

# Marriage Is Meant for Making Children Disciples of Jesus, Part 2

by John Piper

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*Marriage is meant for making children disciples of Jesus, and fathers have a leading responsibility in raising children, avoiding unnecessary anger and cultivating a wide-hearted approach to parenting.*

**Duration:** 48:21

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:31, Ephesians 6:4

**Topics:** "Christian Parenting", "Family Discipleship"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of fathers in raising children, focusing on the need to avoid provoking children to anger and instead cultivate a home filled with love, forgiveness, and tenderheartedness. The message highlights the role of fathers in imitating God's love and forgiveness towards their children, creating a nurturing environment where kids can thrive emotionally and spiritually.

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## Transcript

Before I pray, I want to respond to the source section of the Minneapolis Tribune. And the book that was reviewed there, Kids Don't Need Religion to Be Good, writer says. It's a new book that was just published by a local author called Parenting Beyond Belief, colon, on raising ethical, caring kids without religion.

Reviewed here, and then on the back page, the picture of the author, who lives in Robbinsdale. Three responses to lead us into our message tonight, because I finished my message before I saw this. So this is preface.

Response number one, test the internal consistency of a viewpoint. He says, my own kids have gone to Lutheran preschool. I'm happy to have them exposed to religious ideas.

The only ones I won't tolerate are hell and the assertion that doubt is bad, to which I ask, ask, what if your child doubts that your denial of hell is true? Second, test the main goal of Christianity. The assumption behind the headline and the article and the book is religion is for making people good. That's not the main thing religion is for.

Religion is for helping us escape the wrath of God and have everlasting joy in His presence. Goodness here on earth is an overflow and should be there. It's just not the main point.

That's the misunderstanding behind the book's response to Christianity. And then the third response, of course, is that we should pray for Dale McGowan. So Father, for Dale McGowan up in Robbinsdale, who's written a book to try to persuade parents that religion of any kind is not only not necessary, it probably gets in the way.

We ask, Lord, that you would bring him into experiences that would convince him otherwise. He grew up going to church with a bunch of evangelical friends and tested a few others and just decided religion was a human concoction to help people cope. So God, I pray that the truths that we have sung and that we've sung on every one of these campuses would become true in his life.

May this book not do too much damage, but rather, as you make the wrath of man to praise you often, turn it for the glory of Christ. Now help me, I pray, to be a blessing to fathers. Families, and through that, the church and the cities in the world.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen. This is the second of two parts about marriage is for making children disciples of Jesus. Let me rehearse for a moment.

The ultimate meaning of marriage, we have said, the ultimate purpose of marriage is to dramatize on the earth the covenant-keeping love between Christ and His bride, the church. So what we saw last time was that this flesh-and-blood drama between Christ and the church is the God-designed setting into which children are to come and be raised into discipleship of Jesus. So there's a connection between the ultimate meaning of marriage and the secondary meaning of marriage.

The ultimate meaning, a flesh-and-blood parable drama of Christ modeled by the husband and church modeled by the wife in covenant love with each other, the one providing sacrificial, loving, gentle, strong leadership and the other devoted and supportive and loving and creative and articulate coming alongside to bring about the purposes of the union. And this drama lived out on the earth is the place where babies are to be made and raised. And they're to watch this happen.

They're to watch Christ love and watch the church respond and follow and say, yes, it's a nest, loving and warm and satisfying and secure, a nest where babies are to be made, little birds are to be hatched and then live there until they can fly and find their own worms and make their own nests. I got a missionary newsletter yesterday from the Bluets, veteran missionaries in Papua New Guinea, and they announced now that both kids are married, Matthew and Marilee, Steve and Kim, and underneath their picture were the words, you get it, empty nesters, empty nesters. Everybody in this culture knows what they're talking about.

Both kids have flown. So the assumption is in that cultural phrase that marriage is for nest making partly. It's still a marriage when it's empty and before it was full.

But that's part of it, and that was the point last time. Today, the question is, what's supposed to happen with these little birds in this drama called Christ and the church lived out in a marriage, husband and wife, modeling? What's supposed to happen to children in that parable, in that drama, in that safe nest? Especially dads. What are we supposed to try to make happen there? Two reasons for focusing on dads.

One, it's Father's Day. Two, the text moves that way. I pointed this out last time.

Let me point it out again. If you still have your Bibles open to Ephesians 6, look at verse 1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Now, that's mom and dad.

Evidently, the assumption is since children are called to obey both, both are teaching. Both are saying do this, and both are saying don't do that, and both are united in shaping. But when you get to verse 4, it doesn't say parents anymore.

It says, parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. But it says, fathers. So there's a movement.

Not denying the absolute cruciality of both in this process, except where with all the heartache involved, it cannot be, and there's a single parent family or an orphanage. But in the ideal of God's design, both, yes, but, verse 4, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. So the point I made last time, and I want to underline it again, is that fathers have a leading responsibility, not the only responsibility, but a leading responsibility in raising children.

The way I like to say it is this. If there's a problem at the Piper household in child raising, and Jesus knocks at the door at 1801 11th Avenue, and Noel goes to the door, Jesus is going to say, Hello, Noel. Is the man of the house here? We need to talk.

Even if it's her fault. I mean that. He will look to me first for the big picture, the moral vision, the setting, how I've worked with that issue.

We men will give an account in a special way, a leading, not a soul, but a leading responsibility. I bear it. You fathers bear it with me.

Now, just to make sure we get the whole picture of the flow of the chapter, and it feels coherent, realize that this is simply an extension of the headship mentioned in 523 and 525. Read that again and you'll remember it from previous messages. 523.

We're at 6-1. We're going back to 523. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.

Husbands, and I'm down in verse 25 now, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Now God doesn't say to the husband, I call you to bear the sacrificial, crucifixion-like burden of responsibility in relationship to the leading of this woman, and then turn around and say, and woman, you've got the responsibility to lead the kids. He doesn't say that.

It's men responsible primarily both ways. And women partnering to see that vision through with her unique gifts and calling. So this is big, men.

We were told to be Christlike lovers and leaders of our wives, and then we're now being told to be Christlike lovers and leaders of our children, partnering with our wives who have an absolutely unique and precious role in this rearing with us. So, here we are at verse 4. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, simply extending the leadership of man over his wife to the leadership of the children. What does it mean? What's a man to do? Someday perhaps we'll give a whole series on parenting.

This is not it. This is marriage. And I'm simply arguing that marriage means having and raising children.

It's not all about parenting. Therefore, as I thought about what I should say on this one last Sunday before we turn next time to the whole issue of divorce and remarriage, what should I say to fathers who are

husbands, living out their husband role in relation to children? And I thought I would unpack all three parts, four or five parts of verse 4. Don't provoke your children to wrath. Bring them up in the discipline and the admonition of the Lord.

That's about five sermons. So, I gave up trying to pack all that in. And we're just going to talk about anger and why Paul said what he said at the beginning of this verse.

So, here we are. Chapter 6, verse 4. He does not begin his focus on telling them what to do, but what not to do. So, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.

Does that strike you as amazing? That of all the things he could have warned fathers about, just think of them. I listed about ten. He could have said, Don't discourage your children.

Don't pamper your children. Don't tempt them to covet with stuff. Don't tempt them to lie by setting up situations like that.

Don't tempt them to steal. Don't abuse them. Don't neglect them.

Don't set a bad example for them. Don't manipulate them. And he didn't say any of that.

He said, Don't provoke them. Does that strike you as amazing? So, I ask, Why? Of all the things he could have warned us dads not to do, seemingly more serious than this, this is what he picks. Why? Well, he doesn't tell us why.

So, I'm going to guess. I'm going to guess on the basis of my wider knowledge of the Bible, and Ephesians in particular, and I'm going to guess on the basis of experience. Those are the two things I bring to life.

Bible and life. I've had some life. I've had some Bible.

I try to think biblically. So, here's my guess. Number one.

There are two of them. Two reasons why I think he's zeroing in on anger. Number one is because anger is the most common emotion of the sinful heart when it confronts authority.

Anger is the most common emotion of a two-year-old heart when it confronts, No, you don't do that. They're called tantrums when they're two, and when they're teens they may slam the door, or worse. Nobody likes to meet authority that contradicts my will.

I want to do what I want to do, and if you won't let me do what I want to do, I get mad. So, I'm thinking, Paul's saying, Here's Dad. He, just by being, represents limits and authority.

Here's this little sinner, born that way, and one of the first things he learns is, Dad limits me. Of course, he ought to be feeling a lot of other things about Dad too, but he knows that one, and therefore, anger begins pretty early, as Dad limits. So, Paul's thinking, If it's just going to happen in the best of parenting, then don't do anything, Dad, that would cause any unnecessary anger.

There's going to be plenty without that. That would be my first guess. It's just so built into the structure of sin meeting authority, that Dad's going to be told, You don't need to work at this.

You don't need to do anything. Don't do anything to use your authority, to use your moral vision to cause unnecessary anger. Second reason.

This may be the more profound and serious one. Anger is of a special concern to Paul, and we will go back and see how much time he spent on it in chapter 4. Remember? Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor be put away from you with all malice. That was a fighter verse about four weeks ago.

Paul is really worked up and concerned about anger in the church, and now anger in the home. And perhaps, a second reason is, anger is the one emotion that when it dominates, it consumes all the other emotions. Like a cannibal.

So that where it is dominant, it's almost impossible to feel sweetness, compassion, kindness, gentleness, tenderheartedness, joy, hope, gratitude. Anger is a strangler. Not just on itself.

In itself, it causes enough problems, right? When it bursts out, it just messes up all kinds of relationships. But it's in there killing all the other ones that make the relationships beautiful. So, maybe, Paul may have more reasons, better ones than those, for why he tackles this issue of anger in dads immediately before he even tells them to bring up the children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

So, dads, what shall we say about this? Paul doesn't want us to make our kids mad unnecessarily. Before I start telling you what I think we should be doing, let me say something else. It's a negative.

Don't make your kids mad. But I'm going to argue in a minute that one of the ways not to make your kids mad is not just to think of all the stuff that makes them mad and don't do it, but to think all the stuff that awakens those other emotions. In other words, come at this thing not just directly severing the root of all the yelling at them or hitting them when you shouldn't hit them, putting too tight limits on them, the stuff you could, okay, got to stop doing that, stop doing that, but rather think of all the stuff you could be doing that might awaken the very things that are being strangled by the anger.

So, just be aware that I don't want us to limit, just go the negative route here. I'm going to stop doing this and stop doing this and stop doing this. I've got to be more creative.

I've got to look into my own soul and think about the things that maybe my dad didn't do for me and never occurred to me to do for my kids and therefore they're not getting it and therefore generation after generation we're just passing along these strangled emotions with dominant anger. So, what do we do, dads? How can we be the generation where it's broken? First thing I want to say is to give you a little bit of peace about this is that this verse may not be used as emotional blackmail by the children. Emotional blackmail would say, I'm angry, dad, so you're wrong.

You know, it's almost funny to think anybody would take it that way. I've been here long enough and lived long enough to know some people not only think that way as a kid, they never grow out of it. My emotions are the litmus test of your love for me.

If I don't feel it, you don't have it. Ever run into anybody like that? If you're not making me happy, you're sinning. If I don't feel good around you, it's your problem.

Maybe, be careful, we will not let our kids blackmail us with this. Your emotions are not the measure of my affections for you. My affections for you may be defective and part of the reason you don't have the right emotions for me, but maybe not totally.

It's complex, not simple. You can't have a kid throw back at you, I'm mad. This verse says not to make me mad, you're sinning.

Here's the reason we know that's true. Jesus made lots of people really mad and never sinned against them. They wanted to kill him.

That's mad. And he never sinned. Ever! So, draw the right conclusions.

All anger is not owing to being sinned against. Some is, some isn't. Just be careful.

That's the first thing I wanted to say just to have you not walk out of here and say, if my kid ever gets angry at me, I must have blown it because the verse says not to make him angry. No, no, no, no. Don't go there.

This is a warning. This is a warning to dads against the huge temptation to say things, do things, neglect things that cause legitimately avoidable anger. Some anger you can't avoid.

Some you can. This is a verse that says avoid all that you can in your righteous, humble, holy, Christ-like use of your God-given authority. Not all anger signifies your sinning.

Some might. Go deep with this. And if the kids are old enough, talk to them about it.

It's one of the great things about having kids that grow up is that you can start asking them questions about this. Why are you mad? What did I do? Or was it me? Am I the problem here? Or was it school? And you just begin to... So don't just avoid the aggravators like I said a minute ago. Do preemptive things.

Not just to avoid anger, but diminish it. Pull the plug on it. You know, the Apostle Paul was an amazing model of fatherhood as a single man.

Let me quote you some words as he, as a father, aches over the dysfunction between him and the Corinthian church. His children. Listen to these amazing words.

This is 2 Corinthians 6, 11-13. And you'll know because there's a little parenthesis. I didn't add it.

Paul added it. The ESV translators put a parenthesis around it to let you know he's speaking as a father. He said this.

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections.

In return, parenthesis, I speak as to children, close parenthesis, widen your hearts also. You hear the ache there? He's trying to persuade them. They don't believe it probably.

My heart is as wide as the ocean toward you. I want you totally in. I want everything totally out.

I want no hypocrisy. Nothing held back. All of me there for all of you.

And you have shriveled up on me. Your heart is constricted on me. The Greek word, stenocharizo, or something is constrained or restricted.

Your heart has gone down. It's like there was a grape full of juice and it's a raisin. It's not a raisin.

It's just a dried raisin. And I'm just pleading with you, let your hearts be wide toward us. So when you read things like this, let Paul, Dad, model for you how to deal with the children.

Be wide hearted toward them. Not just a little teeny heart, one emotion, anger slipping out again and again. Just let it go wide with the whole array of God-given affections, some of them tough and lots of them tender.

Widen your heart towards your children. Think of it this way, or think of this. God has never done anything that should legitimately cause anger in any of his children.

It is never warranted to be angry at God. Never. But it happens.

And when it happens in your heart, feel bad about it. Confess it to God and whoever else is involved. Be open.

Repent of it. And take hold again of God's sovereign goodness in the pain that you just went through that made you mad at Him. Reorient your theology.

Reorient your mind. Reorient your heart. Apologize for the outburst of anger and say, I know you're good.

I know you're good. I'm sorry for what I just felt and said. Do that.

So here He is as our Father and He has never done us wrong or done anything to give us a legitimate cause for anger and the relationship is broken with everybody in the world. Whose fault is it? It's man's fault. It's always our fault.

It's always our fault when the relationship breaks down between us and God. Always. Always.

Now, here's the point of making that. Who takes the initiative to fix our Father in Heaven does at the price of His Son's life. This is not a small little... I'm going to give it a little try here to see if I can save my children.

This is the Father and the Son from all eternity knowing our rebellious anger against Him and saying, Son, we're not going to let them go. We will not let our elect go. We will do everything it takes to have them in this family and have them happy.

Now, I mention it, dads, because that's our pattern. And it was all our fault. It will never be all your children's fault when they give you trouble.

Some, but not all. And therefore, the call to be like God to our children will be more warranted than if we were perfect fathers. And if we were perfect fathers, the knock on the door would be, I would like to talk to the man of the house.

And we'll work on this. We will lay our lives down to have these children back and to have them free from anger and to have them whole emotionally and moving into their own little nests. Whole.

Now, I said I would point you back to the way Paul worked with anger. If you want to move a page, you may not have to move a page. Chapter 4, verse 31.

This text, 4:31 to 5:2, is a model for fathers and how to attack the anger in the family, in himself, in his children, wife. Let's start reading at 4:31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, you could say you dads, along with all malice, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

Now stop right there. That's all command. And as command, powerless.

You go to a dad who's angry in this church tonight, and you say, stop feeling that way. He'll look at you like, you mean you want me to fly? It doesn't work. That's what he would say probably if he just said, stop being angry.

Or, like Paul, put it away. That's powerless. But the next phrase is all power.

As God in Christ forgave you. There's the only hope, dads. The Gospel is the only hope for child rearing.

The main issue in making kids mad is that we're mad. And if we're going to pull the plug on our anger, this is it. I don't know any other Christ-exalting answer to how to overcome anger than to do the way Paul says here.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you. Reverse it. Let there be kindness and tenderheartedness.

That's those other sweet emotions that are being slaughtered by the anger. Replace the anger with tenderheartedness and forgiving one another. And then here it comes.

As God in Christ forgave you. So the text is, God doesn't just come to us, dads, and say stop being angry and stop provoking your kids to anger. Period.

I mean it. I'm God. Do what I say.

That's not the Gospel. What God says is, from eternity I plan to save you. My son and I in a covenant of redemption agreed to do it.

I'm going to let him go. He's going to die. He's going to rise again.

For every dad who will look away from himself to Christ as the punishment he deserves, the righteousness God requires, and receive all that precious, glorious treasure, at that moment God says, I am totally for you. Forever. And out of that forgiveness, out of that right standing, out of that sweet, tenderhearted experience of the living God folding me like a father into His family, you know what can happen, dads? A soul that has shriveled up to one solitary emotion, anger, can begin to melt under the smile of God.

It will happen. And just so you know, I'm not reaching back for an irrelevant text. When I go back there, look at 5.1. Therefore, He's just said, forgive and put away anger as God in Christ forgave you.

And now He says in 5.1, Therefore, be imitators of God as loved children. We are children of God. He's our Father.

He has taken painful initiatives to make us His children, totally accept us, begin to work in us and love us and awaken our hearts to feel what we haven't felt for years at infinite cost, Christ. So He says, imitate me. I've done that.

You do that to your kids. Do that to your kids. Imitate me.

And then He just can't not say it again. As loved children. So dads, be careful.

Don't think, okay, Pastor Sam said put away anger. Get my act together here. Do some more good things so that God will love me.

It's backwards. That's not the Gospel. This is Gospel.

Imitate your Father as already loved children. You see it dads? 5.1 Be imitators of God as beloved children. He doesn't call us to get our fatherly act together to test whether we can qualify for His fatherhood.

The only hope of our being fathers that are half way useful to our kids is that we're already freely made the children of God before we get our act together. It's the only hope. That you sit there right now knowing you could be totally, you can be totally forgiven for all your fatherly failures is the only hope that tomorrow you might respond than you ever have.

A bigger, wider heart than they thought they could ever know from their dad. He doesn't seem so mad today. He seems to be more relaxed.

Like there might be peace in the universe between him and God. Everybody relaxes because dad has found peace. He's not so angry anymore.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. It means don't just stop doing things. Start doing things that remove anger.

Start doing things that awaken in the heart of a child other wonderful emotions that have been perhaps devoured by the cannibal of anger. And I'm arguing, as you see, that our main task, dads, is to be a Christian. You know, I said last time I have a simple head.

You give me a list 15 or 20 points long, I'm lost. I just don't know how to manage it. One or two things I can manage and I'll just give you one thing.

Dads, the main way to help your kids not be provoked to anger is for you to stop living in anger and live in the amazing joy of the forgiveness and acceptance and love that you have from your father in heaven. The kids will know it and they'll be changed by it. It's not the list.

It's not the, oh, I can't yell. I can't spank too hard. I can't, I've got to decide on, you know, how late can they stay out because they get mad if it's afternoon.

That's tough. Look, we're all over the map on that. We'll never get that figured out.

But one thing you can get figured out, day by day I need to bathe in the grace of God and have the anger pulled, the plug pulled on my anger. And instead of the anger as it drains out, my heart is wide to you, God, would you please take away all the hardened, numbing, emotionless, low-grade anger and bitterness that's been there about so many things. Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger.

Be like God. It was very costly. This is the Gospel.

So make sure you get this as we close. I'm not calling you to love your children like this so that you will have a Father in Heaven who loves you. That's backward.

I'm calling you to enjoy the amazing Father that you have in Heaven by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone and out of that restfulness, pull the plug on anger and give voice to the other emotions that will awaken them in your children. Where do children learn to praise? Where do children learn to say sweet and tender things to brother or sister? Where do children learn to say, I'm sorry? Where do children learn to sing? Where do children learn to feel gratitude? I'll tell you how, right here. The parent's spontaneous mouth of praise and gratitude and I'm sorry, I didn't mean to forget.

It's the whole array of wider emotions that will awaken and quicken our children so that they leave the nest ready to make their own happy nest. What children need from us is our experience of the fullness of God's offer of healing. So here's the dynamic of fatherhood.

As God has forgiven you, forgive your wife, forgive your children and sever the root of the whole cycle of anger by savoring to the depths, savoring to the depths of your soul the preciousness of God's forgiveness. Don't provoke your children to anger. Show them in your own soul that it can be replaced with tenderhearted affections.

That's what I'd like to do in closing on all the campuses, downtown and north. I'd like all the dads on all three campuses right now, including in this room, to stand. I just want to pray for you, that's all.

I'm not going to ask you to do anything. Just stand up, dads. And I know that leaves out a lot of people.

It's okay to do something special for dads every now and then. And I just want to pray that what I've said would come true for you. Some of us are granddads.

Some of us have a little baby in the womb. So wherever you are on that, let's just ask God to come. So God, as we're standing, some in Moundsvie, some downtown, some in Burnsville, we, dads, say come and do whatever you have to do, Holy Spirit, to help me break any long-term patterns of anger, whether explosive anger or just low-grade anger that makes me passive all the time.

Father, come by Your Holy Spirit and assure these brothers that by faith in Christ alone, all the anger of God is removed, all the wrath of the Lamb is removed. You are totally for them and not against them. And in that security and safety and enjoyment, release all the good range of affections that You've created, all the gratitude, all the joy, all the hope, all the tenderheartedness, all the kindness, all the goodness, all the praise, all the admiration, all the spontaneous delight in the child's simplest efforts.

Oh, God, we look forward to good days ahead as You do this work. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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