

By
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The Husbands' Survival Guide

Part VIII—Provoke Them Not

The one place in Sacred Scripture where God speaks to us about how Catholic families should be is found in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I urge you to read what he had to say in the fifth and sixth chapters.

We've pretty much exhausted what Paul tells us about husbands, except for one thing. The beginning of the sixth chapter is addressed to children and fathers. It says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4).

We notice first of all that children are addressed before fathers, and there is a reason for this. Paul understood that children, by nature and lack of maturity, tend toward selfishness and egocentricity. Therefore, they naturally will not obey parents without training. And that is why Paul then addresses fathers. He tells fathers the very best way to teach children is to rear them in the ways of God.

Guess what. You can't rear your children in the ways of God if you aren't living His ways yourself. There is no such thing in parenting as "do as I say, not as I do". This doesn't work with kids, and Paul knew that. This is why he admonishes fathers not to provoke their kids to anger. A child may indeed do as you say and not as you do, but he will do so with resentment growing into a monster inside of him.

You can always tell how a child was reared by observing how the teenager acts. Teens are naturally sullen and rebellious. Changing and raging hormones have a tendency to do that to teens. Still, have you ever noticed that some teens are publicly well-behaved and very respectful of those around them (particularly adults), while other teens make you feel like giving them a little baseball bat therapy? The latter have been reared with the do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do mentality on a parent's part, if reared at all. No matter what a teen was taught growing up, they behave as if they were never taught a thing when the parents—especially dads—teach one thing but do another by example. And rearing children that way provokes them to anger. That's why you're sometimes tempted to think that no jury in the land would convict you if... Well, you get the picture.

Children reared in this way don't bode well as adults. They have skewed or bad relationships with others, marriages that usually end in divorce, and their own offspring are most assuredly

going to be worse than they were. In worst case scenarios, they end up as guests of the state by order of a judge, replacing the name parents gave them with a number.

Speaking of that worst case scenario, a full 90+% of people in prison come from single parent families where the father wasn't anywhere around, except on a part-time basis... maybe. It's a proven fact in study after study that children reared in families with ever-present fathers who take an active role in parenting are far more balanced adults who live happier lives than those who are reared with fathers absent, or fathers who leave the children to rear themselves or by the mother. So it behooves fathers to take an active role in parenting rather than being a buddy, assuming you want the best for your kids.

Fathers need to begin assuming their rightful and morally duty-bound role in the rearing of their children. This means learning to say no. In today's world, it means learning to do that a lot. Just because your child wants something you can afford to give him in no way means you have to. For example, more and more parents are giving their children smart phones. Yeah, yeah, I know the argument for a child having his own cell phone, and I actually agree. Public phones are a thing of the past, and you want your kids to be able to get in touch with you if the need arises. I get that. But smart phones? What's wrong with a plain flip phone?

The problem with smart phones is that a parent can't monitor what a child is doing with that phone. Preadolescent viewing of pornography has reached epidemic proportions across the country, let alone the adolescent abuse of pornography. You might say, "Hey, my kid wouldn't do that." Really? How do you know? Just the other day I read an article about a ten year old whose parents said the same thing, yet the little boy was charged with the sexual abuse of three of his preadolescent cousins. This is what happens when children are not supervised in their activities, and it's impossible to supervise the use of a smart phone.

Today's kids enter the adult world completely unprepared. Parents indulge their children to the point of turning them into self-indulgent snowflakes who expect—no, demand—their hearts' desires. How do you turn that around? By being a parent, even when it's tough.

My father taught me a very important lesson in the '60s. All of my neighborhood friends got an allowance from their parents, but mine refused to give me an allowance. Honestly, I was embarrassed. I asked Dad several times if I could have an allowance. Each time he said no, never giving a reason. Then one day I worked up the nerve to ask why. He asked, "Does anyone pay your mother to cook, do the laundry or clean the house?" "No, sir" I replied. He continued, "Does anyone pay me to keep the cars maintained or the house in good repair?" Again I said, "No, sir". He asked, "Then why should we pay you to carry out the trash and make your bed? You're obligated to do your family duties, just the way we are. If you want money, earn it on your own."

My pop had a good point. Not only was I unable to argue with his logic, but I learned the value of work and the value of money. I learned there was no such thing as a job that was beneath me; I was willing to do anything, and often have. I learned work is honorable, and I learned to have a sense of pride in earning my own money. Perhaps this is something you may want to consider adding to your parenting tool belt. I did, and it worked out very well.

Next week we'll wrap up this *Husbands' Survival Guide*. Can you guess the only thing we haven't covered yet? Until then, please visit JoeSixpackAnswers.com to get answers to all your Catholic questions. You can even ask me directly.