

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-TWO

Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Ephesians 6:1–4; Proverbs 22:6

Regardless of the home you've come from, regardless of the mess you have made in the home where you are now, it is never too late to start doing what is right. And the secret is nurturing.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AFTER enlightening his readers on the subject of marriage, Paul next shines the light of mutual submission on parenting. Just as he helped spouses learn how to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21), he shows the way for parents to apply the principle with their children.

Ephesians 6:1–4 features words such as *obey*, *honor*, *discipline*, and *instruction*. But we should not view these words as integers in a math formula. We can't add them up and . . . *viola* . . . perfect family! Real life's not as tidy as that—it's much messier. But it's also richer and deeper when by God's grace a beautiful family bond emerges out of the mess, despite our mistakes.

Though we don't find formulas, we do find a core concept around which we can organize our parenting efforts: *nurture*. Nurture in the parental context is similar to love in the marital context. In marriage, husbands who love their wives create an atmosphere in which women more freely submit to their husbands' leadership. Likewise, in parenting, children who breathe the air of love in a nurturing home are more likely to respond with submissive obedience.

Mutual submission is like a dance in which one partner leads and the other follows but they both take cues from each other. We've seen this graceful interplay between husbands and wives, now let's enjoy the wonder of the parent-child dance.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God’s Word, open your heart to receive His wise counsel on rearing children. Reading His words may cause memories of your own childhood to surface. As emotions stir, just remember that God knows the inner workings of your soul and your child’s soul. David was in awe at God’s delicate handiwork in us:

*You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother’s womb.* (Psalm 139:13 NASB)

Take a moment in prayer to invite the Lord to minister to you as you enter what may be a sensitive part of your heart.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 6:1–4*. It takes less than a minute to read these verses but a lifetime to live them! Ponder the connections between Paul’s commands, how one command builds on the other and how all of them circle around the centrality of our relationship with the Lord. Write down your initial impressions.



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Observation: Instructions to Children and Parents

In *Searching the Scriptures*, when we observe a passage, we examine closely each phrase and how they interrelate.¹ Are there any couplets—parallel statements that are similar in which one expands on the other? Did Paul use any connecting words that offer clues into what he was emphasizing? Let's observe first his instructions to children.

Instructions to Children—Ephesians 6:1–3

What are the parallel imperatives for children in the verses below? How would you say they are connected? For background, read the fifth command in the Ten Commandments on which Paul's instructions are based (*Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16*).

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1–3)

Obedience is the appropriate *action*; it involves a child's behavior. Honor conveys respect and devotion and reflects *attitude*. Both right action and right attitude are essential, and both flow out of *a trusting relationship*. At the heart of obedience is a relationship in which children are secure in their parents' nurturing love. They know that their parents truly desire what's best for them, and so they are willing to accept reproof and submit their will to their parents' will.



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Why does God instruct children to obey and respect their parents? Can you spot the two reasons in the verses above? Notice the motivations are both internal and external. How might this fact help you think of ways to motivate your children to obey?

On the flipside, how might things *not* go well for disobedient and disrespectful children when they grow up and get married, try to hold a job, and live as citizens in a community?

How can parents help their children avoid the inevitable life storms that defiance and disrespect stir up? Let's examine the parents' responsibilities in the next verse.

I've observed that children who are nurtured, not always but most often, have little trouble obeying and honoring. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Instructions to Parents—Ephesians 6:4

The apostle Paul advises parents to take a balanced approach.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)



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What did Paul warn against? What did he command?

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we'll dig deeper into the meaning of two concepts in this verse worth excavating: "provoke" and "bring up."



Interpretation: What Does *Provoke* and *Bring Up* Mean?

First, *parorgizete* means "provoke to anger." Compare its usage in a parallel passage, *Colossians 3:21*. How might a father provoke his children to anger or, as the word appears in *Colossians 3:21*, "aggravate," or, in the New International Version, "embitter"? According to Paul's warning to the *Colossians*, what happens to the child as a result?

The second Greek word is *ektrepheete*, translated "bring up" or "nourish." Compare its usage in *Ephesians 5:29*: "for no one ever hated his own flesh, but *nourishes* and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church" (NASB, emphasis added). Just as Paul challenged men to nourish their wives as they nourish themselves, he also challenged men as fathers to create a nourishing environment for their children. How?

Let's compare the two words in the following chart to draw out some specific actions. We'll list a few descriptors, and you can fill in some of your own. If you are a parent, take time to think through how you may have provoked or nourished in the past. How can you nourish more in the future?




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Provoke to Anger <i>Parorgizete</i>		Nourish <i>Ektrephete</i>	
Exasperate	Lecture	Affirm	Support
Nag	Harass	Encourage	Clear boundaries
Aggravate	Ridicule	Praise	Patient instruction

Nourish leads us straight back to the word, *nurture*, the single, unifying concept we can use to tie together Paul’s teaching. To shed even more light on this core principle, we turn to the wisdom literature of the Bible—and what mom or dad doesn’t need more wisdom!

 **Correlation: Train Up a Child in His or Her Way**

Read *Proverbs 22:6* in three Bible versions, noticing the differences and similarities in the translations.

Solomon counseled parents to *hanakh* (“direct” or “train up”) their children to walk in the way (*derek*) of the Lord. Interestingly, the phrase, “in the way he should go” (*Proverbs 22:6* NASB), can also be rendered “according to his way,” meaning the way God made them. Let’s seek further meaning by dividing this passage into three main concepts.

“Train Up”

In his study, Pastor Chuck Swindoll used a Hebrew-English lexicon to discover the meaning of *hanakh*. The authors of the lexicon associate the word to an Arabic root, which, in one source, means to “rub [the] palate of [a] child with chewed dates.” It also refers to a midwife rubbing the “palate of [a] new-born child with oil . . . before it begins to suck.”²



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The image of a midwife stimulating a newborn’s natural desire to suckle says a lot about the purpose of nurturing—namely, to encourage a child’s God-given abilities. What can you conclude about the meaning of *train up* from this metaphor?

If training your child involves stimulating a latent talent or gift within your child, what may lay hidden within your child’s God-given nature? Perhaps some hidden interests? Needs or longings? A thirst for a close relationship? Or a spiritual desire? What hidden gems have you seen in your child?

God gave you a child with a particular set of bents and characteristics. It is the job of each parent to make a study of each child. It takes effort; it takes flexibility; it takes time.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“ . . . A Child . . . ”

The Hebrew term for “child” is *na’ar*. This word is used in the Old Testament to describe children of various ages. Let’s examine three of these uses. In each of the following verses, at what stage of childhood is the “child”: *Genesis 34:19; 37:2* (NASB); and *1 Samuel 4:20–21* (NLT)?



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What conclusion about the duration of parenting can you draw from these references? In other words, through which stages of your child’s life are you responsible to train him or her?

“ . . . The Way He Should Go . . . ”

The Hebrew phrase for “the way he should go” can be translated literally, “upon the mouth of his way,” which is an idiom meaning, “in accord with his way.” What does *way* mean in the context of this verse? For a clue to the answer, read Proverbs 22:6 in the Amplified Bible:

Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it. (emphasis added)

In the amplification, the *way* of the child refers to his or her characteristics, manner, or “bent.” Most English versions emphasize the word *should*, implying a prescribed and proper direction in which to lead the child. But the Hebrew idiom emphasizes *his way* and *in accord with*, pointing to characteristics that emerge from within the child, namely, his or her personality, abilities, or natural interests. Which way should a child go? The way God designed when He formed the child in his or her mothers’ womb (Psalm 139:13).



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Now sum up your study of parenting. What secrets of a nurturing home did you discover?

Your children need you to help them know who they are. And when you find out who they are, you cooperate with them in developing them according to their God-given way.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Nurturing at Home

What do children gain from a nurturing home? First, *nurturing parents help their children know who they are*. A child speaks through the megaphone of his or her deeds. If you listen, you can hear him or her saying, “This is me. Please notice. I’m not him. I’m not her. Let me be me.” Reflect on what you’ve observed in your child’s deeds. Be sensitive. Watch closely. Listen intently. What have your child’s deeds been communicating lately?



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Second, *nurturing parents take time to cultivate their children’s individuality*. In what ways can you encourage your child’s bents—his or her God-given personality, interests, pursuits, possible vocation, relational style, gifts, and strengths?

Nurturing your child is an adventure! But don’t forget to nurture *yourself* along the way. What hidden God-given bents do you have waiting to be discovered and unleashed? God has great things in store as you and your children join in God’s wonder-filled family dance.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see Your fingerprints on my child’s soul. Your handiwork began at conception, and You continue to shape and mold. Unite me with Your creative work in my child’s life—and help me to grow as well, to be the person You made me to be. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”
2. Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 335.

