

How Can Fathers Raise Kids without Provoking Them to Anger?

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“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” ([Ephesians 6:4](#)).

For many years I was a Little League dad. I cheered through desert heat, frigid cold, thrilling wins, and deflating losses. If there is a place to research how parents interact with their children, for better or worse, the ball field is the place to do it. There were some parents who led their children in love, and some who certainly provoked them to anger. This can be found in any sport or activity, but the truth rings the same.

As parents, we want our children to excel, but when our quest for excellence becomes intertwined with anger, greed, or discouragement, we do the opposite.

My children were involved in all kinds of activities: sports, gymnastics, theater, you name it! There were championship teams with highlight reel action, and there were times my kid was left on the bench even though I was certain they should have been the star of the game.

I didn’t always do it right, but I understood that my response in those moments helped shape their character for a lifetime.

The Car Ride Home

Author John O’Sullivan writes at the [Changing the Game Project](#) that he has conducted many interviews of children deciding to give up sports. He always asked them, “what was your

least favorite moment in sports?" I often got a very similar and sad answer: the ride home after the game."

As a dad, my instinct is to use the ride home to pontificate upon my wisdom, insight, and acute post-game analysis, and tell my kids everything that they did right and wrong, and how they can improve.

Of course, this is the last thing they need.

We live in a culture filled with anger about every possible thing. Social media we actually *encourages* anger over love and reason. Yet we have the opportunity to make our homes, and our cars, "anger-free" zones by focusing our thoughts on Christ and consciously blocking out the anger that is so easily found elsewhere.

A Message Designed for Fathers

Why does Paul single out fathers in this verse? Fathers have an impact that cannot be understated in the life of a child. We must be thoughtful in how we interact with them. We often see ourselves as the ones to keep kids safe and out of trouble, which can make us tough, unapproachable, discouraging and passive. Alternatively, Paul instructs us not to keep them "out of trouble," but to put them "into discipline and instruction of the Lord." In doing so, we can choose to be gentle, available, encouraging, and active.

Fathers are called upon throughout [Scripture](#) to lead their families well. In [Colossians 3](#) Paul gives similar instructions as he does here, instructing husbands to "love your wives and do not be harsh with them," and following with, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

It is clear that fathers have a role to set the tone for Godliness in our homes. When fathers tell their kids how much better we were at their age, compare them to others unfairly, demand compliance to unfair expectations, expect them to act differently in church than at home, or speak to them in anger and not humility, we set a dangerous precedent that does not represent Christ or his love for them.

Children Should Also Honor Their Parents

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" ([Ephesians 6:1](#)).

This passage of Scripture holds instruction not just for fathers, but for children also. Children are instructed to honor their parents, and Paul even quotes the Ten Commandments to drive his point home, "this is the first commandment with a promise" ([v.3](#)).

This must be a two-way street. Children are to honor their parents, but this does not give fathers license to neglect their children and simply expect blind obedience. Children will obey parents who care for their children in a Godly manner, who encourage them through the Word and a life example of what it means to follow Jesus even when circumstances are difficult, because these children can see that they are loved.

Paul gives this instruction to children, and then turns around and talks to fathers. He is essentially saying, your children are expected to obey you, but you are expected to be a good father. Sadly, we have all seen the idea of children obeying their parents taken too far. Parents can punish children for their lack of obedience while neglecting the other half of this passage, which requires them to not provoke children to anger, and raise them in discipline and instruction. The results can be devastating.

Anger vs. Discipline

No one learns from an angry teacher, and no one learns when they are being belittled and discouraged. Children learn in a safe and encouraging environment where they are able to ask questions and recover from their mistakes without fear of being belittled.

When we discipline our children in anger or frustration, they only learn that we are angry, unfair parents, and all we accomplish is provoking them to anger. Yet when we as parents are actively seeking Christ, actively seeking his instruction and discipline for ourselves, we can become fathers and mothers who discipline and instruct in [faith](#) and love.

It is very possible to teach our children that they have done something wrong without provoking them to anger in response to our own. But this has to come from a place of grace, love, and a home that is built around Christ. We must also remember that growing up in a Christian home does not make one a Christian. Just like anyone else, each of our children must hear, see, and know the Gospel for themselves. When we live for Christ, and instruct and discipline them in a Godly way, we help to lead them towards the truth of Jesus that will sustain them throughout their own life.

We can spend time as a family praying together, asking each other about things to pray for one another, memorizing verses together, making time to serve our communities together and letting our children know that they have value, meaning and purpose that stems from who they are in Christ.

Our children are the greatest gift we could ever be given. Let us seek to not provoke them to anger. There is anger enough in the world. Let us instead make a difference by leading them to Christ in love and grace.