

TICKIN' 'EM OFF OR BRINGIN' 'EM UP?

Ephesians 6:4

Rev. Paul Nelson

TOP TEN THINGS YOU'LL NEVER HEAR A DAD SAY¹

10. Well, how 'bout that?... I'm lost! Looks like we'll have to stop and ask for directions.
9. You know pumpkin, now that you're thirteen, you'll be ready for unchaperoned car dates. Won't that be fun?
8. I noticed that all your friends have a certain "bug off" attitude ... I like that.
7. Here's a credit card and the keys to my new car -- go crazy.
6. What do you mean you wanna play football? Figure skating not good enough for you, son?
5. Your mother and I are going away for the weekend ... You might want to consider throwing a party.
4. Well, I don't know what's wrong with your car. Probably one of those doo-hickey thingies -- you know -- that makes it run or something. Just have it towed to a mechanic and pay whatever he asks.
3. No son of mine is going to live under this roof without an earring -- now quit your belly-aching, and let's go to the mall.
2. Whaddya wanna go and get a job for? I make plenty of money for you to spend.
1. Father's day? Aahh -- don't worry about that -- it's no big deal.

Happy Father's day to all the fathers and grandfathers with us this morning.

Here is what I think is a shocking statement made by psychologist Judith Wallerstein. Dr. Wallerstein is a psychologist and researcher who created a 25-year study on the effects of divorce on the children. In her book *Second Chances* she wrote:

Amazing as it may seem, developmental psychology has only recently become aware of the vital role fathers play in the lives of their children. For many years, child psychology was preoccupied with the mother-child relationship, as if fathers were secondary figures...

Our research is part of a growing body of knowledge that puts this lopsided view of child development back into perspective. Fathers exert a critical influence on their sons and daughters throughout childhood and adolescence, helping to shape their characters, values, relationships with other people, and career choices.... Children do not dismiss their fathers just because there has been a divorce. Indeed, it is the children of divorce who taught us very early that to be separated from their father was intolerable. The

¹ <http://www.jokeshumor.net/fathers-day-jokes>

poignancy of their reactions is astounding, especially among the six-, seven-, and eight-year-olds. They cry for their daddies--be they good, bad, or indifferent daddies.²

Much of the sickness of our society can be traced to this shift away from a focus on fathers and their role in the family and society. Here are some of the chilling statistics from recent research on this issue:

- *According to a U.S. Census Bureau report, over 25 million children live apart from their biological fathers. That is 1 out of every 3 (34.5%) children in America.³*
- *Children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor.⁴*
- *Even after controlling for income, youths in father-absent households still had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in mother-father families. Youths who never had a father in the household experienced the highest odds.⁵*
- *Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.⁶*
- *Teens without fathers were twice as likely to be involved in early sexual activity and seven times more likely to get pregnant as an adolescent.⁷*

I think the first point we can conclude from this data is that:

Fathers - you have a powerful influence on the healthy development of your children!

Fathers, you are incredibly important to your children. Please don't underestimate your impact or value to your kids. Ours is a high and holy calling to raise our children. Brothers be affirmed at the privilege that is yours to help shape the life another human being.

Because we have such a powerful influence we need to take to heart what God tells us through the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:4

Ephesians 6:4

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

(English Standard Version)

² Wallerstein, Judith S. & Blakeslee, Sandra, Second Chances, pp. 233-234.

³ http://www.fatherhood.org/father_factor.asp

⁴ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2002, P200-547, Table C8. Washington D.C.: GPO, 2003.

⁵ Harper, Cynthia C. and Sara S. McLanahan. "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14 (September 2004): 369-397.

⁶ Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993.

⁷ Ellis, Bruce J., John E. Bates, Kenneth A. Dodge, David M. Ferguson, L. John Horwood, Gregory S. Pettit, and Lianne Woodward. "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy." *Child Development* 74 (May/June 2003): 801-821.

Because our kids have such a deep seated need and desire for our love and approval, we fathers can really do them damage. That's why the first command is so important because we really have the power to provoke our children to anger.

Don't provoke your children to anger.

From time to time we get in our kids face and they angry with us and that kind of anger is certainly in view in here. But I think its long term anger, the kind that seethes over a long period of time. It's the kind of anger that's like a low grade fever, always there just under the surface. I think we see it in kids all around us. I see kids in our community that are sullen, there's a scowl on their face, they're listening to angry music. I wonder if they're angry on the inside and what is making them angry. Certainly, for some, not all, we are seeing kids who have been provoked to anger by their fathers.

Maybe as an adult you still harbor anger towards your father. The only way to be free of that anger is to forgive your father with God's help.

Dad's how do we provoke our children to anger?

I put that question to my kids the other day and here's their response of the kinds of things fathers do that provoke their kids to anger: hypocrisy, lack of protection, divorce, neglect, overbearing, unapologetic, unapproachable, never affirming.

We provoke our children to anger when we don't invest in our relationship with them.

Howard Hendricks has said that the average American father spends 37.7 seconds a day with his children.⁸ I'm guessing that figure doesn't apply so much in our church family, but that's a sobering statistic.

When our children are young, investing in our relationship with them centers more around activities like going to the park or coaching their softball or baseball teams, things like that. As our kids grow older, investing in our relationship with them centers more on conversation. This is where we guys sometimes feel really challenged and if we don't put conscious effort in learning to communicate with our kids, we can provoke them to anger.

We provoke our children to anger when we talk *at* them rather than talk *with* them.

As our children grow older they need us to become more conversation oriented and to share our thoughts and feelings with them. It is important that they hear our stories, in little servings, and not all our successes. As our kids get older we need to talk with them as real individuals with thoughts and feelings of their own. We will accomplish a lot more through listening than we will lecturing.

⁸ Hendricks, Howard, (Dallas, TX: The Art of Family Living) [The Anatomy of a Father.](#)

I'm not suggesting that we drop our standards and principles and that our parenting become a group sport. But as our kids grow up we need to engage them in conversation and teach them how to think and live in a principled manner. We need to learn to talk with our kids and not at them.

We provoke our children to anger when our ego trumps the truth.

You may be thinking, "Pastor Paul, what in the world are you talking about?" There are a few men in my life who do not seem to have the ability to admit when they're wrong. Even over stupid things like admitting I turned left when I should have turned right. "They must have renamed the streets since we were here last."

Our ego trumps the truth when we can't let anyone else in the family have a good idea or a better idea than ours. It's our way or the highway.

Our ego trumps the truth when we have been hurtful to one of our kids, but we refuse to acknowledge it and apologize to them for what we did.

What we fear will cause our children to respect us less actually causes them to respect us more. Our kids will respect a dad who lives by the truth rather than by his ego.

We provoke our children to anger when we withhold our blessing from them.

Victor Hugo is quoted as saying,

*The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved.*⁹

Our kids crave our approval.

We fathers are notorious for filling our children with a sense of inadequacy. Some of us have a tendency to constantly push our children to do more, to get better grades, to excel in sports or music. And we have some extraordinary kids in our church. But do we give our children our blessing. Do we build them up with our words and share with them the attributes we observe and appreciate in them? We're probably more apt to praise them for something they have achieved when what they need even more is praise for who they *are*. We all crave affirmation and validation. Dads, are you giving your children your blessing?

God's first command to us is that we not provoke our children to anger. The second half of Ephesians 6:4 shifts from a negative command to a positive command.

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

Help your kids grow spiritually.

⁹ English, O. Spurgeon, M.D. and Foster, Constance J. Foster, (New York: G. Putnam;s Sons, 1961) Fathers Are Parents, Too.

To “bring up” means to feed and nurture a child to maturity.¹⁰ Paul says we are to nurture our kids to maturity in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The word discipline basically means training through action and the word instruction refers to training through verbal teaching.

So I think the Lord is telling us dads to help our kids grow spiritually by what we teach and by what we lead them to do.

Now you might be thinking to yourself at this point, “OK, Pastor Paul you’re going to tell me that I should have daily devotions with my kids and pray with them every night when they go to bed and all that stuff.”

Well I am and I’m not. On the one hand I appreciate and admire dads who are able to have daily devotions and prayer with their kids. If you can do it, do it!

But I gotta tell you, I tried it and it didn’t go well. I’m not sure why. I’m sure it has to do with my personality and the way I approached it with my kids. I just know it caused tension in our family and not spiritual growth.

Brothers, I think a couple of key principles here are that one

We help our kids spiritually when we ourselves are growing spiritually.

Our kids sense the reality of our relationship with God. If we are growing in the Lord, then when teachable moments present themselves, we have something to offer our kids. As we are transformed into the likeness of Christ it will definitely show. Jesus will deal with us on those things that provoke our children to anger. When our kids see us changing it gives credibility to the Faith. On the other hand, if we aren’t growing in the Lord, our kids see that we’re being a hypocrite. So, brothers, establish a daily quiet time between you and the Lord. Get involved in a men’s study or a home group or a discipleship relationship with another man. You’ll help your kids grow spiritually by growing spiritually yourself.

Second,

We help our kids spiritually by establishing some basic spiritual disciplines for our family.

Two spiritual disciplines I have in mind are commitment to the local church and serving in the local church.

I found a very interesting statistic about the influence fathers have on their commitment to church.

- 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.
- If only your mother worshipped regularly with you, there’s only a 30 percent probability that you’ll worship regularly as an adult.

¹⁰Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed., G1625 (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000, c1992, c1993).

- If only your father worshipped regularly with you, the likelihood that you'll worship regularly as an adult increases to 70 percent!¹¹

Dads, I believe you need to make the church a priority in your life and in your family's lives. What I mean is that being in church and serving in church takes priority over most other activities including sports and recreation. I don't mean to be inflexible, but to miss Sunday mornings at church should be the rare exception and not a regular occurrence.

I think we also need to model serving in the local church for our kids. The Bible teaches us that every one of us has been given a spiritual gift by which to bless and build up the local church and for which we are going to give account to Jesus and the judgment seat of Christ. We need to model a life of service for our kids. If our kids don't see us dads investing ourselves in the local church they grow up relating to the church as consumers. The church becomes just like a restaurant – you go if you like what they serve; if not, you go someplace else. We dads need to take the lead in bringing our kids to church and modeling a life of service in the local church.

Finally,

We help our kids spiritually by praying for them.

Sometimes we don't know what to pray for our kids so let me give you a template for praying with your kids based on Colossians 1:9-11.

Father, fill _____ with all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that _____ may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Father strengthen _____ with all power, according to Your glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.

CONCLUSION

Dads, you are incredibly important to your kids. May God bless you and give you wisdom and strength to raise your kids to love and serve Jesus.

¹¹ www.bible.org