

The Divine Pattern for the Family, Part 3 *The Role of Parents*

Introduction

A. The Call of God to Be Separate from the World

1. As seen in Ephesians

God is calling on us to be different from the world. We're to have different marriages, different families, and different life-styles. In Ephesians, Paul says we're not to walk the heathen walk (4:17). We're to walk in love (5:2), not in lust; in light (5:8), not in darkness; in wisdom (5:15), not in foolishness; in the Spirit (5:18), not in the flesh. We're not to be selfish---each man for himself; we're to be unselfish---each for the other. We're not to be possessed by our own ego; we're to be controlled by the Spirit of God. We're to be different.

2. As seen in Leviticus

From the beginning when God called out the nation of Israel to be His people, it was clear that they were to be separate from the world. In Leviticus 18, when God lays down the law of behavior for Israel, this is what He says regarding the difference between His people and the world: *"After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD"* (vv. 3-5).

Later on in the same chapter the Lord says, *"Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants."* In other words, He says, "Why would you do that for which other nations were judged?" He continues in verse 26, *"Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you."* And verse 30 repeats the same thought: *"Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God."*

From the beginning, it was God's intention that His people be separate, set apart, and not comforted to the world. Yet that's extremely difficult. And when we come to the area of marriage and family, it's obvious that we have become victimized by the system. Our desire to be what our society tells us to be has caused the destruction of marriage and the family in many ways. Yet God is still giving us the same message in Ephesians 6 as He did in Leviticus 18: "Do it My way. Don't listen to what the world says. You're not of the world anymore, you have overcome the world, you are out of the world. Do things My way; follow My standards."

B. The Consequences of Being Victimized by the World

Unless we understand God's understand for the family and begin to put them in operation in your own homes, we will have nothing to pass on to the next generation. You may say, "That will never happen in America." Really? Did you know that Russia was once a Christian nation? In fact, Russia was in many ways the heart of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Eastern Europe was once a Christian area where the Eastern church reigned supreme. And there was even a time in China, during the great days of Hudson Taylor, when the church was being founded and there was great Christian growth. Yet now in all those areas, generation after generation has been raised without any concept of God or Christianity.

There's a Chinese proverb that says, "One generation plants the trees, and the next gets the shade." I don't know whether there is much "tree-planting" going on for the shade of the next generation. How are we planning to shelter our children from the heat of the world's evil sun? What are we doing to protect them against those disintegrating rays? I'm concerned that we not just sit by idly and think that our children and the next generation are going to turn out all right on their own---because they're not. Until we come out of the world and begin to stand apart, and until we begin to define the biblical life-style and teach it to our children---passing it on, no matter what it costs---we're not going to have anything for the next generation.

C. The Corruption of God's Design for Children

1. The world's view

Much of the world today doesn't even want children. Consider the following:

- a. One-third of all married couples who are of child-bearing are permanently sterilized. The don't want children.
- b. One survey done in America showed that 70 percent of the parents surveyed would not have children if they had to do it over again (Lance Morrow, "Wondering If Children Are Necessary," *Time* [5 Mar. 1979]: 42).
- c. There is an organization in America called N.O.N. (The National Organization of non-Parents). They say they don't want to complicate their lives with children.

What are we doing with the future generation? Even when they are born, it seems as though they are left to themselves.

2. God's intention

I can't understand how people could not want to have children. Scripture is abundantly clear that God gives children; they are gift from the Lord.

- a. God is the source of children (Gen. 4:1, 25; 16:10; 17:16, 20; 29:31-35; 30:2, 6, 17-20; 33:5, 48:9; Ruth 4:13; 1 Sam. 1:19-20).
- b. Children are a heritage and a reward from the Lord (Psa. 127:3).

- c. Children are a source of joy (Psa. 113:9; 127:4-5; Prov. 23:24).

God gives children. He gives them as a blessing, as a benediction, and as a grace to life. And the more children you have, the more potential you have for happiness (Psa. 127:5), but only if you raise righteous children (Prov. 23:24). Otherwise, they will become a source of agony and heartbreak. Proverbs presents both sides of the picture. It talks about what happens when a child is not properly reared and given the right perspectives on life. Children are a gift from God; they're meant for joy. However, if you try to rear children without Jesus Christ and without the guidance of the Spirit, and instead rear them on the world's psychology, you'll get just what we've got today---absolute chaos.

D. The Cause of the Present Chaos in Rearing Children

1. As seen by the Houston police department

The Houston police department years ago put out a leaflet called "How to Ruin Your Children." And it was guaranteed to be 99 percent effective. In part, this is what is said:

- a. Principle #1 --- "Begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants."
- b. Principle #2 --- "When he picks up bad words, laugh at him."
- c. Principle #3 --- "Never give him any spiritual training. Let him wait until he's twenty-one years old, and let him decide for himself."
- d. Principle #4 --- "Avoid using the word 'wrong.' It may develop a serious guilt complex."
- e. Principles #5 --- "Pick up everything he leaves lying around, so he will be experienced in throwing responsibility on everybody else."

2. As seen by a Christian Psychiatrist

Christian psychiatrist Dr. Paul D. Meier, in his book *Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development* ([Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977], pp. 49-79), facetiously discusses the tragedy of children raised without proper divine standards. He does it by showing steps to raising certain types of children.

- a. How to develop a drug addict or alcoholic
 - 1) "Spoil him; give him everything he wants if you can afford it."
 - 2) When he does wrong, you may nag him, but never spank him."
 - 3) "Foster his dependence on you, so drugs or alcohol can replace you when he is older."
 - 4) "Protect him from your husband and from those mean teachers who threaten to spank him from time to time. Sue them if you wish."

- 5) "Make all of his decisions for him, since you are a lot older and wiser than he is. He might make mistakes and learn from them if you don't."
- 6) "Criticize his father openly, so you son can lose his own self-respect and confidence."
- 7) "Always bail him out of trouble so he will like you. Besides, he might harm your reputation if he gets a police record. Never let him suffer the consequences of his own behavior."
- 8) "Always step in and solve his problems for him so he can depend on you and run to you when the going gets tough. Then when he is older and still hasn't learned how to solve his own problems, so he can continue to run from them through heroin or alcohol."
- 9) "Just play it safe, be sure to dominate your husband and drive him to drink too, if you can."
- 10) "Take lots of prescription drugs yourself, so that taking non-prescription drugs won't be a major step for him."

b. How to develop a homosexual

- 1) "Start by using the ten easy steps followed by the alcoholic's mother."
- 2) "Show love for your son by protecting him very carefully. Don't let him play football or baseball with the other boys---he might get hurt! Don't let him be a newspaper boy or patrol boy; he might catch pneumonia out in the bad weather."
- 3) "Be sure he spends a lot of time with you and little with his father (or any other adult males)."

c. How to develop a sociopathic criminal

- 1) "As usual, start with ten easy steps the alcoholic's mother uses, with the following exceptions and additions."
- 2) "Never spank your child. Physical punishment is a thing of the past. In fact, spanking is now considered immoral and is even against the law in Sweden."
- 3) "Let your child express himself any way he feels. He'll learn from your example how to behave---he doesn't need any discipline."
- 4) "Don't run his life; let him run yours. Let him manipulate you and play on your guilt if he doesn't get his own way."

- 5) "Don't enforce the household rules---if there are any. That way he'll be able to choose which laws of society he will break when he is older, and he won't fear the consequences, since he has never suffered any."
- 6) "Don't bother him with chores. Do all of his chores for him. Then he can be irresponsible when he is older and always blame others when his responsibilities don't get done right."
- 7) "Be sure to give in when he throws a temper tantrum. He might hit you if you don't. Don't ever cross him when he is angry."
- 8) "It will help if you choose to believe his lies. You may want to tell a few yourself."
- 9) Criticize others openly and routinely so he will realize that he is better than everyone else."
- 10) Give him a big allowance and don't make him do anything for it. he might get the idea that he'll have to work for a living later on if you make him work for it. If he does anything worthwhile around the house, be sure to pay him richly for each and every good deed. You wouldn't want him to think that a feeling of responsibility is its own reward."

d. How to develop a hysterical daughter

- 1) "Use the same ten easy steps the alcoholic's mother used, point by point, but in addition do the following."
- 2) "Spoil her; always let her get way, especially if she pouts or cries."
- 3) "Always praise her for her looks, never for her character. Put a mirror on every wall, so she can continually admire herself."
- 4) "Whenever she runs away---and she'll probably do this frequently---be sure to run after her and apologize for not letting her have her own way in the first place."
- 5) "Encourage her to become a movie star. By now she is so dramatic that acting would be quite natural for her."
- 6) "get divorced and remarried two or three times so she can learn what you already know: that all men are good-for-nothings but you might as well live with one anyway."

e. How to develop an adult schizophrenic

Be sure you show no affection and be a weak father or mother.

f. How to develop an obsessive child

This kind of child is so rigid and inhibited that he's afraid of everything. Be sure to be critical, snobbish, domineering, and legalistic.

- g. How to develop an accident-prone child
Parents should fight with each other constantly and blame the child for the fight so that child will go out and get hurt to punish herself. Or just ignore the child all the time so the child will get hurt to get attention. Or just overreact every time he scratches his finger.
- h. How to develop an obese child
Feed him a lot of food and leave him alone all the time so he has nothing to do but eat. Also make sure he has little regard for his father.
- i. How to develop a hyperkinetic child
Don't ever spank the child; just nag him. Also make sure the father is always gone.

Why am I including all that? Because our society is full of those kinds of people. Where are they coming from? They come from families that are not responding to the divine principles God want families to live by. No wonder 70 percent of the parents surveyed said if they had to do it over again, they wouldn't have any children. Who wants children with all the above problems? God intended children to be a joy to their parents, but that will happen only when they are raised according to God's principles. Unfortunately, in our society, many children become nothing but a heartache.

- 3. As seen by the Minnesota Crime Commission
The Minnesota Crime Commission said this: "Every baby starts life like a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it; his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch. Deny him these once, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, no developed skills. This means that all children, nit just certain children, all children are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in their self-impulsive actions to satisfy each want, every child would grow up a criminal, a killer, and a rapist."

That's human depravity. Just do nothing with your children and that's what you're going to get. If you just let a child go his own way, make no consequences for his misbehavior, let him run his own life, and give him liberation, society will not want to live with what it's going to get.

Parents, if we don't work with our children to make them obedient, we're going to have the pain that the world has. It's not easy, but I know one thing: we must teach them to obey. And the only way you'll ever teach a child to obey is to make him pay the consequences for misbehavior. If you don't do that, your children will be a grief to you.

- ***The Effects of a Disobedient Child***

If you have a disobedient child, Proverbs says he will be:

- 1. A grief to his mother (10:1; 17:25)

2. A rebel to his father (15:5)
3. A sorrow to his father (17:21, 25)
4. A disaster to his father (19:13)
5. A disgrace to his parents (19:26)
6. A user of his parents (28:24)

That is summed up in Proverbs 29:15, which says, “*The rod [what you do] and reproof [what you say] give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*” Do you want to have shame on your hands? Do you want to have a disaster on your hands? Just don’t do anything, and that’s what you’ll have.

Review

I. THE SUBMISSION OF THE CHILD (vv. 1-3)

Lesson

II. THE SUBMISSION OF THE PARENTS (v. 4)

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

This is the top side of the authority/submission standard that upholds the family. Parents are to lead and rule but are also to submit to their children with loving, spiritual authority that does not abuse them.

- ***The Power of the Father in Paul’s Day***

In Paul’s day, certain attitudes existed that made life perilous for children. One of those was a Roman law called the *patria potestas*, which literally meant “the father’s power.” This particular law allowed the father to have absolute power over his family. He could sell them all as slaves; he could make them work in his fields in chains; and he could even take the law into his own hands and punish any member of his family as severely as he wanted, even to the point of inflicting the death penalty. And he had that power as long as he lived. When a child was born, for example, the child was taken and placed between the feet of the father. If the father reached down and picked up the child, the child stayed in the home. But if the father turned and walked away, the child was literally thrown away.

A letter of 1 B.C. from a man named Hilarion to his wife, Alis, gives us some insight into how children were viewed. It says, “Hilarion to Alis his wife, heartiest greetings. Know that we are still, even now, in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return, I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech you to take care of the little child, and as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If---good luck to you--- you have another child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, expose it” (Papyri Oxyrhynchus IV, 744).

Seneca, a philosopher during the Roman Empire, said, “We slaughter a fierce ox, we strangle a mad dog, we plunge a knife into a sick cow, and children who are born weakly and deformed, we drown.”

When children were thrown out by their parents, they would often be taken, if they were still alive, and left in the forum. People would then come by at night and collect the boys to make them slaves and girls to raise as prostitutes.

So Paul was speaking to a world where the children were severely abused. The parent-child relationship was as sick as it is in our society---and, by the way, not much worse.

A. The Parents Identified

“Ye fathers.”

The Greek word used here for “father” is *πατερεω*. It’s usually the word for the male head of the family but sometimes is used to speak of the parents, encompassing both the mother and father. For example, in Hebrews 11:23 we read: *“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents [Gk., πατερεω], because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”* Here *πατερεω* refers to parents. The reason Ephesians 6:4 uses the male term is that the man is the head of the family, but the Greek term includes the mother. So I believe Paul is calling out to both parents, saying, “You can’t just leave your child to develop on his own. You are the key to that child’s life. Depravity will only continue unless he is broken by accountability and a loving environment of discipline.” Children, have to be cared for. They are mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually inadequate. They need to grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with men and God (Luke 2:52).

• ***How to Prevent Juvenile Delinquency***

In a study conducted several years ago, sociologist Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck of Harvard University tried to identify the crucial factors in delinquency (*Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U., 1950], pp. 257-71). They developed a test by which they could predict the future delinquency of children five or six years old. Their follow-up tests four years later prove to be 90 percent accurate. They determined that the four necessary factors to prevent delinquency are:

1. The father’s discipline
Discipline must be firm and consistent.
2. The mother’s supervision
A mother must know where her children are and what they’re doing at all times and be with them as much as possible.
3. The father and mother’s affection

Children need to see love demonstrated between the father and mother and have it physically demonstrated to them.

4. The family's cohesiveness
The family must spend time together.

- ***The Key to Right Parent-Child Relationships***

Dr. Paul D. Meier (*Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development*, pp. 81-82) sums up the key to right parent-child relationships in five things.

1. Love

"Parents should have genuine love for each other and for their children."

2. Discipline

3. Consistency

"Both parents should stick together, using the same rules and consistently enforcing those rules so that what a child gets away with on some occasions is not the cause for which he is capriciously punished at another time."

4. An example

"In healthy families, the parents don't expect the children to live up to standards they themselves don't keep. Parents should expect their children to live up to the standards they themselves observe."

5. A man at the head of the home

"The vast majority of neurotics, both children and adults, grew up in homes where there was not father or the father was absent or weak, and the mother was domineering."

What Meier is saying is that you must have the right role of both the father and mother in order to insure the child's success in fulfilling God's pattern.

B. The Parents Instructed

1. The negative

"Provoke not your children to wrath."

The word **provoke** means "to irritate" or "to make mad or angry." Sometimes it refers to a lashing, open rebellion, and sometimes it refers to an internal smoldering. But a parent, first of all, is not to provoke his child to wrath. How do you make your children angry? How do you provoke a child to become unruly, rebellious, or smoldering? Let me give you some suggestions.

- a. Overprotection

Smother them, fence them in, never trust them, and always wonder whether they're telling you the truth. Never give them an opportunity to develop independence. In their environment, where everyone else takes certain risks and has certain opportunities, if they are compressed into a confined area, they'll begin to resent you and become angry. Parents, your children are people, and little by little they need to face the world and learn how to deal with it.

b. Favoritism

Prefer one child over another. Isaac favored Esau over Jacob, and Rebekah favored Jacob over Esau---you may know what terrible agony that caused. Don't ever compare a child with his siblings. You'll discourage him, make him angry, and break his spirit. Don't say things such as "Why can't you be bright as your sister? You always get C's and she gets A's" or "I never have to tell him twice to do anything" or "Why don't you act like your brother?" or "I only wanted two kids; why did you have to come along?" If you want to destroy your child, just make him feel inferior to everyone else in the family. You can test for this problem easily: ask your children how they feel about each other, and find out if they have preferences toward each other. If they do, they've probably picked them up from you.

c. Pushing achievement

Shove your child so hard to fulfill the goals you never accomplished that you destroy him. You can push so much that the child will have absolutely no sense of fulfillment; nothing is ever enough. Many parents pressure their children to excel in school, sports, or other activities, and it causes them to become bitter.

d. Discouragement

Provoke your child to wrath by discouraging him. That occurs if he's never given approval, reward, or honor; and if all you ever do is tell him what's bad, not what's good. I believe, in my own life, for every time I tell my child about something he's done wrong, I ought to equalize it by telling him something he's done right. Now, sometimes you have to look hard and be creative, but find something to praise him for. A child responds just as you do to reward, encouragement, and approval.

e. Failure to make sacrifices

Make them feel like an intrusion in your life. Children are sensitive. They know what you mean when you say, "Well, we'd love to go with you, but we've got these kids, and we can't get anyone to stay with them. It's this way all the time," or "Well, we'd like to get away, but what are we going to do with them?" If you make them feel unwanted and let them know there are many things that you'd like to do but can't because they're around, they'll soon begin to resent you.

f. Failure to allow childishness

Make sure if they do anything that isn't adult, mature, and intellectual that you put them down for it. Don't let them say stupid or silly things. Make sure everything they do is always perfect. If you do that, you'll provoke them for sure. But on the other hand, it's exciting to just let them say what they want---even if

it's dumb. Don't laugh them; laugh after if you have to laugh. Let them grow and present their ridiculous ideas.

g. Neglect

Neglect them. David neglected Absalom, and Absalom became the greatest heartbreak of David's life. You can't neglect your children and win. A friend of mine had a ministry traveling all over the country speaking to young people's groups. One day he overheard his little boy talking across the fence to the boy next door. "Hey, can you play catch?" his son asked. His playmate replied, "Naw, I'm going to play catch with my dad." Then the preacher heard his son says, "Oh, my dad doesn't have time to play with me. He's too busy playing with other people's kids." Needless to say, my friend change his ministry. Don't ever be too busy.

h. Withdrawing love

Tell them you don't love them anymore. That is probably the fastest way to make a child insecure. Don't ever withdraw love as a punishment. You do that when you say, "Daddy won't like you if you do that." God never stops loving His children. Your child needs to know that you will never stop loving him.

i. Bitter words and cruel physical punishment

Take your anger out on your children. I don't know what causes them to batter children, but we all need to be careful; children are fragile. Fathers, don't shove your weight around and use your superior strength. That will provoke your children to wrath. Not only can children be battered physically, but they can also be devastated verbally. Parents are more erudite and sarcastic than children, and they can destroy and discourage a child through their verbal barrage. I'm always amazed to hear the things we say to our children that we would never say to an adult for fear of our reputation.

Don't provoke your children to wrath.

2. The positive

"Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

a. "Nurture"

This is the Greek word *παιδεία* and means "training, learning, instruction." This word is used in Hebrews 12:5, 7-8, 11 and is translated "discipline" or "chastening." There must be rules and regulations that lead to reward or punishment. The child is rewarded for keeping the rule and punished for breaking it. To nurture, then, is to train by rules and regulations enforced by rewards or punishments. And, of course, always in a context of love.

• ***Advice from a Mother of Nineteen Children***

Susanna Wesley, the mother of nineteen children, including John and Charles Wesley, wrote these words: "The parent who studies to subdue [self-will] in child works together with God in the renewing and saving of a soul. The parent who

indulges it does the Devil's work; makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and [damns] his child, body, and soul forever" (*Susanna: Mother of the Wesleys* [New York: Abingdon, 1968], pp. 59-60).

b. "Admonition"

Admonition is not what you do but what you say to a child. It is counsel. The word translated "admonition" is the Greek word *νουθεσια* and means "verbal instruction with a view to correct." For example, it's saying, "if you keep doing that, you're going to run into problems," or, "I've got to counsel you about that." Throughout Proverbs we read that a wise son hears the counsel of his father and mother. That is admonition.

So on the other hand it's, "Do what I tell you," but on the other hand it's, "Listen to what I say." Nurture is correction; admonition is counsel. It's a tremendous task, and the end product is righteousness. If you want a righteous child, it has to come from what you teach him to do and what you tell him to do.

God wants to make our families into all they can be, and He wants to keep us from getting pressed into the mold of the world. Wouldn't it be great if Christian families didn't fall apart? Wouldn't it be great if Christian marriages stayed together? Wouldn't it be fantastic if we had children who were happy and homes that were Christ-centered, all things coming to pass as God designed them? It's possible! And if that ever happened, the world would take notice of us---and Christ.

• ***Would You Do It Any Differently?***

One father said, "My family's all grown, and the kids are all gone. But if I had to do it all over again, this is what I'd do.

1. I would love my wife more in front of my children.
2. I would laugh with my children more---at our mistakes and our joys.
3. I would listen more, even to the littlest child.
4. I would be more honest about my own weaknesses, never pretending perfection.
5. I would pray differently for my family---instead of focusing on them, I'd focus on me.
6. I would do more things together with my children.
7. I would encourage them more and bestow more praise.
8. I would pay more attention to little things, like deeds and words of thoughtfulness.
9. And then, finally, if I had to do it all over again, I would hare God more intimately with my family; every ordinary thing that happened in every ordinary day I would use to direct them to God."

Focusing on the Facts

1. How does God call us to be different from the world in Ephesians?
2. How did God expect Israel to be separate from the world (Lev. 18:3-5, 24-26)?
3. What must we understand and begin to put into practice before we can pass on our Christian faith to the next generation?
4. Cite evidence to show that much of society fails to see the value of children.
5. Show that God gives children as a gift to be enjoyed.
6. When can children become a source of heartbreak and pain?
7. List some things parents do that can cause their children to become drug addicts or alcoholics.
8. What can be overprotection of a mother and the lack of normal male role-models lead a boy to become?
9. How are criminals often produced?
10. What types of parental reactions can foster an accident-prone child?
11. What should parents do to ensure that their child doesn't grow up to become a social misfit? What is the only way they can teach a child to obey?
12. How are parents to submit to their children (Eph. 6:4)?
13. Describe the attitudes toward children in Paul's day.
14. What four factors are necessary for the prevention of juvenile delinquency?
15. What does Paul instruct parents not to do in Ephesians 6:4? Explain.
16. Explain why it is important that children not be overprotected.
17. What must parents do to prevent their children from being discouraged when they have done something wrong?
18. What made David's son Absalom become one of David's greatest heartbreaks?
19. Why should parents not withdraw love as a punishment?
20. What does it mean to nurture a child? Compare that with admonishing a child.

Pondering the Principles

1. Parents, carefully review the lists of things on pages 50-53 that can contribute to a child's delinquency. Are you doing any of those things? I hope you are providing proper guidance for your children. However, do you see anything you may have overlooked? If so, talk it over with your spouse and plan a strategy for strengthening that area of weakness. Quickly seek to rectify any mistakes while you're children's personalities are still easy to shape. If your child is older and you are now reaping the discouraging rewards of having neglected him, don't give up. Be firm and consistent with him, offering a loving family atmosphere that will be a guiding influence during the challenges of adolescence.
2. Do you recognize a need in your church for instruction on being good parents? Pray and plan with your church leaders on how that need can be met. Consider using a Christian film series on the family as a way of ministering to neighbors and friends who could benefit from instruction that encourages them to take a more active and biblical role in raising their children.
3. Do you love each of your children equally even though they have different personalities and abilities? Have you given them guidelines for what is right and wrong, and do you follow through with consistent and fair discipline or positive reinforcement when appropriate? Do you openly show affection to your spouse and enjoy each other's company when you spend time together? Do you set a consistent example that your children can respect and imitate? Do you provide sufficient supervision balanced with

growing freedom and trust as your children mature? Is the principle of authority and submission in a context of love evident in your lives as parents? These elements are basic to a healthy family. If any of them are lacking, you need to begin implementing them today.

4. All of us have regretted something. Consider the list of things a father wishes he had done differently. What advice of his can you begin heeding now---while there is still time?