

Living Out Mutual Honor as Children and Parents

Series: Becoming Who We Are (Engaging Ephesians)

Brad Bailey - March 16, 2014

Intro

Continuing in our series “Becoming Who We Are”...based on the Biblical Book of Ephesians. God did not just do something...He is doing it... by His Spirit.... And it’s about becoming who we are.

So be filled with that Spirit... give yourself to that influence....and this leads into a powerful change from the separation and competition between lives...a submitting to one another...or to state it another way... an ability to live in mutual honor.

Now Paul unpacks that by what it implies for core relationships. Last week....husband and wife.

Today...How God calls forth the mutual honor of child and parent.

This is one of the most sacred and sensitive relationships. [Could play: perhaps Harry Chapin song: Cats in the Cradle]

It’s to that powerful break that God said he would pour out his Spirit and that this would bring a turning back of the heart of father’s to their children...and children to their fathers. That is the work Paul captures in today’s text.

Ephesians 6:1-4 (NIV)

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." ⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Some of you **might think this topic doesn’t apply to you...because you are not a parent...you don’t have children.** You may **feel detached** from these words. They are **relevant for every one of us**, because

Every one of us is a child... and

Every one of us has been shaped...and in different by parents and may still be in process.

Every one of us **lives in a community of parents** and a **culture that is raising up the future.**

At the heart of life we are **fighting for control**...and that is played out most dynamically in the relationship between child and parent.

There are lots of major issues involved in parenting... school choices... sports and other activities... but I believe there is one underlying dynamic / issue that is most defining of the whole nature... **individuation.**

A human life is both separate and connected... and must navigate into the world as such.

We are bound together with a third party...God... out of which **mutual honor flows.**

We are not two sovereign creatures...if we are restored in relationship with God... that actual center and orbit of life....it defines who we are in relationship to one another.

These words were deemed subversive to Rome and much of the world. In the first century nearly all teaching focused only on the roles and responsibilities of the more powerful and privileged -

husbands, parents, and masters...and Paul resets reality with God as the only ultimate ruler and speaks of wives, children, and servants. They were full participants in the community

Notice he **speaks to each**...not of what they should impose upon the other....because you can't impose these things. Rather....to what each should grasp.

Begins with

A Word to Children: "Obey and Honor Your Parents"

Children are to **obey** and **honor** their parents.

Before we unpack those terms a little...it's important to see how this is all centered in God.

- Notice he says... **"in the Lord"**

Ideally a home is supposed to be IN THE LORD. [1]

That's the environment, the atmosphere, the climate ...under the love and leadership of Christ.

But also it could rightfully reflect that obedience flows from God...and if any authority demands we act in direct opposition to God... one can certainly disobey. This is not a call to obey any command of a parent...to hide abuse or hurt others.

- He says... **"it is right"**

Obedience **is right** (v. 1b).

There is a natural order built into the universe...from which order flows. In this sense it is only natural that God would command children to obey their parents. Since the parents brought the child into the world, and since they have more knowledge and wisdom than the child, it is right that the child obey his parents.

Colossians 3:20 (NIV)

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Notice that ultimately children are not told to obey parents because it pleases the parent, but because it **pleases the Lord**. Pleasing one's parents is, of course, a reason for obeying them. But the *first* reason for obeying parents is that it pleases the Lord. The child is to know the Lord to such a degree that he is continually thinking about the Lord and about pleasing Him.

God is the center around which life flows.

And as such, life generally goes better.

He reminds children that this is the commandment that **comes with a promise**.

- **The fifth commandment has a promise attached to it:**

"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Paul notes that the fifth commandment has this promise attached... that life will generally go better and last longer. [2]

This does not mean that everyone who honors their parents will live easier and longer lives... nor that those who died young dishonored his parents. He was stating a principle: when children obey their parents in the Lord, they will always be more prepared to do well. They won't be robbed by as many mistakes...and they will gain from their wisdom.

So what does it mean to obey and honor one's parents?

These are **naturally related** **In general**, if we are disobedient to an authority figure...we are not honoring them.

But **obedience** is the element of honor that is **weighted at the formative season of life**. When one becomes adult... they are bearing the responsibility for life and therefore generally making life's decisions.

But honor still remains throughout life. [3]

To "honor" our parents means more than simply to obey them. It means to show them respect and love, to care for them, and to seek to bring honor to them by the way we live. – Wiersbe

Honor is the most important ingredient in any family relationship. As husbands and wives honor each other they can have a marriage that moves toward oneness and intimacy. When parents honor their children, their kids will know that they're accepted, that they're unique, that they're secure, and that they have a purpose in life. And, when children honor their parents, the family will be healthy as kids learn and grow in an environment of love and acceptance.

The word "honor" literally means a "heavy weight." [Hold up heavy object] It implies that we assign the greatest possible weight to a person in terms of respect by holding them in "high regard." To honor someone is to measure his or her value on a scale and concluding that it is "heavy." On the other hand, to **"dishonor"** means to **treat someone as if they were "light or insignificant."** [Hold up light object]

As adult children... have we honored our parents?

If they are still alive...even though you are no longer living under their authority...are you speaking honor...looking for ways to demonstrate care and concern?

- **Ex of Jesus...**as an adult he did not always obey his mother...but he honored her....cared for her even in his death.

It's **natural to grow to have differences** and disagreements. But here is a truth many of us need to face:

There is a way to disagree honorably...and dishonorably. We can disagree in an honorable way...and in a dishonorable way.

We all need to individuate... but eventually this process calls us to relate to the person...not the punisher or provider.

> Humanize them...a fellow person that is shaped in their own fallen world.

For some of us, one or both of our parents have passed from this world, honor is something that lives on...it does not come to an end when someone's earthly life is over. You **can still choose to honor them in your heart** and way of remembering them. Honor lives on...even after someone's life is over...we honor and dishonor.

Now ...

A Word to Parents...especially Fathers: "Honor and Train Your Children"

The Bible says that **children are a blessing**.

Our culture treats them with a strange mix of **neediness** and **neglect**... but they are a blessing. They may be an **expensive, complicated blessing**...but they're a blessing.

> **They're a blessing, but they're also sinners**....just like every one of us. We do not believe that children are simply innately good. Most of those who think that are people who don't have children.

Do you remember the day you taught them to toss that their food...to roll their eyes...to fight your good judgment?

> You don't remember it because **you never had to teach them !** People who have children have seen the moment...the one that looks a lot like that Garden scene...don't eat from that one tree...and they decide to exercise their freedom to be separate.

Some modern voices may suggest that we just need to create an environment where they can naturally become whoever their heart declares them to be. But children left to themselves do not naturally come to reflect their highest God-desired nature...but rather that of a soul that cannot escape the darkness.

Children need that which connects them to God and their divine nature...**they need a compass** within them **and a light** around them. [4]

So Paul continues to speak to parents about their role...especially fathers...

Ephesians 6:4 (NIV)

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Every life is **like a vessel that sails through life** with **sail and rudder**... and some given freedom to have their sails hoisted but no rudder (training, boundaries). Some may have felt like the rudder was always being built but never free to hoist your sail.

Or we could think of every life as being like a **tree**... which needs both **freedom to stretch its branches**...but also a **deepening of roots**.
development of **roots or branches**.

He begins telling fathers in particular what they need to not do. Fathers are **not to "exasperate"** their children.

I love that word. It's rarely ever used...and yet most of us know what it means because we can just "feel" it.

Many translations simply unpack the gist of the meaning which is: "**do not provoke them to anger**." [To the Colossians he wrote, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col. 3:21). So, the opposite of "provoke" is "encourage."]

This may sound like good but common thought they every culture would understand...but it wasn't. This is where Paul brings what is **entirely subversive**... these words reflect what became a **shift in western civilization**.

In Paul's day, the father had supreme authority over the family. When a baby was born into a Roman family, for example, it was brought out and laid before the father. If he picked it up, it meant he was accepting it into the home. But if he did not pick it up, it meant the child was rejected. It could be sold, given away, or even killed by exposure. No doubt a father's love would usually overcome such monstrous acts, but these practices were legal in that day. Paul told the parents, "Don't use your authority to abuse the child, but to encourage and build the child."

Parents are not to be self-centered abusers or users...but **embrace being God's builders of life.**

There is a life that must develop into its true nature as an adult.

How might we exasperate our children? How might a child not simply become angry ...but be **PROVOKED** to anger.

Ways We Can Provoke a Child's Anger

Some Common Tendencies Will Not Honor a Child's Growth

1. Overprotection.

Young children certainly need protection... but it is natural that as they grow they expect freedom. I often have to remind my wife...remember how much freedom we had when we were their age? It doesn't always help because then we remember what we did as a result.

You can anger your kids by fencing them in too much. At some trying to keep them protected communicates that we don't trust them. It can communicate that we don't honor that they are growing towards adulthood.

2. Overindulgence.

The flip side of overprotection is overindulgence. Excessively permissive parents are as likely to stir their children's wrath as much as those who stifle them. Studies prove that children given too much freedom begin to feel insecure and unloved. Because our society has fostered increasingly permissive attitudes toward children, we are now reaping the harvest of a whole generation of angry young people.

Many express feeling how their parents never really seemed worried about where they were or what they were doing... and it left them feeling like they weren't important. If their parents didn't care...then maybe they shouldn't care either.

3. Favoritism.

A third way to exasperate kids is by showing favoritism. When a child feels that they can never match up...never get a fair deal...they will naturally begin to feel anger inside. They are not being honored.

4. Neglect.

Another way to exasperate your children is by neglecting them. When we fail to show affection and act indifferently toward our kids, we can cause them to burn with anger. We can neglect our kids by **never being home**; or we can do it by **being home but not involved** in their lives.

5. Lack of enjoying them

Not just enjoying the activities that you are into...but **enjoying them...in whatever they are doing.**

There's nothing like seeing a dad sitting on a tiny chair with a tiny cup at a princess party

Stephen Covey, author of the bestselling book "Seven Habits", tells about a friend whose son developed an avid interest in baseball. His friend wasn't interested in baseball at all. But one summer, he took his son to see every major league team play one game. The trip took over six weeks and cost a great deal of money, but it became a powerful bonding experience in their relationship.

My friend was asked on his return, "Do you like baseball that much?"
"No," he replied, "but I like my son that much."

6. Unrealistic Goals.

Dads, we can provoke our kids to wrath by constantly pushing achievement.

7. Being Overly Critical

The teacher asked her class what each wanted to become when they grew up. "President." "A fireman." "A teacher." One by one they answered until it came Billy's turn. The teacher asked, "Billy, what do you want to be when you grow up?" "Possible" Billy responded. "Possible?" asked the teacher. "Yes" Billy said, "my mom is always telling me I'm impossible. When I grow up I want to become possible."

I find most people and parents are more critical than encouraging...especially fathers. Some of us naturally have a word of correction... criticism...made all the worse if harsh or sarcastic.

What provokes a child to anger is when they feel like the **parent is a critic and not a coach**, one who is **there to just point out the flaws and not to help** provide some solutions.

You can see this with some children...when their parent engages them...their head drops, shoulders slouch, look at the ground, "**What did I do now?**"

A few months ago I read an article on parents relating to their kids in sports. Based on a lot of exploring what kids feel about what their parents interaction after games...they brought home that kids don't need another critical coach...and they suggested that the best things to express to a child right after a game is: "***I love watching you play.***"
I have used it that day and nearly every weekend since.

We need to learn to celebrate and applaud. Let's give our approval spontaneously so our kids don't have to earn it or look for it in the arms of a boyfriend or girlfriend. Let's catch our kids doing things right instead of lashing out at them for what they do wrong.

Think of it like a bank account. Encouragement is a deposit; criticism is a withdrawal. One of the ways you provoke your children to anger is you make far more withdrawals than you do deposits. A lot of your time with your children should be encouraging.

"You did your best; I appreciate that.

I know this is hard; I'm praying for you.

You are a blessing; I'm glad to have you.

Hey, I saw what you did, and I just wanted to tell you I really appreciate that.

I know that was not easy for you; thanks for hanging in there.”

We can **speak a word**...as well as **jot a note**, **send a text message**... **give a kiss on the forehead**.

8. Excessive Discipline...and Anger.

Too much punishment is another sure way to provoke a child to anger. Dads, don't ride your kids constantly. The father who throws his weight around whether physically or verbally can be devastating to a child's spirit. Hebrews 12 says that God always disciplines us in love and so should we.

Anger... itself is not wrong....but uncontrolled and self-serving anger is.

If we are acting out of anger...that wants to hurt another....that is not controlled.....that is mean in nature... we are bring something destructive into our discipline.

Provoke, antagonize, hostility, escalation . . . it provokes the child to anger. Those children either grow up to rage against their parents, particularly their father, or they just leave.

Constant anger creates...anger...then apathy...then alienation. Many older fathers feel the alienation from their children...and those children will tell you... that just got tired of the anger...too often it just wasn't an emotionally safe environment.

Constructive discipline takes more work. It means it comes with guidance.

Jesus and I are grieved that this is what you did or where you're at, but Jesus and I are here, and we want to help you grow. We want to help you mature. We want to help you rise up beyond that.” There's a difference in the tone. There's a difference in the invitation.

9. Lack of humility and repentance

We can provoke our children to anger when we haven't learned how to be wrong.

Sometimes we will say things that are wrong...so things that are wrong. Children want to know if we have the ability to embrace that reality.

> Many children have discovered that they are not as important as their father's ego...or their mother's pride.

As parents we are going to blame our kids for something that we discover they didn't do...or something we thought they were incorrect about when in fact they were right.

What do you do? You repent. You go to your kids and say, “I was wrong. I'm sorry.” You don't excuse it or downplay it. You care about how they may have felt.

“I was wrong.” That's what it means to be the head of household and the family leader—you set the temperature of the home.

How many of you right now, **even thinking** “Wow...my dad never owned what he did... if he could really face what he did wrong...it would open up a new world for relating.”

Fathers, we don't need to be right; we need to prove to our children **that God is always right**, and sometimes that means we say that we're wrong.

That's the negative side of our dad duty: avoid exasperation. Now, let's look at three positive principles from the second half of Ephesians 6:4: "...Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Along with keeping wind in the sails...we need to provide the rudder...the roots.

Parents honor children with nurture ("bring them up"), training (discipline), and instruction.

"Bring them up" means to **care and provide for**...to nurture. Kids should know that their parents are invested in their growth.

"Train"...Provide Discipline

The next thing Paul challenges us to do is to provide discipline for our kids. This word is translated "admonition" in some of your Bibles and carries with it the idea of a rebuke or a warning. Literally, it means to "place before the mind."

It's important to understand the **difference between discipline and punishment**.

The purpose of **punishment** is to inflict **penalty and focuses on the past**. The purpose of discipline is to promote growth by looking to the future.

Praying one night for our son...image...barriers that guide a ball rolling through a course... wedge that directs their path.

Provide "Instruction"

And so dads, we are to avoid making our kids angry if at all possible and we're to provide nurture and discipline. There's one last thing that we're called to do in this verse: we're to provide instruction. Notice that this instruction is to be "in the Lord."

Closing...

Today...I want to invite us into the work of the Spirit...in which God' is turning the hearts of children back to their parents...and the hearts of parents back to their children.

We are called to a life of mutual honor. No matter how poorly a parent behaved...or a child behaved...there is an inherent value to be honored.

Some of us...know that we have **not honored our own parents**... perhaps living... perhaps passed on.

Some of us... **feel the consequences of how we were exasperated**... perhaps we identified with one or more tendencies in the parents who raised us. Today is an opportunity to come to God for healing and courage/grace to honor.

Some of us... we **identify with our own tendencies in parenting** the children we are entrusted with.

(Grandparents you have a lot of influence over your grandchildren.)

Invite any who feel God's heart along these lines...to come forward....to bring that to the alter...to God.

Resources: Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Eph 6:1–4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books; Brian Bill (Message Fathers who Lead); Mark Driscoll “I Am Fathered” message on same text.

Notes:

1. “*in the Lord*”—Both parents and children being Christians “in the Lord,” expresses the element in which the obedience is to take place, and the motive to obedience. In Col 3:20, it is, “Children, obey your parents in all things.” This clause, “in the Lord,” would suggest the due limitation of the obedience required (Ac 5:29; compare on the other hand, the abuse, Mk 7:11–13).

Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Eph 6:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

2. The quotation is from Exod. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16, the first part of it literally according to the Septuagint. To honor father and mother means more than to obey them, especially if this obedience is interpreted in a merely outward sense. It is the inner attitude of the child toward his parents that comes to the fore in the requirement that he honor them. All selfish obedience or reluctant obedience or obedience under terror is immediately ruled out. To honor implies to love, to regard highly, to show the spirit of respect and consideration. This honor is to be shown to both of the parents, for as far as the child is concerned they are equal in authority.

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953-2001). Vol. 7: Exposition of Ephesians. New Testament Commentary (259). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

3. The Scriptures are very clear on the responsibility to care for one's parents as they get older. Leviticus 19:32 says that we are to, “Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God.” While Beth and I have not had to do this yet, we want to be ready to care for our parents if they need us. 1 Timothy 5:3-4 says, “Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.”]

Mark 7:9-13. The Pharisees were in the middle of accusing the disciples of breaking the Law by not washing their hands before eating. Jesus pointed out their hypocrisy by blistering them about how they treated their parents.

The Law said that they had to financially take care of their parents. But instead, what they would do is they would declare all of their money and possessions Corban. By calling it Corban, they were saying all their stuff was dedicated to God and could not be used to support their parents. They were basically saying, “All my money has been set aside for God.” Meanwhile, elderly Mom and Dad were left to fend for themselves. They thought they had found a loophole to keep from having to take care of them. They were technically within the law, but Jesus saw their attitude. Their attitude did not honor their parents. Honoring our parents isn't an option. It's a commandment. A commandment to honor them by providing for them when they can't provide for themselves.

4. The Bible records the sad results of parents neglecting their children, either by being bad examples to them or failing to discipline them properly. David pampered Absalom and set him a

bad example, and the results were tragic. Eli failed to discipline his sons and they brought disgrace to his name and defeat to the nation of Israel. In his latter years, even Isaac pampered Esau, while his wife showed favoritism to Jacob; and the result was a divided home. - Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Eph 6:1-4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.