about everything. They emphasize on what the kids cannot do. They can't hang out with friends. They can't ever have a piece of gum. They can't have an independent thought. They can't read a secular book or see a secular movie. What happens when a child is raised this way? They often rebel. Once they get out of their parents' roof, it's life with no restraint and no plans to slow down.

Parents can **punish instead of discipline**. It's a sad reality, but today many parents punish their kids. The problem with punishment is it is intended to inflict pain or discomfort, but contains no intent or element of instruction or correction. And all too often, if unchecked, punishment can lead to abuse of many kinds. Abuse and punishment provoke children.

Parents can be **overly critical**. Some kids are good kids, but they feel like they're trash. They come home and show their report card. They tried hard to get that B but the parent is sure to let them know how disappointing it is. A kid tries out for varsity sports and only makes JV, so the parent never shows up for the game. Too many kids today – both young kids and adult children – desire the approval and blessing of their father and mother, but sadly they will never receive that approval or blessing. Being overly critical will provoke them.

Some parents **fail to show affection** and fill their love tank. Some parents don't love their kids, so they have no desire to show their kids affection. I think a great many others simply don't know how. They don't know how to speak their child's love language.

In Gary Chapman's book, *The 5 Love Languages for Kids*, he adapts his famous relationship book for kids. He has discovered that generally, people want to give or receive love in usually 1 to 2 primary ways. First is through **physical touch**: a hug, a back rub, messing with their hair. Second is through **words of affirmation**: identifying specific character traits that you admire through a note in a lunch box or through a verbal exchange in the car. Third is **quality time**. Some kids just want to be with you and no one else: going to a baseball game; going to Paint Yourself Silly; going to Barnes and Noble and reading together. Fourth is through **acts of service**. Some kids would love to be made a special meal or desert. Others would love to come home and find out their clothes were put away for them. Last is **gifts**. Some kids greatly appreciate getting a new glove, or the new book by their favorite author, or even a container of gum. But we as parents are called to show our children love in the ways they desire.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: And now let me turn to my discussion partner, Arnie Cole, to talk a bit about these love languages. First of all, Arnie, from your perspective as a behaviorist, does this theory of love languages hold water?

A: So, you know, as a behaviorist, on those kinds of terms, love is something that's hard to see,

hard to prove, but Arnie as a person, yes, I think the love languages makes good sense, and I think it's true, as on how it influences behavior. You just can't see it very well.

N: That's a great answer. I'm just curious. Do you know your love languages?

A: Yes. It starts with an “O”, Fritos, Cheetos, Oreos....

N: Doritos - Anything edible. That's the sixth love language. Yeah. And I think that is part of the struggle, is trying to figure out at what point do those gifts, those love languages become enabling? And there isn't a hard and fast rule. Past observation, and studying our kids, and watching how they respond to it, and whether or not they're actually now taking advantage of it. But I think in general, those assessments, whether it's a Strengths Finder, love languages, DiSC analysis, whatever they are, I think those are greatly beneficial, but only when you actually use them. And that's what would be my encouragement to anyone who is going to take one of these assessments is, if you're going to take it, you know, use it effectively, but also know that it's not the Bible on these things. It's rather a guide that can help you lead better and live better, and in this case, love better.

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As we continue in Colossians 3, we hear Paul's warning to not provoke our children. How does that happen? Kids who never get their emotional love tank filled are provoked to being broken in spirit.

Well, there is another way and that is by forcing your child **to be something they are not**. We should not force our kids to be something they're not: whether that's an extrovert or introvert – a sportsman or a reader – a detail person or a scatterbrain. Parents can shame their kids for not being like their siblings. Parents can discourage a kid's career goals, because it's not what the parent would do. This provokes the child. We should desire and learn to lead them in the way that God has made them, in accordance with His Word and His will.

We can also provoke our kids by **neglect**. Neglect can come by abandonment, for sure, but I'd suggest you can do it in many other ways.

You can work your life away – even at your own home. You kid wants to play Legos with you, but you instead say, “Oh, just one more e-mail.” You can neglect your kids by being involved in every hobby, on every non-profit board, or serve at every service event under the sun, while your kids sit at home. You can push them into every activity, but never be part of it.

Let's just put this one on the table: your phones or technology. I find it sad to see on Instagram or Facebook all these photos of families together on holidays, on birthdays, or just for a meal, and everyone has a phone in their hand. It drives me crazy. Kids playing at the park calling out, "Mommy, watch me." Or "Daddy watch me!" And they just keep repeating themselves, because the parents are neglecting the kids. It's heart-breaking. All of these actions provoke them.

Okay, Nat, we get it. Don't make them something they're not. Don't overprotect. Don't neglect. Don't withhold affection. So what should we do? How should we parent, love, and discipline without provoking them? Paul will answer this, but we need to turn to Ephesians 6:4. Paul writes virtually the same phrase in Ephesians 6:4, but adds to it. This will answer our question.

Paul writes, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4, ESV)

Paul's words are almost identical to his words in Colossians. But then he adds "but bring them up." That means to nourish – to nurture – to invest in. Nourishment takes time and it takes intentionality. Some people say quantity doesn't matter. It's quality. Even if you can only give your kid 5 minutes a day, make sure it's quality. I disagree. You need both.

If I were only home one night a week, but gave each boy one hour of my time, they'd feel empty, neglected. If I were physically home every night, but never really there: I'm consumed in work, in hobbies, in housework, in Netflix, they would feel neglected still. We need both quality and quantity to nourish and nurture our kids, our spouses, any relationship really.

**Paul says we are to bring them up – to nourish them in the punishment and shame of the Lord.**

Oh wait, Paul doesn't say that, does he? He says we are to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. What does that mean? When we think of discipline, we wrongly think of punishment. As parents, punishment should be not the goal; instead it should be to teach. To train. To correct. To develop. The word discipline here should be thought of as teaching through action. That is to show them the way. To walk alongside them.

Paul then says we are to bring them up in the instruction of the Lord. This is teaching through words: through clarifying, through verbal correction, through encouragement, through advice, through asking questions. All of this discipline and instruction is to train up your children in righteousness, in good stewardship, in financial responsibility, in physical well-being -- in other words all areas of life. **It's a comprehensive nourishment.**

A little bit ago, I made a challenging statement. I said that how we parent will impact how our children think about God. I believe that's true. So I want you to think about you and your relationship with God. If you are here today and you are a Christ follower – a Christian - then let me ask you this: How does God, your Heavenly Father treat you? How does He parent you? Does He get angry quickly? Does He yell at you and threaten you with punishment? Does He pull on your arm and throw you onto the bed? Does He ignore you as He plays Candy Crush or surf Facebook? Does He shame you? He never has and He never will. Why? Because God is a good Father. God is in the business of bringing up His children through instruction, discipline, mercy and grace. I believe this is what God is asking us to do today with our children.

If you stop and think about the amazing amount of mercy and grace He has given you and I, why on Earth would we not want to do the same with our kids? Does God correct us? Absolutely, He does. Hebrews 12:6 says [“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”](#) Biblical love – godly love - entails discipline, that teaching through action; instruction, that verbal teaching; and through mercy and grace.

So will God let His children run wild in sin? No, not forever. He provides consequences to get our attention and to correct us. And everyday, we are hit with His mercy and grace.

If you are raising kids today, ask yourself: How am I doing at representing God's discipline, instruction, mercy and grace? Are you simply telling them about them? Or are you demonstrating them in all the areas of your life?

I'll be honest, I hated preparing for this message, because I realized how often I fall away from this. Often I am quick to correct and slow to understand what happened. Or at times I punish, but fail to remember to bring up through the teaching. And when I do these things, it breaks my kids' spirit.

Over the past week or so, I've had to go to my older two boys and apologize to them for this. I have forgotten they are just kids, and aren't always planning sinful rebellion. They simply didn't understand my expectations. Or they were just being kids, not sinful pagans. And at other times, I've delivered punishment instead of discipline.

As I speak this message, I recognize there are people of all ages and seasons of life. There may be many of you who have grown children and you provoked them. You can't change the past, but you can apologize and begin to nourish them today in an appropriate way. Tell your kid, your

grandkid you love them and are proud of them. And you want to nourish them. Whatever stage of life you are in, you can apply this today. And don't wait.

You may be in leadership and you've provoked the people you lead. Apologize. Seek forgiveness and begin to nourish them today.

And for the rest of us who are in the thick of this thing called parenting: Every day aim to nourish your children, through the discipline – that teaching through action - and instruction – that teaching through words. Through extending mercy and pouring out grace. And in all of it, do it in the Lord.

When we do this, we'll show our kids, grandkids, and those we lead, how our Heavenly Father parents us.

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N: Once again, let me bring in Arnie Cole. And I would love to hear about leading and parenting. Arnie, as CEO of Back to the Bible, you bring many years of leadership and business and ministry to the table, but you're also a parent and a grandparent. So as we're studying about parenting, and not forcing your children to be something they're not, does that same principle apply in leadership as well?

A: Yeah, I think it does in a lot of regards. I like to think of our ministry team here as a family. And so yes, there's things that apply. Also families need to be led. And so you need boundaries and you need strong leadership, but within that frame of reference, you also need to have the freedom, so that team members, or family members, can grow on their own and blossom in the job that they have. So it's kind of a fine balancing act, but yes, I think in the true sense of the word, I think we are a family.

N: Yeah, I would agree. And I think this actually kind of reminds me of *Leadership Gold* by John Maxwell. In that, he has a chapter called, "Don't Send Ducks to Eagle School". And I think that's a great picture of trying not to force somebody into something that they cannot become. You know, ducks waddle around, they quack, and they act like ducks. They're not going to soar, you know, like an eagle does. And so you can't force someone to be something that they're not. And I think you've done a very good job here at Back to the Bible, of putting people in roles where they will flourish, and you give them leadership and coaching, so that they can be the very best duck or eagle that they can possibly be.

Okay. I know I've shared with you guys about maybe extending either discipline incorrectly, or even just punishing a child, without that special care to grow them, which made me have to apologize or prompted me to apologize. So have you ever had to apologize to your kids before, and what was the outcome?

A: Yeah. Oh yeah. I've had to apologize many times, a lot of times, because we run another ministry together, our equestrian ministry too. You know that in Scripture it says, "Blessed are you when people say all manner of evil against you." Well, I'm fine with that, but when they say it against my wife or my daughter, then sometimes I don't handle that in a way that I would be blessed. So I have to apologize to everybody involved, you know, the grumpy old man.

N: I've never heard you described that way before. It's shocking to me.

A: Yeah. I'm sure it is.

N: Well, as we close out our time, what is your advice for the parent who has stumbled, and honestly let their family down, whether it's by divorce or scandal, or something else; it could be even neglect? What first step do they need to get back in a relationship with God and also with their family?

A: Not only to ask for forgiveness of your family, but then you have to go and forgive yourself as well. That's even harder.

N: Yeah. And I think we all struggle with both those: extending forgiveness and receiving forgiveness. I know one of the best things I ever did, was talk to both my mom and dad who are divorced, but we talked openly and honestly about what I experienced as a child, and what maybe they conveyed in that process. And what was beautiful is, sometimes we discovered how there was maybe unrecognized hurt and pain, but also those white elephants in the room, that we never dealt with. And through that process of admitting the wrong, owning the wrong, we were able to work through it. And because of it, we have put aside any resentment, and now we have a great relationship. So if this is you today, listen to my friends here, and go and seek reconciliation and receive that forgiveness, both from God, and also extend it to yourself.