

We've been working our way through Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

6 or 7 weeks ago, we were in Ephesians 4, and I gave a message entitled "Living as the transformed creatures that we are". Through the cross, and the saving Grace of God, we have been transformed. We've been transformed from darkness to light. We have moved from unrighteousness to righteousness. We once were far away from God and cut off from Him, but now we've been brought near, and into His very presence (in fact God the Holy Spirit lives inside of us).

And because of this transformation that has taken place in us, we should therefore live as the transformed creatures that we are... And then as we got to 5:1, we read "**Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.**"

And we've gone through some very practical examples of how we can imitate God, in our daily living... And this imitating of God, begins with an attitude of sacrificial living...

And so for a few weeks we looked at Sacrificial living in the marriage relationship, and last week, we began to consider sacrificial living in the parent/child relationship. And that's what we're continuing on with today...

Last week's lesson was for the children. It was for young children, and it was for adult children – it was all about how we should be relating to our parents. And sacrificial living, means that when we are younger, we **obey** our parents, and we continue to **honour** our parents, for our whole lives – That was last week.

This week, we have a very practical word for parents. Kids, you can listen in too, because one day God might bless you, with children of your own, and you'll need to know how to be a parent too. But it's also, good to understand why our parents do what they do.

So, let's begin:

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,

*British historian, Lord Acton once said "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." ... And there's a fair bit of truth in that. With power, comes a very real temptation to become self-seeking, and to lord it over those who are **under** our control. And so we find a dictator becomes a despot; a boss becomes a slave driver; a child star becomes a spoilt brat; and of course the organist rules the church.....*

And when Christian children are commanded to obey their parents, that gives the parents a fair bit of power. *And as Agent 86 (Maxwell Smart) would have said "If only they used their power for good instead of evil"*. How do you as a parent, use the power that God has given you, over your child?

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,

It's specifically written to Fathers. Mothers, you can probably learn from it too, but it's specifically telling the Dads, not to provoke their children to anger... Why do you think the dad's singled out???? - well probably because we're the ones who have the biggest problem with doing that to our kids....

A father becomes someone who provokes his kids to anger, when he loses sight of the fact, that his role as a husband and as a father, is to be a **sacrificial** leader in the family... When a father ceases to be sacrificial in his leadership, and begins to become selfish in his leadership, that's when he begins to provoke his children to anger.

I'm a bit nervous preaching on this today, because my children will probably realise that for me to preach this sermon, I'm going to be speaking a lot of hypocrisy... What they don't know, is most Sunday's when I get up to preach, you're listening to the words of a hypocrite. I haven't got everything in order, and usually when I preach, the main person I'm preaching to, is "me". And sacrificial leadership is something that I don't do very well.

When a father loses sight of his role as a sacrificial leader, that's when he starts to provoke his children to anger.

Now, that's all Paul says ⁴ **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger**, He doesn't tell us in what **ways** we do it, nor does he tell us how to prevent ourselves from doing it – he just simply tells us **not** do it.

There are all sorts of ways that fathers (and parents in general) can provoke their children. Last week we talked about how it's hard to honour **our** parents when they 'press our buttons'. And we spent a bit of time trying to figure out, "Well, how can I continue to honour my parents, when they're absolutely frustrating to me, or when it seems that they're purposely challenging me to defy them?" And I didn't have any neat answers for you. I have thought about it more since, and I

want to say, “When you give honour to someone who’s actions do not deserve honour, that’s called ‘grace’”. God has shown **us** grace, and we are to **imitate** God, by showing grace to others. And there’s something very Godly, to honour our parents, even if they’re ‘pressing our buttons’.

That was last week, but this week, we’re talking to the parents, and the message for us today, is not about how to honour, when it’s difficult to do so... Today’s message is, “How can we make it easy, for **our** children, to honour **us**?”

As a sacrificial leader in my family, how do I become a person, who’s actions are honourable???

Well, there’s probably countless ways we can provoke our children to anger... But I think it all boils down to losing sight of sacrificial leadership. God has given us an enormous responsibility, to lead in our families. And to do it well, is a personal sacrifice, given in love for God, and in love for your family.

And here’s a few examples of how we **can** provoke our children to anger:

We can provoke our children to anger:

- By being overly strict, and needlessly restrictive
- By **not** giving them the responsibility they have earned
- Show favouritism to other children
- Treating them as a slave (*when household chores go beyond what is right, and we begin to make them take on what we should be responsible for*)
- Breaking promises
- Abuse (in all its forms – verbal; physical; sexual; emotional)

- Extremes in punishment (when does punishment become abuse?)
- Belittling
- Unforgiveness towards our children
- Ungraciousness to our children
- Lovelessness
- Hypocrisy (telling our kids to do one thing, while we do the very thing we're trying to weed out of them)
- Strangely enough, we can also provoke our children to anger by letting them have whatever they want, and by rewarding their bad behaviour.

And if you don't believe me on that one, you show me a child who's never had any discipline at all, and always gotten his or her own way, and 9 times-out-of 10, you'll be showing me a child who has a chip-on-their-shoulder, and feels that the world owes them, and often that's expressed in anger.

So, there's all sorts of ways (and that's just a few examples), that fathers can provoke their children to anger... And we have to guard against that...

8 year old Johnny, had finished his Christmas holidays and gone back to school. 2 days into the term, his teacher rang his mother to tell her that little Johnny had been misbehaving. "Now hang on a minute," his mother said. "I had Johnny here for 6 or 7 weeks over the holidays, and I never called you once when he misbehaved".ⁱ

Such is the attitude of many parents today: We've failed in disciplining our children, and then we expect the teachers to

fix it. It is the responsibility of the parents, to discipline their children, and we should **not** be expecting the teachers to do **our** job for us. By the time our children reach school age, if we haven't been diligently disciplining and guiding our children up until then, well the poor old teacher's always going to be playing 'catch-up'. Discipline **must** begin in the early years, and continue through to the beginning of adulthood (the teenage years).

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Remember last week, when we talked about honouring our parents, and how this is something that is just **so** important.... And I read a pretty shocking bit of Scripture to you – something that I've never heard preached on, and it came from Deuteronomy 21. I'll just quickly read it to you again: - it's talking about what to do with an uncontrollable child:

Deuteronomy 21: **18** "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, **19** then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, **20** and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.'
21 Then all the men of the city shall stone him to

death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

And I think I went “woooohhh”...

It's obviously an Old Testament law that we don't keep any more, but last week I used it as an example, so we could just see, “how critical it is for us to honour our parents”. It leaves absolutely no doubt in our mind, just how important it is to God, that we should be a people who honour our parents.

I also touched on what I wanted to bring out of it today:

Imagine, if you were living in Israel, and you were the parent of a child, and you love your child.... Would you not, do everything in your power, and would you not, make every effort, to instil into your children, Godly values, and to always discipline them, and to sometimes punish them, to ensure that they would not become stubborn and rebellious?... Would you not, do everything in your power, to bring them up to honour and obey????

Wouldn't you do that??? And I wonder how much harder we parents would work at bringing our kids up properly, if we understood, just how critical it was...

Last week, I said “This passage has more to say to parents than what it does to children.”

The father and the mother **both** have to be involved in the raising of the child. God never designed the family to have absentee fathers. Fathers, do not walk away and leave the child-rearing to the mother. The Father and the mother, **both**

have to be conscientious in their discipline, and when they reach their wit's end, and take them to the elders of the city, they stand before them together, and say "We've done our best – he just won't listen".... And it makes a point there, that it has to be your own town – the place where you live and are known.... And the elders of the town are going to know, if you actually have done your best, or whether discipline, and raising your child, was just all too hard for you...

I'm going to make a bold statement – one which is only based on personal observation, and I haven't done any formal research into it at all, but I'm going to say it anyway:, "Most uncontrollable children today, are that way, because their parents have **not brought them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

Very rarely, will a child who has been disciplined and instructed properly by parents, become a rebellious child. But it does happen. And when a person is "*characterized by enduring antisocial behavior, diminished empathy and remorse, and disinhibited or bold behaviorⁱⁱ*", well these are the sorts of characteristics we see in a psychopath.... And they do exist. And sometimes even with the very best efforts of the parents, children are beyond control, and the State has to get involved.... But that is only in the most rarest of cases...

Paul says, mainly to the Fathers, but I also believe it's for the mothers too: bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

I want to have a look at that phrase in the Greek:

ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νουθεσίᾳ κυρίου.
ektrephete auta en paideia kai nouthesia Kuriou

Do you understand it better now????

ἐκτρέφετε (**ektrephete**) : to rear – to care for – to bring up – to nourish

αὐτὰ (**auta**) : them – meaning the children

ἐν (**en**) : in

παιδείᾳ (**paideia**) : *upbringing, training, instruction, discipline*ⁱⁱⁱ;

καὶ (**kai**) : and

νουθεσίᾳ (**nouthesia**) : *admonition, warning, instruction*^{iv}.

Κυρίου (**Kuriou**) of the Lord

So, literal translation of what Paul said: To rear; care for; bring up; to nourish our children in the upbringing; training; instruction; discipline and admonition; warning; instruction of the Lord.

Usually, when someone says the word “discipline”, what do you straight away think of??? I think of the strap that used to sit on top of the fridge when I was a kid, and every now and then when I was particularly naughty, down it would come.... When you think of discipline, you might think of the wooden spoon; the poddy waddy; the principle's cane, or maybe even a stock whip....

But we need to understand, that that part of discipline, while being essential, remains the tiniest part of bringing a child up in the Lord.

- We care; we care for; we nourish; we bring them up.
- We train; we instruct; and we discipline.
- We admonish; we warn; we instruct...
- And we do all this in the Lord.

If your idea of discipline, is limited to giving your kid a flogging when they've deserved it, you haven't understood the self-sacrificial nature, of parental discipline.

There are two selfish ways to bring up a child: The first is to basically ignore their behaviour, and to mostly let them bring up themselves. The second, is to just give them a flogging when they've done something wrong.... Both those methods, are lazy parenting.

If you want to bring your child up in the Lord, care for them. Nourish them. Train them. Instruct them. Yes, and discipline them. Admonish them. Warn them. Instruct them...

Do you get what's happening here? It's about teaching them Godly living. And teaching (to be done well), needs to be intentional...

And if you recognise that your child needs some instruction, or warning, or punishment, and go "hmmm... Big job" and let it just pass by, that's not Godly parenting. To bring them up – instructing them; warning them in the Lord; admonishing them – is a big job – it's a self-sacrificial job – it's a task that's going to cost you . It'll cost you in time; in energy;

emotionally and physically.... But Godly parenting and discipline, is much more than physical punishment.

Having said all that, I am going to talk about physical discipline. And we must do this, because there are 2 extreme views on physical discipline (I'm talking about physical punishment) – there are 2 extreme views on it, and neither of them are good for the child.

The first extreme view, is that corporal punishment, is a violent abuse of the child, and under no circumstances can it ever be condoned.

And as a bible teacher, I have to tell you, that is completely against what God says in His word.

Hebrews 12, talks about how we as Christians are disciplined by God, and it uses the father / son relationship as a metaphor:

“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,

and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves,

and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers

who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Isn't that a good word? Our fathers discipline us because they love us – it's not very pleasant, but it produces righteousness in us.

Proverbs 3:

¹¹ My son, do not despise YHWH's discipline
and do not resent his rebuke,

¹² because YHWH disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.

Proverbs 23:

¹³ Do not withhold discipline from a child;
if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.

¹⁴ If you strike him with the rod,
you will save his soul from Sheol.

Proverbs 22:

¹⁵ Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,

but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

Proverbs 29:

¹⁵ The rod and reproof give wisdom,
but a child left to himself brings shame to his
mother.

All of these things, are wise words. Biblically, physical punishment, is definitely something that at times, we have to do, and it's for the good of the child.

But the second extreme attitude towards physical punishment, is when the physical punishment goes beyond discipline, and becomes abuse. As parents, we are to imitate God. God is a loving heavenly father. And God disciplines his children. He is a god of justice, but He is also a god of mercy.

But sometimes punishment gets taken too far. When Israel rebelled against God, He warned them, and warned them, and warned them, to repent and to turn from their wicked ways, but they wouldn't, and so God used Babylon to punish Israel. But Babylon went too far. And God was exceedingly angry with Babylon, because they showed no mercy, and they made the yoke of slavery very heavy indeed. And so God dealt with Babylon, and punished them. You can read it in Zechariah 1 and Isaiah 47^v.

Always be very careful that you never take physical discipline too far, because the Lord is watching over **your** children.

When it goes beyond discipline and becomes abuse, the Lord becomes very angry.

How do I know if I'm taking it too far?

- If it's making me feel better when I punish my child, well that's a pretty good indicator that I shouldn't be doing it
- It's definitely gone too far if it's damaging or permanently injuring the child
- You've gone too far and you have a wrong motivation, if you find it difficult to stop
- And if as I finish, I am angry, and unable to comfort the child, I've gone too far (to discipline a child, is not to release our anger)

Are you understanding this? Parenting (including discipline) (including physical punishment) should always be done as an expression of sacrificial living. Because that's what Godly parenting is about – sacrificial living in the family...

Well, it seems to have become yet another quite long sermon. This week, I actually looked back over the messages that have been coming out of this little sub-series of "sacrificial living", and every one of them have been long. I hope that's been OK – there just seems to be so many spiritual, and yet practical, lessons here to share...

And as a parent, I actually got a fair bit out of preparing this message. And I wish I'd done it 10 years earlier – I probably would've done a far better job of being a parent...

So, neither you (and certainly not the preacher) have been the perfect parent. May the Lord forgive us for our failures, and may our children forgive us for our failures.

But let's also, beginning from here on in – let's begin to love and discipline our children, **sacrificially** – giving of ourselves – and imitating God – our perfect heavenly Father.

Questions?????

^{i i} Readers Digest, Laughter , the best medicine. Readers Digest Association: Westmount, Quebec. 1998. F.Tracey p.30

ⁱⁱ “Psychopathy is traditionally defined as a personality disorder characterized by enduring antisocial behavior, diminished empathy and remorse, and disinhibited or bold behavior. It may also be defined as a continuous aspect of personality, representing scores on different personality dimensions found throughout the population in varying combinations.” Wikipedia

ⁱⁱⁱ F,rst, D., 1986. παιδεύω L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.

^{iv} Selter, F., 1986. Exhort, Warn, Console, Rebuke L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.

^v Zechariah 1:15 and Isaiah 47:6