

## A PARENT'S TOOLS EPHESIANS 6:1-4

I've met parents who have great ambitions for their children. They're hoping to shape child prodigies... *academically, musically, artistically, athletically...*

They spend time and money on camps, and lessons, and trainers. And there's nothing wrong with providing children these advantages - but you can do all I've mentioned and more, and not fulfill **a parent's purpose**.

As we learned last week, above all else a parent's God-given responsibility is **to teach their children obedience and respect**. Left to himself a child will *disobey* and *go his own way*. A child needs to learn to obey and honor - and he or she won't learn it from the world we live in - it's a parent's purpose to teach them!

We're studying Ephesians 6:1-4... *Paul's principles for parents...* Remember the acrostic that's serving as an outline for our studies on parenting... **P-T-A...**

Last week, it was a **"P"** - *a parent's purpose*.

Today it's a **"T"** - *a parent's tools*.

Next week it's an **"A"** - *a parent's avoidances*.

This AM, we want to look at **the tools of a parent**.

Chapter 6, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.'"**

And then this today's instruction, **"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."**

Last week we talked about a parent's purpose. We need to teach our children **obedience** and **respect**.

You win a child's *respect* while you insist on his *obedience*. Then you teach him to obey by employing two tools... **"the training and admonition of the Lord."**

Or to say it another way... **"correction and direction."**

Paul is telling us that godly parenting is a proper blend of both *discipline* and *encouragement*.

Martin Luther put it this way, **"Spare the rod and spoil the child - that is true; but beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well."** To be a good parent you need two tools... **a rod** and **an apple**.

My second son, Nick, was a great kid, but he was a kid nonetheless... And there were days when Nick, like all kids, would push his limits and test his boundaries.

One such day, when Nick was about 5 years old, he'd pushed and pushed - and pushed me to the brink... Finally, I sent him to his room, while I went into the kitchen to fetch the dreaded wooden spoon.

I was about to dish out the discipline, when Nick looked up at me through teary eyes - and with a quivering voice he asked, **"Dad, when you finish spanking me will you give me a great big hug?"**

Well, my heart melted. What an *anger-diffusing, daddy-disarming, mercy-motivating* comment for a child to make. And being the loving, compassionate father that I am, *guess how I responded to my son?*

I said, “Nick, you know daddy will give you a big hug... right AFTER you get the spanking you deserve!”

Then I took that spoon, and applied the discipline my child needed. For it takes both warm hugs AND wooden spoons to properly and biblically raise a child.

Hebrews 12:7 insists that a wooden spoon is as sure a sign of a parent’s love as a warm hug. “What son is there whom a father does not chasten?” In fact, the parent who only uses warm hugs and never employs the wooden spoon really doesn’t love their child.

Today I want to talk to you about using both...

Both *warm hugs* and *wooden spoons* are the tools needed to teach your children obedience and respect.

**First, let’s talk about the training of the Lord... *the wooden spoon*.** The word translated “*training*” is a Greek word “*paideia*” or “to educate through discipline.”

You've heard of, *Padeia School*. It's a fitting name.

The key to disciplining your children correctly is to ask yourself the question, “*Is the discipline I’ve chosen providing a learning opportunity for my child?*”

Discipline should *train not torture - prepare not punish*. Proper discipline will accomplish at least three purposes: **it corrects - it protects - and it perfects.**

**First**, proper discipline **corrects** a crooked course.

It pulls back on the reins of a kid who’s started to buck and rebel. It checks, and trumps wrong choices.

Kathy and I had kids who liked to assert their independence - and that was good. We let go a little at a time - and they learned to flap their wings... But if they strayed too far off course it was our job to step in and ground them. A parent has to be brave enough to recognize a wrong course, and put their foot down.

It's my job to let my kids know that privilege and responsibility go hand and hand. And you don't get the privilege without accepting the responsibility.

Here's a quote from a wise mother, Susanna Wesley. Her words are 200 years old, but they're timeless.

"In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer the will, and bring them to an obedient temper. To inform the understanding is a work of time, and must, with children, proceed by slow degrees... but subjecting the will is a thing which must be done at once; and the sooner the better.

For by neglecting timely correction they will contract a stubbornness and obstinacy which is hardly ever conquered. Whenever a child is corrected, it must be conquered... Self-will is the root of all sin and misery."

Once, my sons and I were walking across the football field after Nick's practice. Zach was about 15 at the time. He says to me, "Dad, why don't you take off your glasses and wrestle me. I think I can take you."

And he really meant it! His brothers were shocked. The order and stability of their world was under-threat.

I said, "*Oh, you think you can take me?*" I took off my glasses, handed them to Mack, and in 5 seconds I had that guy on the ground in a full nelson, rubbing his face

in the grass. *The world was right again.* He had underestimated the old man. I corrected his attitude.

Of course, it was all in fun - but trust me, there were other struggles with my kids that are no fun at all.

They were draining and agonizing. With toddlers and teenagers there are lots of wrestling matches.

Attitude corrections are a constant occurrence. *And your child needs a parent who can wrestle and win!*

If I've learned nothing else about child-rearing, I know one thing... *a parent better win the battles!* Kids need to know who is boss... and that it's not them!

**Second**, good discipline also **protects**. When my kids were tots I spanked them for running out into the street. *It wasn't punitive as much as protective.*

I wanted them to view the street as a dangerous place, so I created an effective deterrent. My goal was to erect an invisible wall between them and the traffic.

And when they became teenagers I was still erecting walls to protect my children from harm. A parent's job is to build moral and spiritual walls around their kids.

Every parent is a Nehemiah.

He was the Jew who returned from Babylon to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The previous wall lay in rubble. The city was a wasteland. For Jerusalem to prosper again, the city needed a protective wall.

When I look at our society today I see a Nehemiah-like situation. Morally we're a wasteland. Spiritually we're in ruins. Notions of truth and absolute values have been

abandoned. Walls of right and wrong have been torn down... If our kids are going to spiritually thrive we need to rebuild walls of truth around them.

Speaking of Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild the walls there's an insightful verse. We're told in 4:13 where he stationed his guards. In essence, what part of the work he considered most crucial. He says, "I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings..."

Nehemiah's chief concern was **the foundations and the openings**. And this is where a parent needs to focus his discipline. Oppose any threat to your children's **foundation - their belief system**. And watch the **openings - their exposures to the outside world**.

Be attentive to what they *believe* and *receive*.

And this is the area where a parent not only battles the evil in the world, but also battles his own children.

Kids want to watch the hip movies - and listen to the cool music - and tune in to popular TV shows - and have unlimited access to the internet - even when they're accessing moral filth and spiritual garbage.

Curiosity, and peer pressure combine to produce a blindness. At times they just don't see why we say *no*.

It reminds me of the kids who wanted to see a movie of which dad did not approve. They explained, "It only has four curse words, one sex scene, and mild violence - but the special effects are incredible, and the good guy wins." Dad still put his foot down.

Later that night dad went into the kitchen and made brownies. The kids were licking their chops...

But just before they took their first bite, dad told them, “I put just a little bit of dog poop in with the brownie mix. It’s not a lot. It shouldn’t spoil the taste. They’re still good brownies.” Of course, no one ate...

Dad was trying to get the kids to see the obvious. If a little poop in a brownie makes it inedible, why doesn’t a little filth in a movie make it inappropriate?

Parent, it’s up to you to just say “No!” - to build some walls for ourselves, and for our kids. I don’t go to “R” rated movies, and while under my roof neither did my kids... *And did my teenagers always appreciate my standards?* Not hardly. At least, not at the time...

A parent loves their kids, yet at times they’re hated for insisting on what’s best for them. *A mom and dad have to remind themselves that they’re not running for re-election.* The goal of every parent is not to be popular, but to grow healthy and godly kids...

One day your kids will thank you for not standing idly by and letting them load their minds with trash.

Mark Twain once said, “When I was 16 I thought my dad was a fool. When I turned 21 I was amazed at what he’d learned in five years.” In the meantime, I’ve adopted Nehemiah’s battle cry - 4:14, “fight for... your sons, your daughters...” Parenting involves a fight.

Proper discipline corrects, protects, but **third**, it also **perfects** - or matures. And this kind of discipline begins in infancy... *Put off a feeding to stay on schedule... Forbid a child from interrupting your conversation... Respond to a request with "not now"...*

Require patience of your child. When you delay their gratification it disciplines and builds character in them.

Pediatrician, John Rosemond, once wrote, "A child isn't going to develop the strength of character to say no to things like drugs, alcohol, and sex in the absence of parents who themselves don't have strength to say no when the child whines for a new video game, the latest in stereo hardware, or a new car." Every child needs parents with the guts to say no.

It's been said, "Children are like stomachs - they don't need everything we can afford to give them." A child develops *self-discipline* from *parental discipline*.

Kids don't need to be over-indulged and given everything they want. They need to learn how to suppress a desire - do without a whim - turn from a temptation - put principle above convenience.

Character grows through effective discipline.

Proper discipline **corrects, protects, and perfects.**

For kids to grow into responsible adults they have to learn that certain actions carry painful consequences...

When a parent disciplines a child, he allows the child to taste a healthy measure of those consequences...

My discipline of my kids followed a three-pronged approach: **First, I gave them a reason. Second, I gave them some rope. And third, I gave them the rod.**



First, *I would give them a reason.*

I'd sit down with my kids and explain the *logic* behind the *law* - the *reason* behind the *rule*. I tried to never follow my "No" with that stock parental excuse, "Just because I told you so." That's often the way to cover-up your lame parenting. If a rule doesn't have a good reason behind it, then it needs to be discarded.

Now, sometimes the only reason I could offer my kid for saying "no" was a caution or uneasiness from the Holy Spirit. Normally, the activity would've been okay, but if I didn't have a peace from God about it... *then my kids were taught that was the best reason of all.*

Whenever a parent says "no" we should be able to provide our children the reason and logic behind our decisions... *Yet let me warn you, your reason might not satisfy your child. Kids aren't always interested in logic.*

So, that's when *I would give them some rope.*

I engineer *a controlled crash*. I lift the parental safety net just enough to let my children taste a little of the uncomfortable consequences of their actions...

When they were old enough to understand my instructions, and yet ignored them, I made sure they suffered the consequences... If their shoes weren't on when it was time to go to bed, they went in their socks...

If they ignored my advice and left without a jacket, when it got cold, they had to bear it... If they didn't eat their dinner, they went to bed hungry... A few minutes of cold, or one night without dinner won't hurt a child.

I didn't fight about it, but I didn't bail them out either.

I just gave my kids some rope, and allowed them to experience the natural consequences of their actions.

Sometimes it takes a child experiencing the by-product of disobeying the rules for that child to understand the reason those rules were established.

Becky was the little girl in the neighborhood who tattled to my mom, "*Mrs. Adams, Sandy hit me.*"

There was a strict rule in our family of boys... *never, ever hit a girl.* My mom was upset and disappointed.

I'm sure she wanted to spank me, but instead she let me experience the consequences of my actions... *sort of.* She made me stand with my arms by my side, while Becky wound up and slapped me across the jaw. Forty-five years later it still smarts! It hurt *my pride* more than my chin... *But I've never hit a girl since.*

When Zach was a sophomore in High School I went to pick him up from school. When I opened the door, rather than express his appreciation for me coming to pick him up, he immediately complained about me being 5 minutes late. I didn't *get angry* or *act upset*...

I calmly tossed his book bag out on the pavement, and told him he could *walk* the 3 miles home. It made a definite impression. He was suddenly more grateful.

But after giving your child **a reason** and **some rope**, if he or she still won't learn the lesson - *or* if the consequences of the violation are too severe, too painful to let them taste... then I need to manufacture some less painful consequences to get home the point.

Say, I tell a 6 year-old not to play in the street, and he disobeys. I'm not going to sit back and wait for a car to blindside him... then say, "*Well, that'll teach him!*"

No, when the consequences are too severe to let my child taste, then it's up to me to manufacture less painful consequences. In the case of that 6 year-old, I'll get him out of the street... then I'll spank him myself.

I'll give him **the rod!** Parent's here're the three steps to good discipline? **A reason. Some rope. A rod.**

Now if you ask, "**Sandy, do you really believe God wants us to spank our kids?**" My answer is *a very qualified "yes."* And here are seven qualifications...

**First, never spank a child in anger.** *Cool off* before you *apply the heat*. Count to 10... Count to 10 again. Do whatever it takes to get control of your emotions.

**Second, make sure you're spanking for the right reasons.** You don't spank a child for being childish - that is, spilling a glass of milk, or forgetting a chore.

Kids will be kids. You only spank a child for *a deliberate act of defiance*. A parent's job is to *curb and control* their rebellion, not *crush* their initiative.

A **third** qualification is **never spank a child on the face, arm, head, ears** - that's not discipline, it's cruelty.

Note the genius of human anatomy - God created the human posterior with cushion. Thus, He identified it as the place to paddle. Spank your child where God put the extra padding. The *rod* is only for the *rump*.

**Fourth, I tried not to spank my child with my hand.**

I always looked for a neutral object - my belt, or a wooden spoon. When the Scripture talks about spanking it always speaks of the “rod.” You want your child to *fear the rod, and welcome your hands.*

**Fifth, be consistent.**

Often, Parents get lazy in their discipline. Don't just spank when it's convenient for you to do so – during commercials - or at halftime of the football game. Discipline with diligence. Act when the need arises.

**Sixth, always make sure your child understands why he's being spanked.** Remember the biblical definition of training... it's “*to educate through discipline.*”

And **seventh, make sure the punishment fits the crime.** It's been said, “Don't shoot a mosquito with a bazooka.” *Reserve the rod for what deserves the rod.*

The pain inflicted on the child needs to be in proportion to the degree of the child's defiance.

But if you meet all these qualifications, then absolutely, I believe God wants us to spank our kids.

The Bible is clear - Proverbs 22:15, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” Proverbs 13:24 goes as far as to say, “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”

Real love restrains his kids.

Once, a mom used a wooden board - a paddle - to spank her kids. It hung on the kitchen wall just below a plaque. The plaque read, “I Need Thee Every Hour.”

While growing up the kids never knew if the plaque was referring to *the Lord* or *the board*... After they became parents they realized the answer was both!

But here’s a question, “What about teenagers? Do you spank a 16 year-old?” I suppose you could try...

But here’s what I’ve notice about teenagers. By the time a kid turns 14 or 15 they've harden on both ends - *the head and the fanny*. The rod no longer creates the desired effect... It bounces off, rather than sinks in.

The rod may no longer be an appropriate tool, but remember the reason for the rod - it’s a substitute for the natural consequences of an act of defiance.

So, if you don't curb a child’s rebellion with a rod, you'd better find another substitute. A form of discipline that manufactures enough pain to be a deterrent.

Here’s my advice... find something to make him *feel* the consequences of his actions... In the case of a 16 year old the effect that pulling out the rod once had, might now be duplicated by *confiscating the car keys, or pulling a cell phone, or a weekend grounding*.

Bill Maher is an liberal commentator. And trust me, I agree with very few of Bill’s opinions, but he did make a comment about fatherhood that resonated... He was asked, “Were you and your dad good friends?”

Bill replied, “*Friends? We’re friends now, but while growing up I didn’t need him to be my friend, but my dad. This idea of dads getting mushy, and being friends is*

overblown. Dads are supposed to be the guy who tells you right from wrong.” And I couldn’t agree more.

I want to be my child’s friend, and I’ve done all kinds of activities to cultivate their friendship - but I also know, at times, **a parent’s place is in his kid’s face.**

My kids have lots of friends who will tell them what they want to hear, but they have only two parents who'll put their foot down, and insist on what's best!

Thus, when it comes to training or disciplining your children take a 3-pronged approach - **give them a reason, give them some rope, then give them the rod.**

But along with the rod, don't forget **the apple!**

Along with the wooden spoon we need *the warm hugs...* As Paul puts it, *“the admonition of the Lord.”*

I'm convinced we often *spank a child for doing wrong*, because we haven't given him enough *praise for doing right*. Some kids draw more attention by getting into trouble than they do by trying to be good.

Yes, kids need the **rod of correction**, but they also need a **nod of approval**. Over a lifetime a person will have a multitude of *critics* - they need their parents to be their *cheerleaders*. When my kids go out to spar against the world, I want them to know that their mom and dad are in their corner. We’re on their team.

I love the story of Derek Redmond. He ran the 400 meters for Great Britain in the Barcelona Olympics.

Derek had cruised to an early lead, and it looked like he might coast to victory, until he pulled up in pain. He tore an Achilles tendon, and collapsed in the last 50 yards. *That's when something wonderful happened...*

His dad jumped out of the stands, and ran onto the track. He grabbed Derek's arm and helped him cross the finish line. Derek didn't win, but he fulfilled a dream by finishing the race... *and it was thanks to his dad.*

The human tendency is to take the path of least resistance. Kids are prone to give up without a fight. They need to be taught that mountains can be climbed or leveled. They need their parent's encouragement.

Notice Paul tells us in our text we're to admonish our kids not just with simple encouragement, but with **"the admonition of the Lord."** That takes it up a notch.

God's encouragement is inexhaustible.

He *looks over* us with pleasure, but to do so, He first *overlooks* so much... He refuses to be embarrassed by our failures. He's determined and persistent not to let our sin sidetrack His love. Romans 8 is adamant, **"(nothing can) separate us from the love of God..."**

The apple God uses to motivate His kids is the sweetest tasting apple you'll ever bite - and He wants us to extend it to our kids. Love them with *God's love*.

The famous painter of the 18th century, Benjamin West, once explained why he became an artist.

One day his mom left he and his sister, Sally, home while she went to the market. While she was away the kids found a bottle of ink and a pen. Benjamin tried to paint

his sister's portrait, but made a mess. Ink was everywhere. The kids feared their mom's reaction.

But when Benjamin's mother walked into the house she ignored the mess. She picked up his drawing, and said, "Why, that's Sally!". Then she planted a kiss on his head. In the years that followed West would often say, "It was my mother's kiss that made me a painter."

Our kids need to be encouraged to pursue what's *healthy* - not just punished for pursuing what's *harmful*.

I'm thankful for my parents, who just like God, overlooked my messes and recognized my God-given gifts and talents - then provided me the opportunities and the encouragement to develop those abilities.

God fills our kids with boundless energy and ideas. Their parent's job is to channel it all in a right direction.

Here's the story of another not-so-famous painter...

One day I came home from work, and was met at the back door by my youngest son, Mack. He was 5 years old at the time. He grabbed my hand and led me to a picture hanging from a magnet on the refrigerator.

This was his masterpiece! Realize now, the faces were green, the sky was orange, the clouds were brown, the grass red, but Mack was so proud of his picture. He was looking for my approval... And I made it a big deal, "This picture is a fabulous piece of art!"



After my rave review, a huge smile appeared on his face. He told me, “Dad, I thought you’d say that!” I was so glad he’d become accustomed to my support. Parents need to love their kids with *an unconditional love*.

I didn’t think I’d ever need to be reminded of that truth... We had *such lovable babies*. They cooed and cuddled - and love just oozed out of my every pore...

But it didn’t take long for those same lovable kids to start turning up their nose and talking back. Ever heard of the *terrible twos*? The term was coined by a parent whose kid didn’t live to be three - *for it only gets worse*.

The *terrible twos* give way to the *defiant fives*, then the *sarcastic sevens*, and the *whiney nines*, and the *testy tens*. Then they become teenagers and your babies are no longer cooing they’re bucking and kicking... and loving them becomes more of an issue.

By the time your kids become teenagers they’ve now been around long enough to embarrass you and disappoint you. They’ve made mean, ugly comments to your wife - and they’ve even lost a few of your tools.

Your teenage kids are not as lovable as they once were - or as deserving of their parent’s love... *but they don’t need it any less*. Kids of all ages need a sweet tasting **apple** to go right next to the rod.

In verse 4 of our text, the Greek word translated, *"admonition"* means *"to direct a child's mind."* This is a vital role for a parent. God tells parents to steer their children's thinking in positive directions. It’s a parent’s responsibility to encourage his children to think about God - and help them dwell on spiritual themes.

In essence, the parent is the captain on the deck of the child's thought life. A wise parent doesn't do the thinking for his child... but he does control the rudder.

It's amazing, we'll be careful with a child's feet and hands. We don't let either wander too far off. But we're not so diligent with their mind. It's said, "Open lots and open minds gather trash." Aim your child's mind in a positive direction and it will yield positive results.

Like Nehemiah be concerned about the openings! Not just to keep the enemy out, but to put good stuff in. Give your children pleasant things to think about.

Deuteronomy 6 taught the Hebrews how to convey spiritual values to their kids, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 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." In other words, you teach your kids while you live life with them.

As you walk with your kids through challenges, and trials, and disappointments, and triumphs you're always looking for the teachable moment. As you live your faith, and apply spiritual values to practical issues, share it with your kids - *then all of life is a Bible study.*

The kid on the baseball team who loses his temper becomes an opportunity to talk about self-control.

A peer's rejection is the springboard for a discussion on why our security needs to be in God, not man.

Nervousness before a test is fertile ground to teach the power of prayer and the peace of the Holy Spirit... *And the importance of studying every now and then.*

Read the Bible and pray with your kids, *but do more than that* - apply the Bible to everyday stuff. Your kids will see that Jesus is real, and Christianity is for today!

One Christmas a neighbor a few streets over had a nativity scene in his yard. It was life-like - complete with Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus. My kids were attracted to it, especially Natalie, who was 3 year-old.

One night we were on our way home, and Nat wanted to go see baby Jesus. It was late and I wanted to get home. Zach explained to his sister that the baby was just plastic. But to Nat, that manger scene was so real. She just wanted to tell Jesus that she loved him.

When I tucked my daughter into bed that night she was still crying because she couldn't see Jesus...

I'd just settled into my chair when God pricked my heart... I walked into her room, threw a blanket over her, scooped her up, and drove her back to that nativity scene. I'll never forget she and I standing in that front yard, talking about how much we loved Jesus. After that night, I tried to never miss a teachable moment.

I like the old Scottish proverb... "better felt than telt."

When it comes to transferring our faith to our kids, applying a spiritual lesson, or living a spiritual truth - is always more effective than merely hearing a sermon.

In closing, a parent's purpose is to teach their kids obedience and respect. And we have tools - "training" or *discipline* - and "admonition" or *encouragement*.

But maybe today the parent is the one who needs encouragement. “Parenting is not for the faint of heart.”

Being a parent can take its toll. Maybe you’ve been in a fierce fight for your family - and you’re worn out. You’re tired of fighting the world... even your kids.

You’ve been giving it all you’ve got, but no one seems to appreciate your efforts. *Let me tell you a funny story that also supplies great encouragement...*

An incident occurred on the streets of East Hampton, NY, that made headlines. A group of 11 year old girls were together, and one of them was heard screaming, “Daddy, daddy, please don’t sing, please don’t sing.”

As a side note, this is a great tool for a parent. If you’re child doesn’t obey, then threaten to sing. This is every child’s worse nightmare. They’re embarrassed by their parent’s singing... *even the girl in East Hampton.*

Yet it’s ironic that 11 year old girl was none other than the daughter of Billy Joel. Millions of people love to hear Billy Joel sing, but not his 11 year old daughter.

And here’s great encouragement for parents...

If Billy Joel’s daughter doesn’t appreciate her famous father’s singing - don’t be surprised if your kids don’t appreciate your parenting... at least not at the moment.

One day they’ll see it differently. They’ll say thanks... You’ll be their hero... In the meantime, you be faithful.

A parent’s purpose is to teach your child obedience and respect. And it’s done with two tools - “*the training and admonition of the Lord*” - the rod and the apple.