Discovering our purpose
The parents responsibility to children
(Eph. 6:4)

Intro: Socrates once wrote, "Could I climb to the highest places in Athens, I would lift up my voice and proclaim; Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth, and take so little care of the children to whom you must someday relinquish it all?" Though provoking, isn't it? Somehow it seems to me that Socrates words might not seem so out of place today.

Let's consider today then the words of Paul in Eph. 6:4.

<u>Fathers</u>

Note that the exhortation is addressed to "fathers" not parents. This is interesting and suggestive. First it addresses the myth that child- rearing is solely a mother's work. It underscores the importance of the father's participation in raising children.

In 1960, the total number of children living in fatherless families was fewer than eight million. Today, that total has risen to nearly twenty-four million. Nearly four out of ten children in America are being raised in homes without their fathers and soon it may be six out of ten. How did this happen? Why are so many of our nation's children growing up without a full-time father? It is because our culture has accepted the idea that fathers are superfluous—in other words, they are not necessary in the "modern" family. Supposedly, their contributions to the well-being of children can easily be performed by the state, which disburses welfare checks, subsidizes midnight basketball leagues, and establishes child-care facilities.

Ideas, of course, have consequences. And the consequences of this idea have been as profound as they have been disastrous. Almost 75 percent of American children living in fatherless households will experience poverty before the age of eleven, compared to only 20 percent of those raised by two parents. Children living in homes where fathers are absent are far more likely to be expelled from or drop out of school, develop emotional or behavioral problems, commit suicide, and fall victim to child abuse or neglect. The males are also far more likely to become violent criminals. As matter of act, men who grew up without dads currently represent 70 percent of the prison population serving long-term sentences.

Wade F. Horn, "Why There is No Substitute for Parents", *Imprimis*, Vol. 26, No. 6, June, 1997, pp. 1-2

Secondly, it shows that a father's responsibility in parenting goes far beyond putting bread on the table. It has been shown that the level of the father's involvement has a tremendous impact on the spiritual outcome of a child. Consider these facts:

One startling bit of research conducted by the Christian Business Men's Committee found the following: When the father is an active believer, there is about a seventy-five percent likelihood that the children will also become active believers. But if only the mother is a believer, this likelihood is dramatically reduced to fifteen percent.

Keith Meyering, in Discipleship Journal, issue #49, p. 41.

1. If both your parents worshipped with you regularly while you were growing up, there's an 80 percent likelihood that you'll worship God regularly as an adult.
2. If only your mother worshipped regularly with you, there's only a 30 percent probability that you'll worship regularly as an adult.
3. If only your father worshipped regularly with you, the likelihood that you'll worship regularly as an adult increases to 70 percent!

Fathers have an enormous impact on their children's faith and values. One of your most important ministries is worshipping with your kids!

<u>Do not provoke your children to anger</u>

Paul is describing the kind of rebellion that we see so frequently in our society and in the church where a child is driven by anger to turn away from what is most precious to their parents. It is the child's way of expressing anger against the way he was treated as a child. This rebellion may be manifested by:

Indifference to the parents spiritual values (worldly goals)
Living an immoral lifestyle
Marrying someone the parent would not approve.
Neglect of the parents, refusing to visit them or meeting their needs in old age.

Listen to children and you will hear what upsets them and become familiar with the seeds of anger that may lead to rebellion.

When the 10-year-olds in Mrs. Imogene Frost's class at the Brookside, N.J. Community Sunday School expressed their views of "What's wrong with grownups?" they came up with these complaints:

1. Grownups make promises, then they forget all about them, or else they say it wasn't really a promise, just a maybe.
2. Grownups don't do the things they're always telling the children to do—like pick up their things, or be neat, or always tell the truth.
3. Grownups never really listen to what children have to say. They always decide ahead of time what they're going to answer.
4. Grownups make mistakes, but they won't admit them. They always pretend that they weren't mistakes at all—or that somebody else made them.
5. Grownups interrupt children all the time and think nothing of it. If a child interrupts a grownup, he gets a scolding or something worse.
6. Grownups never understand how much children want a certain thing—a certain color or shape or size. If it's something they don't admire—even if the children have spent their own money for it—they always say, "I can't imagine what you want with that old thing!"
7. Sometimes grownups punish children unfairly. It isn't right if you've done just some little thing wrong and grownups take away something that means an awful lot to you. Other times you can do something really bad and they say they're going to punish you, but they don't. You never know, and you ought to know.
8. Grownups are always talking about what they did and what they knew when they were 10 years old—but they never try to think what it's like to be 10 years old right now.

For Families Only, J. A. Petersen, ed., Tyndale, 1977, p. 253

How we may provoke children to anger:

By saying one thing and doing another
By always blaming and never praising
By being inconsistent and unfair with discipline
By showing favoritism in the home
By making promises and not keeping them

I once asked my daughter Jennifer what she thought were the biggest problems fathers have with kids. She said, "Dads have too many "tomorrows." You know, "I'll play with you tomorrow, I'll talk to you tomorrow." She was right. Dad, be there now for your children, building quality and quantity benchmarks of trust. Don't wait until tomorrow—or you'll end up wasting too many todays.

Gary Ezzo, *Men of Action*, Summer, 1996, p. 11

By making light of concerns the child feels

By being unreasonably restrictive

<u>But bring them up in the nurture and discipline of the Lord</u>

"Bring them up" translates the same word found in 5:29 "nourish". This emphasizes our obligation to meet their needs, not only physically but emotionally and spiritually.

Nurture--"training", Cf. 2 Tim. 3:16 "instruction in righteousness, Heb. 12: discipline or chastisement"

"to provide instruction, with the intent of forming proper habits of behavior - 'to teach, to instruct, to train, teaching, instruction.'

A home without rules is insecure and without love. A parent shows love and creates security by giving positive guidance and by setting limits on behavior and enforcing them. The idea of letting a child have his way, of letting himself express himself without response is a sure-fire road to heartbreak later on in life.

Discipline is first teaching but also enforcement of what is taught. That is a parents right. The Duke of Winsor once remarked years ago, "Everything in the American home is controlled by switches....except the children". I wonder what he would say now!

Discipline--"instruction", Cf. 1 Cor. 10:11 denoting admonition and even warning.

How we may bring our children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord

Exemplifying the qualities in yourself that you want your children to have. "Thou shalt be a signpost rather than a rut on the highway of life". Are you asking your kids to do what you are not willing to do?

By both formal and informal conversation with children (Deut. 6:6-7). When was the last time you had a good spiritual talk with any of your children?

By exposure to good teaching from sources outside the home (Bible classes) 2 Tim. 3:. I am at times amazed at how diligent we are at seeing that our kids get the best secular education; but are entirely casual about their spiritual education. We want them have good teachers. We might even go the principal if we thought our children were not getting what they needed. We want to see progress reports and we check to make sure they have their homework. At church?…

By protecting them from false teachers. Most of us would probably think of a religious person with seminary training; but most of the false teachers our kids are exposed to are not of that kind. They carry guitars and play in bands. They act on the big screen and they say things to our kids that are intended to undermine all that we seek to teach them.

James Dobson cited a Cornell University study showing that fathers of preschool children on the average spend 37.7 seconds per day in real contact with their youngsters. In contrast, the study indicated that children watch television approximately 54 hours per week.

The average young teenage American girl views 1,500 references to sexual acts on TV annually, according to a study at Michigan State University. Boys of that age view an average of nearly 1,300 such and attend 17 R-rated movies annually. According to the teens studied, parents "never" or "not often" limited their TV viewing. There's little indication that parents exercise any control, positive or negative, over TV viewing.

By clarifying values through wise decision-making. Children learn our values in those critical moments when we choose what is most important.

Children are most impressed when they see what we do in "crisis" moments, when there is an obvious conflict of interests and values and we have to choose one over the other.

When I was a kid I was little league pitcher, a pretty good one. Rain out games were played on Wednesday night. My parents were confront with a crisis. Would I pitch the game or go to Bible class.

A young boy watches his dad as he decided whether to spend time working on a pressing project or attending the services. He will learn values from that decision.

By firm but loving correction of disobedience.

Conclusion: A few generations ago, a man captured the essence of this truth in some powerful words about the balance between home and career. When I read this good counsel written by Edgar Guest in *My Job as a Father* back in 1923, I can almost see the ghost of Solomon in the background, sadly nodding his head. Read it and take heed. Guest wrote:

I have known of a number of wealthy men who were not successes as fathers. They made money rapidly; their factories were marvels of organization; their money investments were sound and made with excellent judgment, and their contributions to public service were useful and willingly made. All this took time and thought. At the finish there was a fortune on the one hand, and a worthless and dissolute son on the other. WHY? Too much time spent in making money implies too little time spent with the boy.

When these children were youngsters romping on the floor, if someone had come to any one of those fathers and offered him a million dollars for his lad he would have spurned the offer and kicked him out the door. Had someone offered him ten million dollars in cash for the privilege of making a drunkard out of his son, the answer would have been the same. Had someone offered to buy from him for a fortune the privilege of playing with the boy, of going on picnics and fishing trips and outings, and being with him a part of every day, he would have refused the proposition without giving it a second thought.

Yet that is exactly the bargain those men made, and which many men are still making. They are coining their lives into fortunes and automobile factories and great industries, but their boys are growing up as they may. These men probably will succeed in business; but they will be failures as fathers. To me it seems that a little less industry and a little more comradeship with the boy is more desirable.

Not so much of me in the bank, and more of me and of my best in the lad, is what I should like to have to show at the end of my career.

To be the father of a great son is what I should call success. ...This is what I conceive my job to be.

Source unknown

When we look around and see homes deteriorating, when we see rebellion and neglect, it is encouraging to see both children and parents who have accepted the wisdom God gives us in these verses. It is a delight to raise children who are appreciative and obedient. It is a great privilege to have parents who love you and you seek what is best for you always.