

The Messenger



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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Fathers: Principal Trainers of Children

by Hiram Hutto

“Children are a heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3) and as such should be considered gifts from God who have been placed in our hands to mold and fashion into worth-while citizens in His kingdom. Thus is laid on us the responsibility to “train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). Note the word “train.” Far too many times this is thought to be accomplished simply by **telling** how to act, etc. However, even a dictionary recognizes that such is not the case. It says, “to bring to a desired standard of efficiency or condition or behavior, etc. by instruction and practice” (*Oxford American Dictionary*).

Telling is definitely important. “These words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:6-7). But practice and application are also required. This can be seen even in secular matters. One may attend school where he is told the information he needs, but then he needs on-the-job *training*, and some are hired as *trainees*. He needs the experience. Churches have *training* classes in which instruction is given, but training is gained by practice and experience.

This is brought out in the New Testament in Ephesians 6:4. It says, “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” There are several important points made in this passage:

1. Of utmost importance is the expression “of the Lord.” This has religious and spiritual application. It is “the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6). It is not just nurture and admonition, but is nurture and admonition *of the Lord*.
2. The synonyms *nurture* and *admonition* are not easily defined but most seem to agree that the word “nurture” deals with training by act and discipline and the expression “admonition” is training by word (*Expositor's Greek Testament*). In his discussion of *paideai* (nurture) Thayer says: “1. the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment).”
3. Usually we husbands leave this to mothers, but in doing so we have neglected the fact that *the passage explicitly gives this to the father!* Thus, it is *his* responsibility to do the “nurture and admonition.” He can do this by reading the Bible and Bible stories to and with his children and enabling them to make application of its truth to various aspects of life. He doesn't merely tell them but helps them in preparing their Bible class lessons. He is involved in training them when he sees to it that they go with him to church services and participate as much as possible in its activities. It is his responsibility that they are taught the word of God, to train them in proper behavior, and when needed he is to administer discipline, correction, and punishment, as he

“chastens them betimes” (Prov. 13:24). If a father is not actively involved in this, he is neglecting his role as father. Thus he is the principal trainer of his children.

To be sure, his wife has a part in this. She is told to “guide (or rule, ASV) the home” (I Tim. 5:14). Nevertheless, “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is head of the church” (Eph. 5:23). So, in addition to being involved in the actual teaching and training, it is his responsibility and God has given him the authority to see that all such, though done by others, is done properly. The following quotation from the *Pulpit Commentary* brings this out very well. In discussing the synonyms “nurture” and “admonition”, it says, “It is difficult (but apparently impossible) to get words in the English language to represent the two words that are in the Greek original. They are in a general way to be distinguished as *discipline by power* and *discipline by reason*. . . It is rather all that drilling which a parent gives his children in virtue of the executive (magisterial) power which is placed in him. He has certain rules by which he goes in training his children, and he has got the power to enforce them. He makes them say ‘grace before meat’ that they may learn betimes from whom all table comforts come. He makes them attend to their lessons, that they may know that they have got to work and not be idlers. He makes them be selective as to their companionships, that they may not get out in evil associations. He appoints certain hours for the house, that they may learn order and punctuality. He does not ask them if they will go to church, but he makes them go to church with him. That is the kind of drilling that is meant here, and when it is necessary it must be backed up by chastening, or judicious punishment for good.” It is interesting that in discussing *admonition* it says, “It is not necessary that a parent should always explain to a child the reasons of his procedure. But it is important that, as a rule, children should have explained to them the evil of the course they are asked to avoid, and the advantages of the course they are asked to follow.” Again observe that the text places the responsibility to do this on the fathers.

The wording of this may seem somewhat harsh, but remember the same verse (Eph. 6:4) lets us know that it is to be administered in such a way as not to provoke the children to wrath.

Conclusion – It seems fair to say that, in this regard, the Bible shows:

1. Children need the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
2. This involves much more than mere *telling*; it requires *training*.
3. God has specifically given this responsibility to fathers.

*“Listen, my boy, to the voice of your Dad;
He knows of the world and its way.
Even when he forbids the thing you desire,
Obey what he says – it will pay.*

*When you are with boys and they take a smoke,
And coax you to be a “good sport”,
Just think of your Dad; don’t put him to shame,
Tell them you are not of this sort.*

*There may be some boys with a Dad that won’t care
When their sons swear and gamble and drink;
But your Dad will grieve, for he taught you right.
Just stop for a moment and think.*

*You may try to cover some things that you do,
And think that your Dad will not know.
But don’t fool yourself! He will hear of your ways;
Your sins find you out as they grow.*

News and Notes:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

“...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:16