

# The Nurture & Admonition of the Lord

## Ephesians 6:4

We stand on the promises of God's mercy to a thousand generations when raising our children. You can't begin with faith and finish with works. All truly good works are driven by, founded upon, and accomplished by faith. The Pharisee and the publican both pray to God, but only one is heard. Should we conclude that prayer doesn't really work? No, pride doesn't work—it ruins prayer and everything else. When we consider the command to raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, it works the same way. Unbelief sees only checkboxes and to-dos, but faith sees something to believe and do. This message focuses on parenting younger children.

### Summary of the Text

Fathers are not to provoke their children to anger but instead bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (v. 4). The parallel verse in Colossians connects the provocation of children to their discouragement, indicating the kind of provocation: "lest they become discouraged" (3:21). A father must be careful not to teach, exhort, require, or discipline in such a way that makes his children angry or discouraged. This doesn't justify ungodly behavior in children, it just means he must not provoke or allow them to settle into this state of sin and misery. Instead, he must see to it that his children are brought up in the education and admonition of the Lord. See the contrast between nurture and admonition in the Lord and anger and discouragement apart from Him. God claims us as His children and teaches us how to raise our children in Him.

### Arrows and Pillars in Training

Parents are in charge of raising young children for a brief number of intense years. These are crucial years and the Lord uses them for big purposes: "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger" (Ps. 8:2). How He does this we may not know; *that* He does is plain to those who read and believe. God meant it when He said He would be God to the children of believing parents (Gen. 17:7), and He receives their worship like any other disciple. This is why children ought to be included in the worship service and not carted off to be occupied while the adults do important things. It's a lot of work to train kids to worship (and not just be in the service), but if God wants their praise, then what more rewarding work is there than this? Because of what Scripture says about covenant children, we baptize babies and encourage those who don't to have their children baptized when they profess faith. Just as children participated in Passover and ate the unleavened bread and lamb of the feast (Ex. 12:24-27), so we welcome children to communion. This is a relatively recent development in the history of the Church and we are blessed to receive it. These are holy things which ought to terrify us in the right way. As Paul said about preaching the gospel, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16), so we see with raising our children in the Lord. They are young arrows in His army and trees and pillars in His house (Pss. 127:4, 144:12). All of your assets and investments will fall and none will go with you after death. But these people will live forever. Seeing this first gives us hope and strength.

### Nurture

The word "nurture" is also translated "discipline" and describes an all-encompassing endeavor of enculturation, the *paideia* of the Lord. For Plato, to shape the ideal citizen required a lifetime of training and education in the total Greek way. His purpose centered on the state. Paul takes the word and says Christian parents are to provide *paideia* of the Lord, to nurture, teach, shape, and enculturate in Him. Nurture is not mere behavior control. It's shaping the affections to love the Lord our God with all of the heart, soul, mind and strength. Because our life in the presence of God is unceasing—we glorify Him in whatever we do, even eating

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and drinking—so nurturing children in the Lord is immersive. It includes education but it's much bigger than that, closer to Plato's vision of total training of mind and body, imparting knowledge, virtue, and purpose for all of life. Paul calls it *paideia* because it captures what God already described in the Torah. On heels of the greatest commandment, He says,

*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

*Deuteronomy 6:6-9*

All of creation and every human endeavor relates to God, and therefore there is no neutrality, no meaningless fact to know or activity to do outside of life in Christ. So we take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:8). We live all of life *coram Deo*, before the face of God. And we nourish our children this way. Many parents fall into the ditch of talking only or predominantly about how bad sin is and what not to do. This is certainly part of parenting, but enculturation is about loving the right things, not just hating the wrong ones. If you want them to love the standard, you have to love it. Even better, you get to love it—that's how good God has been to you. Fathers and mothers make full-souled children by themselves being interested in things and eager to take dominion under God's blessing, giving them something to imitate: "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Prov. 25:2). This is why education is not just about information. Subtract academic, behavioral, and the gender and race (woke) confusion in our government schools. Take them back 50 years. Did they shape people to know and love God back then? Since *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) it has been deemed illegal to support any religious activities in public schools, meaning agnosticism is the official (religious) policy. Because a disciple when fully trained will be like his master, Christian parents want teachers to shape their kids to know Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Little kids are nourished by time with parents, so fathers especially need to make sure they get it.

### Admonition

Because the early years are so important in shaping us, Proverbs provides much information and encouragement. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). Admonition isn't only about spanking and corrective discipline, but these are part of it. Many wonder if it's a metaphorical rod, but we don't have to: "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol" (Prov. 23:13-14 ESV). "Gentle parenting" isn't. It's fragile parenting and it produces fragile people. It's a lot of work to discipline, truly a labor of love: "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Prov. 13:24). The goal of discipline is restoration, not retribution. So to do it obediently and effectively, a parent must be free of anger and annoyance. The offense should be stated, discipline administered, forgiveness sought and granted, and fellowship restored with love and affection. When children are young, parents exercise a lot of control and constant oversight. Shaping them during this time means increasing maturity and freedom when they are older, right when everyone else is complaining about teenagers and taking away their privileges. God gives these gifts so we would delight in our children as He does.