

Principles of Godly Parenting

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Well, good morning! And thank you for joining us for another Sunday morning sermon here at Grace Fellowship Church at a very wonderful time, because Easter is upon us! We are now in the Easter holiday season.

And just to say a few words about that. As many of you know, we've been doing a children's program on Sunday mornings here at the church. We're doing several of them because there's been a good response. So, we've opened up two programs on Sunday mornings: one at 9:15 and the other at 11 o'clock.

If you've been watching the news, you'll know that recently our provincial health officer rescinded her previous order banning church gatherings and decided to allow churches to meet outside in settings of 50 people. We want to take full advantage of that right away. The way this will work is that we'll have three services next week outside, over the Easter weekend. One on Good Friday, and two more on Sunday, at an undisclosed location. There'll be music and prayer and the Lord's Supper there. We're going to take communion together. And there's going to be scripture reading and worship and a sermon. I'm going to be doing a message at each of those events. We'll have a good Friday message and then two Easter messages.

We want to make this special for you. We want to make this an important day for all of us. We want to be conscious also of the weather; you will need to dress warmly, and maybe bring an umbrella for the rain. The church will have a large tent there for you to sit under. And so, we're going to keep you out of the elements and as comfortable as possible.

But all this to say, this is good news! This is something positive for us to talk about. Because as we all know, this has been a difficult time for our people. It's been rough. In fact, the elders have asked me recently to take some time out of my schedule, from teaching and other things, in order to visit you in order to see how our people are doing and talk with you and listen to your concerns and hear your heart.

And you've told me that you don't like this. Our congregation told me that you don't like the idea of meeting just online because it's not healthy. It's not the way it's supposed to be. And I get that. I hear you. You want something different. And I want to say that now is your chance to do that. Now is your chance to do something different on Easter weekend.

What a wonderful time of the year, amen? What a marvelous time to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ this way. In person, together. After all, this is what unites us as a church. This is what brings us together. We don't come together because we all look the same and act the same. And we don't come together because we all come from the same background or the same country. We come

together because we believe that Jesus rose from the grave. We come together because we believe He defeated it.

And so please join us as we celebrate that this Easter holiday. If you're on our church email list, our church office will be sending you a sign-up sheet for that. And if you're not on the email list, just let us know. If you're watching this online, and you're not one of our regular people, just contact us through our website and we would love to make a spot for you.

This should be a wonderful time. It should be a great encouragement for everybody. And with that said, while we're talking about the resurrection this morning, I would like to invite you to open up your Bibles to a book that talks a little bit about the resurrection, or specifically, about our salvation in Christ. And that is the book of Ephesians.

We're in a brand-new part of the book of Ephesians. We're coming up to chapter six. And I just want to read this to you before we get started. So, if you would read Ephesians chapter 5, starting in verse 22 with me. Paul writes this:

²² Wives, *subject yourselves* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church ^[a] in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ So husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, ³⁰ because we are parts of His body. ³¹ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. ³² This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless, as for you individually, each *husband* is to love his own wife the same as himself, and the wife *must see to it* that she respects her husband.

6:1: 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 so that it may turn out well for you, and that you may live long on the earth.

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

We're going to stop the reading there. If you've been with us for a while, you'll know that we've been in the book of Ephesians for some time now as a church. We've been in it for over a year. And we've covered a lot of ground. The book can be divided into two sections; you can look at it as two halves. The first half is all about doctrine. Chapters one through three are all about truth. And the second part is how you apply that. Chapters four through six tells you how to connect that to your lives.

And in fact, a major break in the book happens in chapter 4:1 when it says this:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

Paul starts that verse off with the word “therefore”, which means, “therefore, since you've learned all this”; “therefore, since you've heard all of this great truth about Jesus and your salvation and eternal life, this is what you need to do”. Now, you need to walk in a manner worthy of your calling. That's the book of Ephesians in a nutshell.

In fact, the word “worthy”, is “axios” in Greek, and it refers to an object that was balanced on both sides of the scale. You guys have probably seen those ancient scales. You would have a weight on one side and a weight on the other. And you would put things on both sides until they were even. Well, that's what this word means. That's how you're supposed to live the Christian life. That's how you're supposed to be as a believer. You need to be balanced. You need to let your life and your doctrine match.

Paul says it shouldn't be just reading and reading and reading with you all the time. It shouldn't be just listening and listening and listening to sermons. It needs to impact your life; it needs to change you. And if it does, then what we just read there is that it will change your family. If the doctrine changes your life, if it impacts you personally, it is going to impact your home. You can't keep it out. You can't help it; it's going to find its way there.

In the passage I just read to you, chapter 5:22, mentions wives. It mentions the ladies in the home and then chapter 5:25, mentions husbands. He mentions this to say that this is where your doctrine needs to change you the most. This is where the truth needs to impact your life the most...in the family. And after saying that Paul says this in chapter 6:4. He says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

I'll explain that passage to in a moment, but if you notice, Paul speaks directly to the fathers here. He speaks directly to the parents. The word father is just another word for parents. It's the same idea. It's kind of an all-encompassing term for the mother and the father. And it says that the spouses are not the only ones who have a responsibility in the family. It's not just about wives and husbands. It's about this as well.

The children are mentioned earlier in the chapter here, right above this, but now Paul turns his attention to the parents. It applies to the adults in the room. It's not your job as a parent to just drop your kids off at church and leave them there, right? It's not your job as a parent to just take them to youth group or Sunday school, or vacation Bible school, and then leave them alone and let other people kick in. You have to do more than that. You have a part in raising them too.

We're delighted to teach your children at church; we're delighted to minister to them every Sunday. But we're not the only ones who are supposed to be doing that. You're supposed to be doing it as well. You also can't just do this on Sundays, you can't do this one day a week and forget about it the rest of the time. This is something you're supposed to do every day. The way this is worded in Greek means that this is a continuous thing. This is an ongoing thing. Parents need to be constantly instructing their children because the kids are constantly growing. The kids are constantly changing.

I've talked to some young parents and they say, "you go see your little one or two-year-old in the room at night, and then you come see in the next morning, and they physically changed". Therefore, you have to teach them every day. And I would say that if our families are failing anywhere in the world today, if we're struggling anywhere, it's here. We don't teach our children anymore. We don't raise them like we should, because it's too hard. I mean, this is difficult stuff. So, we would rather just let someone else do it for us.

In fact, studies have been done on this, and they found that one of the biggest factors in the growth of most churches in North America in recent years, has been the children's program or the youth department. Parents want their kids to be taught; they want their children to be shepherded, which is a good thing. That's okay, but at the same time, these studies have shown that those same kids also leave the church after they graduate.

They leave the Christian faith after they finish high school and never come back, because it was fake to them. It was artificial. They never saw it at home. They never saw the Faith lived out there. So now they don't want to have anything to do with it.

And one author said this: "Children are truly a blessing from the Lord, but unfortunately, they don't come with an instruction manual". They don't come with a map for how to raise them, which is why you have to teach them the Bible. That's why you have to teach the Word of God to them.

And I might add that all this means nothing if you don't do that. For your kid's sake, Christian faith means nothing if you don't teach it to them in the home, because your kids aren't going to believe the Bible if you don't. They're not going to follow it and submit to it and do what it says if they don't see you do it too.

So, this is really not an option for you as a parent. This is important stuff. You know, I mention this because it could be so easy to neglect this today. It can be so easy to forget because we're so busy with other things, we're so distracted with our job and politics in the news that we don't have time to do this. Paul says you need to make time. He says you need to make it a priority because your children need you.

I also mention this because sometimes we don't forget our responsibility to teach the Bible as much as we abuse it, as much as we do it the wrong way. When we teach the Bible to our children, it's all about rules, rules, rules with us. When we tell them what it says it's all about the law, the law, the law to the point that we shove it down their throats. It's like taking medicine.

You can't do that either. You can't parent you can't parent your children like that because God doesn't do that with you. God doesn't parent you that way. He shows you grace, and you have to do the same with them. You need to parent them in love.

A friend of mine told me this story some time ago about the time a preacher's kid came to see him. They said "You know, my dad prayed a lot in public growing up. I saw him read the Bible a lot in public, but I never saw him do it at home. Never saw him do it with us. It was almost as if he didn't care about it there".

And friends, you don't ever want your kids to say that about you. You don't want for them ever to say that you don't care about the Bible. You need to teach it at home. You need to do it every day, which leads to what I want to talk to you about today. So, if you're taking notes this morning, in Ephesians 6:4 we're going to look at two responsibilities for a Christian parent in the home. That's our outline for today.

We're going to do this because I don't think that everybody gets this today. I don't think everybody understands that this is what parenting is all about. You need to teach your children the Bible. God could have put your kids in anyone's home. He could have given them life in any family, but He gave them life in yours.

And as a Christian, as a believer, you need to teach them the Word of God. You can't just provide for them physically. You can't just do it financially; you need to do it spiritually as well. You have an obligation to that.

You know, I've personally been thinking about this a lot lately, with all the crazy stuff going on right now and all the chaos and confusion happening in the news. I've wondered what should we be talking about as a church right now? What should we be looking at on Sunday mornings?

I just finished a 5-week series on the government. I wonder, should I do it again? Should we go back over that material? And every time I think about that, I'm reminded of the fact that Paul wrote this letter from jail. Which means that while his freedoms were being restricted there, while Paul's rights were being taken away, and he was being mistreated, this was on his mind. This is what he was thinking about.

He was thinking about the home. He was thinking about the family. He wasn't even really thinking about his circumstances, he was thinking about something greater than that. So, it's very fitting for us to talk about this; this is very timely.

If you're interested, we are going to talk about the government again here in a few weeks. I actually have one more sermon that I want to preach about that after Easter in light of some of the recent events. But for now, let's just wrap up our discussion of the family by looking at two responsibilities of a Christian parent in the home. And the first one is to not provoke your children.

The first responsibility of a Christian parent in the home is to not provoke your children to anger, which means that you should not make them needlessly angry with you. You should not make them needlessly upset. Make no mistake, there is a time to do that. There is a time to upset them and correct them, but it isn't all the time. It shouldn't be the only thing you do.

And if you read starting in chapter 6:1. Paul says

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may turn out well for you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers do not provoke your children to anger.

In this passage Paul says something unusual. He says something strange for the first century, because he tells fathers how to treat their children. He tells fathers or parents how to deal with them. And that's strange, because I've told you before, the first century didn't normally do that. They didn't normally think

about their children when they parented because they lived in a world that allowed them to kill their kids if they wanted to.

The Ephesians lived in a world that allowed them to hit them and beat them and sell them into slavery if they so chose. It was very barbaric; very cruel world. They treated their kids just like property. They treated them like objects. And against that, on the other side of the fence, Paul says this. He tells fathers not to provoke their children, and the word provoke here is “parorgizo” in Greek. It’s a compound word from “para”, (alongside) and “orge”, which means anger. It means to come alongside someone and anger them.

It’s one thing to come alongside someone and comfort them. Some of you may know the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete, which means the Comforter, or the one who comes alongside and comforts. It’s one thing to do that for somebody...to come alongside them and encourage them. But this refers to someone who comes alongside and discourages them. Someone who comes alongside and puts them down. Paul says a parent shouldn’t do that. Should not have that approach with your kids.

Some of your translations use the word exasperate here. And that’s a good word because it conveys the idea of wearing them out, of just shoving them down every time they try to rise up off the floor. You put them back down again, have them feeling so low. I’ll say a few words about what that looks like in a moment, but before I do, you need to understand the gist of what Paul is saying here.

What Paul is saying here is that you need to treat your child like a person. You need to treat him like a human being. He’s not an object, she’s not your property, or a toy or a play-thing. They’ve been made. They are human being made in the image of God just like you and you need to treat them that way. Of course, there’s boundaries to the parent-child relationship and there are limitations and those things, but you need to treat them with respect.

So many parents make the mistake of thinking that when a child is born, they’re going to stay that way. They make the mistake of thinking that when they first come into the world, they’re never going to change. They are always going to be small and cute and cuddly. That’s not the way it works, is it? That’s not the truth.

Truth is they grow up. Truth is, before long they know how to walk and talk and talk back and act out in sin. They learn how to defy you. And Paul says here, when that happens, you can’t attack them. When that happens, you can’t beat them back into submission, bully them around. There is a place for discipline and those things...the verse actually goes on to talk about that, but there’s an overarching principle here that you have to keep in mind. And that is, whatever you’re doing, you can’t provoke your children to anger. Can’t exasperate them. Childhood is hard enough without that. Growing up is hard enough without someone beating you down. It’s painful enough. It’s awkward enough. You don’t want to make it worse.

I think we all understand that the Bible gives us a lot of freedom in this department, as to how you parent and how you raise a child. It doesn’t tell you certain things like what time to put them down to bed at night or what time to get them up in the morning. Some of you keep your kids up way later than I would. That’s fine! You have the freedom to do that.

It doesn't tell you what kind of school to put them in. It doesn't tell you what kind of sport to get them involved in, doesn't tell you what kind of job to give them at what age, all these types of things. But it does tell you this. You have no freedom in this - you can't discourage them. Your home cannot be one of constant frustration for them. That doesn't please the Lord. That doesn't honour God.

And if you're wondering how to do that, let me just mention a few things here. Just a few ways that you can provoke your child to anger. For one thing, you can do this by being inconsistent with them. You can provoke your child to anger by being inconsistent with them, you know, by saying one thing one day and another thing another day. By having one set of rules, one set of guidelines now and then changing it the next day, just rearranging constantly on them.

I can give you some silly examples of this. You can say you can jump on the couch today, that's permissible, but then tomorrow you can't, and you come down on them. Or you can wrestle on the floor today, you can play fight, that sort of thing (I have two boys, they love to do that) but you can't do it on Monday. Can't do it when the neighbours are here.

It's back and forth, back and forth. For teenagers, there's other versions of this. "Your curfew is at this time, no, your curfew is at that time". Nothing will frustrate them more than that because it confuses them. They don't understand trying to follow mom and dad. Mom and dad are like a different person every day. The personality changes, you don't want to do that. You don't want to have a home like that for your child.

I was talking to a parent once about this. And I asked them, can you remember all the rules that you have in your home? And the parents said, No, I can't do that. And I said, then how do you expect your child to do that? How you expect your kid to remember all the rules if you can't? You got to knock some of them down, you got to take some of them off, so you can remember them. That's the kind of thing this is talking about.

Another way to provoke your child to anger is by always being negative toward them. By always being critical or derogatory all the time. By being sharp or snippy. Some of you have been around snippy people before. Everything you say is a snip, snip, snip back. Everything you say comes back thrown in your face. Nothing's ever good enough. Nothing's ever okay. There's no praise, no encouragement, no job well done. Everything always comes back with some kind of complaint.

We've all been in homes like this before, we've all visited families that act this way. It's not a pleasant place to be. It's pretty ugly, because it's cold. It's like walking into an ice box, or a prison. Because everybody's on edge, everybody's afraid that they're about to mess up and get a tongue lashing. You don't want to have a home like that.

I remember listening to an older pastor one time who said the one thing he wanted to do in his home was to make it a fun place to be, because a lot of times in the ministry things aren't always fun. So [he said] "I just tried my best to make home that way. I wanted it to be a good thing". Jones, last name was Jones.

You know, in this particular point, if you do this to your child, if you're always negative to them, you know what they're going to do? Here's what they're going to do. They're going to leave the first chance

they get. They're going to run away or just head for the door as soon as they're able, because nobody wants to live in a place like that.

Another way to provoke your child to anger is by being angry or in a foul mood yourself, because it spills over to them. They repeat your behaviour. You guys know what this is like. If you have an outside job, you work hard all day. You slave away at your desk or at the office. And it's challenging and stressful to the point that the last thing you want to hear when you come home is crying. The last thing you want to hear when you walk through the door is screaming.

And when they do it makes you mad. When your kids scream, you get angry, and you start treating them like a punching bag. That sort of thing will cause them to return the favor one day. That sort of thing will cause them to punch back.

We could talk about other ways to do this. We could talk about some other ways to provoke a child to anger. In fact, if you're interested in this, if this is a subject that you'd like to know more about, Lou Priolo is a biblical counsellor who's written a book on this subject. He's written an entire book on the topic of provoking child anger. It's called the Heart of Anger. Very fitting title for the book.

And it's very helpful because in it he gives you 25 ways to exasperate your child and wear them out. And if you've ever read it before, you know it's a very humbling book. It's very convicting because everybody's done at least a dozen of those or more. We've all failed in those areas, but he points out in the book that when you read the Bible there's not a lot of passages on the subject of parenting, so the ones we have are very important to us... like this one and Deuteronomy 6 and some other ones. They are very precious because nothing else matters if you don't get this. Nothing else in parenting really amounts to a hill of beans in the Christian life if you ignore what this says.

It's not enough to have well-dressed, well-behaved children if they act like pagans all the time in their hearts. Who wants an angel on the outside if you have a devil on the inside? It's not enough to have well-mannered, well-polished ones either who say "yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am and no ma'am" if at the same time they're filled with rage. If at the same time they are filled with hate because you embittered them, you aggravated them. You need to raise them in a different manner.

Paul was a single guy. I've pointed that out to you a couple times in this series. He wasn't married. He didn't have kids but through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit He shows him amazing insight into the home here.

This is a major issue for us, especially Christian families, because oftentimes with our kids we get upset because they don't act godly enough. They don't act Christian enough and they embarrass us when people come over and that sort of thing. We should be more concerned with whether they *are* godly or not, we should be more concerned with whether they are Christian or not as opposed to how they act. Our parenting needs to go deeper.

On February 24, 2001, the Edmonton Sun published an article on a little girl named Erica who wandered out of her house and spent the entire night outside. She spent the entire evening in the freezing cold to the point that when her mother found her, she thought she was dead. She thought little Erica had frozen to death, but she took her to the hospital anyway. She took her into the ER and they revived her, brought her back to life essentially. And the way they did it was interesting because they

didn't just talk to the girl, they didn't just lecture her, they covered her with care. They covered her with warm blankets, and they were gentle toward her.

Friends, it's the same way with our kids. When your child is struggling, when they're becoming cold towards you, don't bring them back by just lecturing them. You don't bring them back by just correcting what they're doing wrong, you need to be gentle. You need to do it with care.

Listen friends. Let's be honest. There is far too much shouting going on in some of our homes today. Far too much anger and hostility being directed at the children. We need to learn what this text says and repent.

The first responsibility for a Christian parent in the home is to not provoke your children to anger which means that you should not make them needlessly angry with you. You should not make them needlessly upset over nothing and over things that don't matter to them, like your bad day at work. Your bad day at work is not your children's burden. It's yours. It's not something for them to wear around. That's for you to keep to yourself, and that brings us to another point to consider.

Another responsibility for a Christian parent in the home is to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, which means that you need to teach them the Bible. You need to teach them the Scriptures. Not only should you avoid provoking them, not only should you avoid making them angry, but you need to go further than that.

If you read in verse 4 Paul says:

“Fathers do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

As you read on, even though it's a short passage, Paul is covering this from every conceivable angle, because after giving us the negative side of this, he gives us the positive side. As we would say in biblical counseling circles, after giving us the “put off”, he now gives us the “put on”.

The word “but” forms a contrast here with what was said before. Paul says, don't do this, but do this. Don't provoke your children to anger, don't exasperate them, but instead, bring them up. And this phrase, “bring them up” is a helpful one in Greek, because it means to nourish and cherish someone. It's actually used earlier in this passage. If you look up in chapter 5:28, just above this, it says:

“So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.”

That phrase “nourishes and cherishes” is translated differently here in verse 4, but it's the same word. Paul says this is how a husband should treat his wife, this is what he should do for her. He should nourish and cherish her. He should provide for her needs. He should take care of her spiritual and emotional well-being.

And now he says, parents should do the same thing for the child. Mom and Dad should do the same thing for the kids. He takes things up a notch here, he raises the stakes. And he says, not only should you provide food and clothing for them and a place to stay, you have to actually raise them too.

Bringing up is kind of the idea of bringing them along, bringing them with you, taking them wherever you go. In the Christian journey, they can't do it on their own. Despite what some may tell you today, children can't raise themselves. They don't know how. Schools can't do it, even though there's a big push for that today. The schools don't have the ability to do this. Kids still have to go home. Neighbourhoods can't do it. Sports teams can't do it. That's a big thing where I grew up. Coaches are raising kids. A lot of football and basketball coaches in my hometown. That's a parent's job.

And to do this, Paul uses two words that are synonymous here. They say the same thing. He uses the word "discipline" which refers to training. It refers to the development of certain habits or behaviours in the life of a child because that is what a parent is supposed to do. Supposed to help them develop good, God-honoring habits. And then he uses the word "instruction" which means teaching. Refers to the practice of imparting information to them. Parents needs to do that, too.

So, it's not just doing hands on things, but you're also to speak into the life of the child. The Lord says bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. That means this is what you should be instructing them in at the end of the day. This is what you should be teaching them. You need to be teaching them the Bible. You need to be teaching them the things of God.

You shouldn't just teach them the ABCs, even though you need to do that. They need to learn that, and you don't need to just teach them how to swing a hammer. You don't just need to teach them how to hit a hockey puck, or those types of things. You need to teach them the Scriptures. That's what makes your family different from all the other families on the earth. That's what makes your home different from any other home. The lost home down the street, they can teach their kids to hit a hockey puck. Unbelieving neighbours next door can teach their kids the alphabet and the multiplication table and all of that. But they can't teach them the Bible That's for you to do. It makes you unique.

Martin Luther once said, "spare the rod and spoil the child". That's true, but besides the rod, give the give the child an apple to show them they've done well, and most importantly give them the Bible as the greatest gift that you have. It's the greatest treasure, so you need to give that to your kids.

I mention this because some parents don't do this. They say, "well my kids are lost. They're not Christians yet so how could I possibly do this? How can I possibly give them the Word of God when they don't believe it?" That's a good question. If you remember, Romans 10:17 says,

"So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. And how will they hear without a teacher?"

Their salvation comes by hearing. It comes by listening to the Word of God, and how can they listen to the Word of God if you don't tell it to them? How can they listen to the Word of God if they don't know what it is? You have to tell them what it is. That's so important.

Other parents say they can't do this, you know, they can't teach their children the Bible because they feel too adequate to do it. They don't feel like they know enough. Paul says here if you are saved you know enough. If you're a Christian you're adequate to do this.

In fact, in the first century, most parents couldn't read. Most people couldn't read. That's why a lot of times when the New Testament letters were given to a church, they would read it out loud. They would do that so they would all know what it says but also because a lot of the people were illiterate. If it wasn't for that act of reading out loud they weren't able to understand it.

Friends, you have so much more than they do if you can read. You have more resources, so you can do this. This is possible for you to do. If you're wondering what it looks like to teach your children the Bible, let me just mention a few ways that you can do this kind of parenting. For one thing, this is so simple, I mean, this is obvious, but you can read the Bible to them. One way to teach the Bible to your kids is you can read it out loud in your home and then talk about it. Have a discussion about what you just read first thing in the morning before breakfast, before the day gets crazy, or maybe the last thing at night before going to bed.

Some folks like to do it before supper time, but however you do it, pull it off the shelf and start in one part and go to another starting on one page and go on to the next one so they can listen to it. So, your kids can hear it. Depending on the age of the child, sometimes they're too young to do it themselves. They haven't learned to read yet so you can do it for them. And depending on the age of your child there are a lot of story Bibles that can help you with this. Picture Bibles may not cover everything in the text but they can cover the main points like the story of creation, the life of Christ. Kids love pictures, they really enjoy that, so you can use that for them. But be sure to read it.

By the way, you get some stories in the Bible that kids just love. The battle of Jericho, the walls come tumbling down, that's fascinating to a child. The walls fell down when they yelled and you can have the kid yell with you, that's always fun. Or David and Goliath, you know, a little boy kills a giant with the slingshot. Life of Christ, all those things are wonderful for a kid.

Another way to teach your child the Bible is to memorize it with them. Doctors have said that children have an amazing memory. They remember far more than we give them credit for. It doesn't seem that way at times, doesn't always look that way because they're so distracted. Kids can get so caught up in simple things, but they do remember a lot of what we tell them. They soak it in and so one of the best ways to help them learn scripture at an early age is to have them start memorizing parts of it. Have them start repeating it back to you by heart. I don't mean, have them memorize a whole chapter, but just a verse or two. And that's it. Give them a phrase or two or a principle that they can hold on to that will help them in life.

For example, when my boys were real little, one phrase I had them memorize was "God exalts the humble and He lowers the proud". And I would get them to jump up when I said, "exalts the humble", and they would raise their hands as high as they could up to the sky. And when I said, "lowers the proud", they would go down as far low as they could go. To remind them, look, it's not good to be proud. It's not good to be arrogant. God doesn't want you to do that.

Children love that sort of thing. It sticks with them. Which brings me to another way to teach the Bible to your children, and that's to sing with them. Do it with song or music. Children love that as well. They love to dance; they love to make noise. They love things that rhyme. If some of you have been to our children's programs on Sunday mornings, then you'll know it's a very noisy affair and very musical. And that's because this is how children grow. This is how they learn. They assimilate knowledge that way. They do it with songs.

If you're looking for help with that, there's a lot of resources out there that you can tap into. If you're looking for some songs to play with your kids, there's a lot of good ones that are available for free online. And if you're having trouble finding those, you can contact our church office, and we would love to help you with that. But at the end of the day, it doesn't matter how you do it. It doesn't matter how you teach your kids, you just need to do it. You just need to make it a priority.

The way one family does this may be different from another family. The way one person teaches the Bible might be different from another one, but you need to make this a goal in your home. And I might add you want to do it now before it's too late. You want to make it a priority now because the time is moving fast. Kids are growing up. Soon they'll be out of the house. This window in your life won't go on for eternity, you need to take advantage of it now.

I've talked to quite a few parents whose kids are grown and out of the house. And they've told me that one of the biggest regrets they have is that they wish they would have spent more time with their children. They wish they would have spent more time teaching them the Bible. I've never heard them say, "I wish I would have spent more time at work". I've never heard them say, "I wish I would have spent more time on the golf course" or "out at the lake fishing". They say, "I wish I would have spent more time investing in the ones I love".

That's a good reminder for all of us. Something we need to take to heart. It's been said that once the twig gets bent in the wrong direction, it's hard to bend it back. It's hard to change the course. And it's the same way with kids. The time to impact their lives for Christ is now. The time to make a difference in their lives is today. You have them in your home today; you make an impact today.

When you study the subject of salvation, and you see how it's described in the Bible in a book like Ephesians, one of the most common images that comes up is that of childhood. One of the most common word pictures that describe our relationship to God as Christians, is that of Him being a Father to us. Him being a dad. For instance, if you look in chapter 1:3 of Ephesians, it says this:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

That's how Paul begins this book. That's how he starts it off by saying this is what God does. This is who He is. He is our Father. He is our Parent, and as such, He blesses us. He gives us good gifts. And that's what the rest of the book is about. Essentially the rest of the book is about these good gifts that come to us from God. Then down in chapter 3:14 he writes this:

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and earth derives his name, that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

That's a beautiful verse there, but Paul says God does this for us as well. He allows Christ to dwell in our hearts. He allows Him to give us strength in the inner man for the same reason because He is our Father. Loves us like a father would. And then down in chapter 5:20 he says that we need to always be giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father.

The point is that this is who God is to you now. This is what He is in the relationship. He's not some distant deity to you. He's not some far-off God living way off in the clouds who doesn't care about you. That's not it at all. He's your Abba... an Hebrew word meaning "daddy". He's your daddy. There's a tenderness in the relationship. There's an affection there that no other god in history ever had with his people.

Allah doesn't have this. Muslims don't know what this is like. Hindus don't have this. They have all their different gods. Buddha does not, can't even, give you this. This is a uniquely Christian thing, and it means that God is patient with us. It means that God is gracious to us. He's faithful. He's loving. He's kind, and He also never gives up on us. Just like any earthly father would, He never gets tired and calls it quits, and that means we should do the same thing with our children.

We should never give up on them either, even though this is hard. Even though there's times when this is not easy to do because there's days when you want to give up on your kids and there's days when you want to call it quits because of their sin and their selfishness and all the craziness that comes with raising them. When those days come you need to remember what this says. God didn't give up on us so you can't give up on them.

The New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce, once said, God is the perfect Father. He's the archetypical one and all of our efforts fall short of that. All of our efforts to parent fall short of His, but the good news is that the more we grow into His image, the more we become like this. The more we grow in our relationship to Him, the more we grow into the parents that God would have us to be.

And that's my prayer for you this morning, my friends. That's my prayer for our church, that we would be the parents God would have us to be. Let me close in a word of prayer and ask God to grant us the grace to do that. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, and I can call you that, Lord, can call you Father because of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Lord, thank you for being a God that would invest such things in your children. That would give up your Son. He would die and rise again, as we'll celebrate next week, Easter, so that you would be near to us and close to us in all these things.

Lord, that reminds us of the parents that we need to be and that we can be through Christ and His blood. And so Father, I pray for the parents who are watching this message this morning. For the moms and dads raising little kids. They may even have little kids running around their feet right now as they're watching this. Lord, I pray you would help them to apply this verse to their lives, Father. Would we learn how to not provoke our kids, but to encourage them. May we learn not to be angry parents, and at the same time, Father, we want to teach them, and we need your grace.

All of us are on different points of this journey here. We want our children to know your Word. We want them to know the gospel. Would we be evangelists to them in our homes. Father, thank you for all the young families you brought to Grace Fellowship. They brought the enthusiasm and the joy of that stage of life. They brought the energy that comes with that. And Lord, I just pray you'd give them strength.

And for those who are older parents, for those whose kids are either teenagers or maybe grown and out of the home, would you grant them grace in this as well. This was a passage that could apply to

them. But in all these things, Father, our greatest prayer is that you would be glorified. We want the things that we learn not to just invade our lives at church or invade our lives during a sermon, we want to take them home with us. We want them to transform our families. And that is what I pray this morning. Lord, would you change our families as a result of what we've learned here today? We pray this in Jesus Christ's name, and for His glory. Amen.