

A PARENT'S AVOIDANCES EPHESIANS 6:4

Every parent wants to be Super Dad or Super Mom, but these cape crusaders don't exist. Though I desired to be a *Super Dad* - at times I felt like a *Super Dud*.

Being a parent is the most difficult task you'll ever tackle. I was once told, "You should've realized that anything that began with the term *labor* was not going to be easy." Parenting kids is certainly a challenge!

It reminds me of the mom who came home from the hospital with triplets. Her four year-old daughter took one look at her new siblings and shouted, "We better start calling folks. They're going to be a lot harder to get rid of than the kittens." Trust me, they're also a lot harder to raise than kittens... Parenting is a tough gig!

You thought *a parent's job was to help their children grow-up - but often, it's the children who cause the parents to grow-up*. Sometimes, we parents, learn more from our children, than our children do from us.

I brought with me today a Top Ten list. Perhaps you can relate.. Here're the "**The Top Ten things I learned from my kids that I didn't really want to know...**"

10) A four year-old's voice is louder than 200 adults in a crowded restaurant. **9)** When you throw a baseball into a spinning ceiling fan, the blades can hit the ball a long way, and generate enough force to break a double-paned window. **8)** When you hear the toilet flush and the words "*uh-oh*" - it's already too late.

7) Legos will pass through the digestive tract of a three year-old human being. 6) The words “Play-Doh” and “microwave” should never be used in the same sentence. 5) McGyver re-runs can teach a child many things he doesn't need to know. 4) Two year olds can make one-click purchases on Amazon.com. 3) Marbles, or rocks, in a gas tank will make lots of noise. 2) The spin cycle on a washing machine does not make earth worms dizzy. It will though make a cat dizzy - and a dizzy cat will throw up twice its body weight. And last but definitely not least, 1) Quiet does not necessarily mean everything is okay.

As a parent, we all can feel a little overwhelmed.

But here is where *the Word of God* and *the Spirit of God* come to our rescue. God doesn't *call us to do* what He doesn't *equip us and empower us to do*.

It's His promise! We all can parent effectively...

God has given us a **purpose**. He's given us **tools** to accomplish that purpose. And He's told parents what to **avoid**... We've been talking about a *PTA... a parent's **purpose, tools** - and today... a parent's **avoidances***.

In verses 1-4 of Ephesians 6, Paul writes, “**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 you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” *The child's duty is a **parent's purpose**. We should teach our children **obedience** and **respect**.*

And we do it with two tools - **a parent's tools** are “*the training and admonition of the Lord*” - *discipline and encouragement - the rod and the apple.*

But that's not all Paul tells us. He also gives us **a parent's avoidances**. In verse 4 he tells both mothers and fathers, *"do not provoke your children to wrath."*

The Greek word translated *"provoke"* means "to anger or frustrate." Other versions render it... don't *"embitter"*, *"irritate"*, *"exasperate"*, *"nag"*, *"vex"*, *"goad"*, *"overcorrect"*, *"be hard on."* The Amplified Version puts it, *"Fathers, do not irritate or provoke your children to anger; do not exasperate them to resentment."*

You can bring a child up in *"the training and admonition of the Lord"* - give your child a rod and an apple - warm hugs and wooden spoons – the encouragement and discipline we discussed last week.

But if you needlessly frustrate your children you can create in them a resentment that will undermine the good you're doing. Even well-meaning parents can make little mistakes that will provoke their kids.

To provoke a child is to needlessly irritate - and the key word is **"needlessly."** I once polled my oldest two kids, *"What do your mom and dad do that irritate you most?"* Here were their answers, *"You spank us, and make us go to the grocery store, and wake us up early for school, and don't give us Coca-cola when we want it, and make us go to bed too early."* But these are *necessary* irritations that one day they'll appreciate.

My question is... how do we *needlessly needle* our children? How do you *pointlessly pester... badger and beleaguer...* how do you *chafe your child?*

Our kids are extremely impressionable - we need to handle them with care and sensitivity. When you approach *kids* make sure you're wearing *kid gloves...*

Today, I want to give you a 12-point checklist you can use to determine if you're guilty of provoking your child to wrath. Twelve parental mistakes to avoid...

The **first** way to provoke a child is with **negative comments**. In her comedy routine, Joan Rivers cracks the joke, "I knew I was an unwanted baby when I saw that my bath toys were a toaster and a radio."

It's sad when parents communicate to their child - *either overtly or indirectly* - that they're not wanted.

In God's mind there are no unwanted children. Every child is loved and desired by God. It grieves me when I hear a parent refer to his or her child as an "accident."

There are no *accidents* in the plan of God. If you view your child as unwanted or an accident - *even if you never say it* - they'll pick up on it in your attitude.

Psalms 127:3 tells us, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward... Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them..."

For me a "*quiver full*" is four. Someone once asked me to describe my kids. "The oldest is the quarterback. My girl is the cheerleader. Next is the running back.

And my youngest son, # 4 is... *The End.*"

But each of my four kids is a heritage - a reward in their own way. They provide us great happiness. We have always seen our kids as a *blessing* not a *burden*!

A Little League coach once told me about a mom who pulled her son from a game to go home early.

The kid was up to bat that inning, and if he left it would cost the team an automatic out. The coach tried to explain the situation to this anxious mom, and he asked if Billy could stay just long enough to bat...

As the mom walked off with her son - *in front of all the other parents and players*, she shouted, “**Aw, Billy’s no good. He’ll make an out anyway. We’ve got to go!**”

Tragically, she said it without thinking. Some parents make negative comments without any thought as to their impact. Their mouth goes on a shooting spree.

Adults forget that kids are fragile and breakable. You don’t toss bone china round the kitchen like you would paper plates - and you don’t handle kids as if they were adults. A child needs to be treated delicately and deliberately. **Always handle your kids with kid gloves.**

I understand parents get tired. At times your weariness can taint your attitude. We’re tempted to view our children as a pest, or a nuisance, or a bother, or an interference... *Resist that temptation at all costs!*

It reminds me of the dad who brought his 4 year-old daughter to the hospital to meet her newborn brother.

The sister looked at the baby through the nursery window and noticed the identification bracelet around the baby’s ankle. She turned to her daddy and asked, “**When are they going to take off his price tag?**”

If you’re a parent you know having a baby is costly.

And the financial expenses are just the beginning... add the love, time, energy, and effort that we invest.

A lot goes into raising a child. Babies are expensive, but they have no price tags - *a baby is priceless!*

No value can be ascribed to a human life. An eternal soul created for God's presence is sitting in your highchair... or driver's seat. *Your child is a blessing!*

A **second** way to provoke a child is with **broken promises**. A child hangs their hopes on a parent's words. Make an idle promise you don't fulfill, and it may not be a big deal to you, but it can crush your child.

This was hammered home to me one day when I promised my 5 year old son, Mack, that we would go to the ballpark and hit some baseballs - *but first, I needed to take care of a few issues at church*. Well, as usual those few issues turned into six or seven hours.

When I finally got home my 5 year old was sitting on the porch with glove and bat in hand. And we had a wonderful time at the ballpark, just as I had promised.

But later, Kathy told me that Mack had been sitting on that front porch all day long. He'd been waiting on me for six hours. He'd been fixated on my promise.

To a young child, a parent's words are power.

Our children have total confidence in what we tell them. Here's their assumption... *My parents brought them into the world - nothing is beyond their ability...*

That's why a parent needs to be careful with his promises. Don't disillusion or disappoint your child. They don't understand "*extenuating circumstances*."

The trust between a parent and child should be considered sacred. Don't let anything violate that trust.

How can we expect our kids to *receive the instruction that comes out of our mouth* if they can't *believe the promise that comes out of the same mouth*.

Be *deliberate* with what you promise - and then be *determined* to follow through, and keep that promise!

The **third** way to provoke a child is with **deaf ears**.

How often do we fail to really sit down and make an effort to listen to our children? Proverbs 20:5 tells us, "**Counsel in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.**"

All kinds of thoughts, feelings, fears are swimming around in the mind of your child. Parent, your child needs for you to stop barking at them long enough to listen to them. Are you attentive to your children?

When Zach was 3 or 4 years-old he spent the night with his grandpa. They were playing cowboys. The toy guns were blazing. People were dropping like flies.

Every time Zach got shot he'd fall to the ground. His granddaddy would race over to the wounded cowboy, open his shirt, make an incision, cut out the bullet, sew him back up... then they'd start playing again.

During the shootout, grandma walked by - when Zach hit the deck she decided to jump in on the action.

She opened his shirt, cut the bullet out, and sewed him back up - but rather than popping back up to continue playing, Zach just laid motionless on the floor.

Finally, Zach said with a groan, “**But Grandma, there's one problem... They shot me in the leg.**” Lots of parents approach their kids with all kinds of solutions without first listening and identifying the real problem.

A college president once explained his success, “**Grow antennae, not horns.**” He was saying, *be a good listener*. And this is great advice for a parent.

Often a behavior we'd like to gore is really a cry for help. Have your antennae up. Be sensitive to your kids.

The **fourth** way to needlessly needle a child is to **play favorites**. If one child senses a parent loves another sibling more than him, it can produce a deep-seated resentment that may erupt in all out rebellion.

The classic case is Joseph - Jacob's favorite. Jacob gave his son, Joseph, a psychedelic leather jacket.

But his brothers were jealous of the special treatment. It was Jacob's fault, but they took it out on Joseph. They feigned his death and sold him as a slave. Joseph was the victim of a father's favoritism.

I have three sons and one daughter, and for some reason my wife always thought I was tougher on my *grimy, gritty, sweaty, gnarly, nappy rough-necked boys*, than I was on my *sweet, precious, adorable, can-do-no-wrong princess*. I didn't see it, but to humor Kathy, I tried to guard against any fatherly favoritism.

Seriously, you may have a child whose interests and personality draw you to them, but work hard to make sure you don't favor them over your other kids.

The **fifth** way to provoke a child is to **force him or her to be something their not**. While coaching Little League I saw this all the time. A dogging dad trying to live out his failed ambitions through his kids. It's sad.

Realize, children don't enter the world a blank slate.

Their genetic make-up predetermines a host of traits, and talents, and tendencies. Parents quickly recognize the influences of heredity when their child makes the honor roll... but we blame their environment when the same child has to stay after school for detention...

Heredity is the reason two children born into the same family - trained by the same parents - subject to the same rules - can turn out so differently. Children are like *snowflakes* – *no two kids are the same*. Thus, no single parenting style works for every child. Cookie cutter approaches to parenting don't always work.

Proverbs 22:6 is the most often quoted verse in the Bible on child rearing, but it's the most misunderstood.

Solomon said, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

But we often read it with the emphasis on the word "**way**" - "Train up a child in the way he should go..."

Thus, we assume there's a single way to parent... and that's the best way... and it's usually my way!

But in the Hebrew language it emphasizes the word "**he**" - "Train up a child in the way *he* should go..."

Commentator Matthew Henry offers this translation of 22:6, “Train up a child according to his capabilities.”

In short, tailor your training to the individual. Adapt it to the child’s interests, abilities, disposition, limitations.

A wise parent discovers the talents and interests that God has hard-wired into your child’s heart - then he or she encourages their child in that direction... If your child is an *artist* don't force her to be an *athlete*. If he's a *musician* don't try to make him a *mechanic*. Don't try to rewire your children – *you might just blow a fuse!*

The **sixth** way to provoke your child is to **set expectations that are too high**. I'm convinced today's world expects too much from kids at too early an age.

Today there’re triathlons for 7 year-olds, and summer camps that teach kids about stocks, bonds, and mutual funds... Kids no longer have time to just be kids.

Sometimes parents expect three year olds to have the same attention span as an older sibling... Or they demand a slower developing son to bring home the same high grades as his studious sister.

Children burdened with impossible expectations end up *burning out* and *giving up* trying to please parents.

Jesus’ words to the legalistic Pharisees also applies to pushy parents. Matthew 23:4, “For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders.” Do that to your children and you’ll regret it.

Maybe your child doesn't want to be a doctor?

He wants to be a *carpenter*? Jesus was a carpenter.

It was good enough for God's Son - why not yours? Too much pushing can harden a child's heart.

The **seventh** way to frustrate your child is to have **no or low expectations**. Your expectations can be too high, but they can also be too low, or even non-existent. You'll find a few kids who are self-motivated, but most kids need some form of external motivation.

They need a gentle nudge at times.

When faced with obstacles it is our human tendency to opt for the path of least resistance. Too often, kids especially are quick to settle for less than their best.

Children have to be taught that some obstacles shouldn't be bypassed. Some mountains need to be climbed. At times a parent needs to keep their kid going. A parent needs to know when to prod their kids.

When Carole saw that her daughter's feet turned inward - her toes pointed toward each other - she decided to do whatever it took to help her little girl.

For four years her daughter wore corrective shoes.

By age 6 she was walking normally, but Carole wasn't satisfied. She wanted her daughter to participate in an activity that would force her to use her feet and legs, and stretch their range of motion.

The little girl chose ice skating - and for 15 years Carole carted her daughter to and from the rink.

This is why when Kristi Yamaguchi climbed to the platform to receive her gold medal in figure skating at the 92 Winter Olympics she knew that her success could be traced back to her mom, Carole Yamaguchi.

Carole was a mom who dreamed for her little girl.

All kids have dreams, but they've yet to learn that dreams come true through hard work and determination. It's a parent's job to teach their sons and daughters the value of persistence, patience, and preparation - *to keep the prize in front of the kids.*

The **eighth** way to pester or hinder a child is to be **overly critical**. Sometimes a parent loses perspective. We can focus on the one C, rather than the five As.

We see the cup as *half empty* rather than *half full*.

Parents, *do your kids see you as impossible to please?* If so, you're provoking them to wrath.

Understand, a child craves their parent's approval. They thirst for it emotionally. They need it like water.

And if a child doesn't get it from their parents, they'll get it elsewhere... They'll turn to a boyfriend, or a peer group. Kids need parents as *cheerleaders* not *critics*.

The **ninth** way to provoke your kids is by **neglect**. Parents, never forget kids spell love, "T-I-M-E."

Child psychologist, Kevin Leman, once wrote, "I hear parents talk about "quality time," (but) in all my years of private practice I've never heard a child mention the term. All a child knows is that he wants your time and attention - whether it's to watch him do somersaults and cartwheels or to take him for a Big Mac.

Leman concludes, "In trying to find time for your children, don't worry too much about how much "quality" is in it. Give them all the time you can and the quality will take care of itself." Parents have the rest of their lives to pursue career ambitions, but they only have a few short years to spend time with their kids.

Parents, whatever you do, whatever mistakes you make - don't neglect to spend time with your children. You provoke your kids if they never see you.

Some parents act like their kid comes with a pause button - that they can push pause on their child's development while they go off to do their own thing.

They're under the illusion the opportunities will still be there when they get ready. *Wow, are these naive parents in for a rude awakening!* Parents, by the time you're ready, your child may no longer care.

I love this quote by author, Wade Horn, "My father was a great dad. I didn't always think so, of course.

When I was growing up, I mostly thought of him as an overbearing, autocratic, stick-in-the-mud whose main mission in life was to make mine miserable.

But I have since come to realize he had one great quality. He was there. Someone once said 90% of life is just showing up. My dad showed up..."

I believe a father with faults is still better than one who's absent. Just being there goes a long, long way...

The fact I was a part of my daughter's life, and I was there to answer the door when the boy came to pick her up, kept certain types of boys away...

If I was home wild parties had a hard time breaking out... Certainly, my kids were able to sneak off and do something behind my back - but that's the point... they *had to sneak off*, because my wife and I were around.

Just *being there* matters more than you think!

And while I'm on the subject of parental neglect, let me mention another form of neglect I think is especially lethal - *and that's the **spiritual neglect** of a child.*

I know parents who have their kids in sports, music, art. They're in all types of extracurricular activities, but they leave out church! Parents who neglect their children's spiritual training make a crucial mistake.

As long as my kids lived under my roof, and were bankrolled by me, they went to church on Sundays!

I know at CCSM we do our best to make church fun for our kids and our Middle Schoolers. This is why it bothers me to hear a parent say, "[My kids didn't want to come to church this morning so I left them home.](#)"

What if they said that on Monday morning about going to school? You'd make them go because they need it, and you would require them to learn to like it!

And this is also the attitude we need to take toward our kids spiritual training. *If your kids come they'll have a good time... but they need that parental insistence.*

With four kids we did it all - *soccer, baseball, football, cheerleading, basketball, dance, baton, softball, roller hockey* - you name it, and our family did it! And we saw great value in our kid's participation, *to a point...*

But we also realized, you can invest thousands of hours sharpening your kid's batting skills - or making sure he can dribble a soccer ball - or she can do a back handspring - yet when they reach adulthood their athletic skills won't be nearly as important as the strength of their faith, and their knowledge of God.

It's crucial, that with everything else you do with your kids, bring them to church. Together, as a family grow in Christ, learn God's Word, apply it to your life. Make your child's spiritual training a priority for them and you.

The **tenth** way to frustrate your kids is **the failure to discipline**. If you let your kids walk all over you - or brush you off - or ignore the rules... if you cave in to manipulations and threats - you are *provoking* them.

It's said, "Kids will forgive you for your mistakes, but your weakness will send them elsewhere for strength."

I'll never forget the night I put the kids to bed. Nick was 3 years old. I'd just gotten comfortable in the recliner when he comes parading through the room.

I said, "Son, what are you doing out of bed?" He turned, and look at me with a defiant look on his face. Then he said, "Dad, mind your own business." Hey, I proceeded to show him exactly what my business was!

At times **a parent's place is in his kid's face**. It's our business to discipline our kids. Children respect their parents, only if you calmly, but firmly, stand up to them.

If you cave in to a child's demands because you're afraid of a fight, or friction - you make a huge mistake.

It's a parent's business to make their child mind.

Though they might never admit it, I believe kids desire a parent's discipline. Boundaries provide a child a sense of security. It lets them know you care.

Never forget the High Priest, Eli. 1 Samuel 3:13 tells us he was judged by God because *“his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.”*

Perhaps he thought if he came down too hard on them he'd lose them. The opposite occurred. Because he didn't restrain them he lost them. Eli allowed his son's rebellion to go unchecked, and God judged him.

The **eleventh** way to provoke a child to anger is to **set a double standard**. Kids have a sixth-sense. A baloney meter. They can detect hypocrisy and duplicity a mile away. And they get seriously turned off when a parent doesn't practice what he or she preaches.

Parent, if you want credibility with your kid - if you want their respect - then be worthy of their respect.

You can tell your kids to stay off drugs until you're blue in the face, but if you abuse alcohol they'll want to know what's the difference?... Don't ground your kid for cheating on a test, if you've got a radar detector mounted on your dash... If it's wrong for a daughter to sleep with her boyfriend, then it's wrong for her single mom to do the same... *Don't set a double standard.*

If you want your kid to listen to what you have to say nothing will impress them more than your own humility, sincerity, and genuineness. Don't expect your kids to embrace values to which you only pay lip service.

Here's a poem entitled, "*The Better Way.*" It was written by Edgar Guest... but it could've been written by your own child... "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day; I'd rather one should walk with me, than merely show the way. The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear; fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear; and the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds, for to see the good in action is what everybody needs.

I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it done. I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run, and the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true, but I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do. For I may misunderstand you, and the good advice you give, but there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live."

And finally, the **twelfth** way for a parent to provoke their child to anger is to be **overprotective**.

I believe the goal of parenthood is to work yourself out of a job. A parent can expect their child to need them at 7 years old - even at 17 - but if he's still dependent at 27 years old... *something went wrong!*

When my fourth child was born I had the privilege to cut the umbilical cord. I picked up the scissors, and snipped the prenatal connection between my child and his mother. It was a profound moment. For in a sense, from that moment, my son has been on his own.

O yea, his parents were still around to help, but he was unleashed that day to live his own life. It became our job to wean him away - grow him up - teach him to make

his own decisions - solve his own problems - develop his own skills, and thoughts, and ambitions.

And this is where a parent's faith kicks in...

The overprotective parent who smothers a child, and is afraid to let him brush up against the real world, suffers from a lack of faith. *I'm aware of the dangers...*

I know the risks... but there's also the risk of holding on for too long. At some point you've got to turn loose!

When my first son, Zach, turned five we enrolled him in Kindergarten. On the first day, Kathy dressed him up, put a smile on her face, took him to school, handed him over to the teacher... *then she went home and cried for three hours until it was time to pick him up.*

It was the first of many steps in the process of letting go... And now we're poised - the Lord willing - for our fourth and final child to graduate from college. If all goes according to plan Mack will walk, December 13th.

And in between Zach's first day at school, and Mack's last - there's been lots and lots of letting go.

Actually, I don't like the phrase, "*letting go*"... It's not accurate. *We're not letting go... we're turning over.*

For every time I've *let go* I've had to trust God to be where I can't be - and to do what I can no longer do.

Psalm 127:1 is true for us all, "*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...*"

There are no Super Parents. The only Super Parent is God... and ultimately, we're trusting our kids to Him.

We all should be like Hannah who brought her son, Samuel, to the Tabernacle and turned him over to the priest. That's what God wants you and me to do...

God desires that we turn our children over to Him - to trust Him with their safety and welfare. God gives us our kids. We do all we can to teach them obedience and respect. Then we give them back to Him.

It's a selfless act... It's what we call *parenthood*.

Let me close with Psalm 127:3-4, "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD... Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth."

At the time this psalm was written archery was a new invention in the science of weaponry. Prior to its utilization, soldiers fought hand to hand, face to face.

But with the introduction of the bow and arrow a soldier could strike a target at a distance – without personally encountering and engaging his opponent.

And this is a father's desire for his kids - to send them on ahead, to help them go where he can't travel, to accomplish more than his hands will ever touch.

It's said, "Every parent is a Moses. We're preparing our children for a world we will not enter ourselves. We see the Promise Land, but we won't enter."

Years ago a dad at the ball park asked me, "*Don't you hope your kids turn out like you?*" I replied, "If my kids only turn out as good as me I'll be disappointed. I'm praying they turn out to be far better than me!"

I want my kids to sail farther, straighter, higher than their dad! I'm the archer, and it's up to me to set the arrow on the course that'll strike the intended target.

So let me state it a final time...

A parent's **purpose** is to teach their kids **obedience** and **respect**. And they do it with two **tools** - *training* or *discipline*, and *admonition* or *encouragement*... All the while they **avoid** provoking their children to wrath...

As we've noted before, God's power always accompanies His purpose. *Let's pray for that power!*