

Introduction

Consider how the design of God for our kids is countered by every adolescent and kiddie movie produced by Disney, Nickelodeon and the like. Let's grab one example: Moana. "*How Far I'll Go*" lyrics?

*I can lead with pride, I can make us strong
I'll be satisfied if I play along
But the voice inside sings a different song
What is wrong with me?*

This is all preceded by the grandmother's advice late in the song "*Where You Are*" that sets up the traditions and cultural norms for the Motunui:

*You are your father's daughter, stubbornness and pride
Mind what he says, but remember you may hear a voice inside
And if the voice starts to whisper to follow the farthest star
Moana, that voice inside is who you are*

Do you hear the lesson? Do what you're told until the voice inside you tells you something else because that inner voice is speaking, not only to you, but from you and it's your true north.

That's just one example...so many of the stories for our kids, especially our daughters, teach them that they're strong enough to go through life without any help, against the grain and against all odds and anyone who has the audacity to redirect or restrain your personal pursuits doesn't love you and can't be trusted. This is all cute until it's not; when the cute wears off, you're left with rebellion, disobedience and sin.

Exodus 20:12

There's some friendly debate about how to break down the Ten Commandments. Most agree that they're vertical and horizontal, meaning they concern our relationship with God and our fellow man. The friendly debates come in when we discuss where the vertical / horizontal divide is applied. Some think it's between 4 and 5 while others contend it's between 5 and 6. Full disclosure, I'm a "between 5 and 6 guy" because I am wholly convinced that our relationship to our parents is not merely horizontal, but is deeply concerned with the vertical. As one commentator puts it, "*...because our parents are never regarded as equivalent to our equals (neighbors), but as God's representatives.*" (Griffith, W.H.; *The Pentateuch*, pg. 94) In short, your relationship with your parents falls more in-line with your relationship to God than to others. Parents are not merely just another horizontal relationship, but a deeply spiritual one. God is deeply concerned with the relationship of children to their parents to such a degree that He addresses that in His commands to His people. Today I want to primarily address parents, though. Disobedient and dishonoring children are best averted by the efforts of godly parents.

Children Are a Key Component of the Dominion Mandate

In the creation, God gave mankind what is often called the "dominion mandate." It is found in Genesis 1:28 where it says, "*And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and*

multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” At the most basic level, our participation in the dominion mandate starts with having children. Now, before I say more, let me be clear here. For some in this very room, sin’s effect on the world through physical sickness or ailment has been felt most crushingly in the inability or difficulty in having children. For you, the holy longing to have children is there, but it is just physically impossible or, for some reason it continues to evade you either by difficulty in getting pregnant or difficulty in staying pregnant. What I’m about to say is NOT for you or about you. I want you to hear this morning that my heart and the hearts of those in your life grieve with and for you. God is not far from you in this and, though sin’s outcome in the world has meant that your holy desire hasn’t yet or may never be realized, He is present in your grief and desires you to find your rest in Him. So please, hear me again when I say that what I’m about to say is not about you.

As I was saying, at the most basic level, our participation in the dominion mandate starts with having children. I hear people in our culture and even in our churches speak as if having children is optional to the marital condition. Getting married so that you can enjoy the pleasures of sexual union without any intention of reaping the rewards is disobedience. I once remember listening to this woman on the radio who was in ministry with her husband and as she discussed their ministry she described how her and her husband decided that it was not God’s will for them to have kids because of their ministry calling and the pressures that it places on them. I’m just going to say it...she’s wrong. God gave marriage, not merely for the sense of mutual fulfillment and companionship, but as a vehicle for mankind to be fruitful and fill the earth with God’s image in the form of His image bearers. What does this have to do with the fifth commandment? The call for children to obey assumes the presence of children in the home and equips families with a baseline expectation for family dynamics, i.e. children are under the authority of the parents. If we consider that the heart of God is reflected in the law of God, then we see that it is God’s heart that His people have children, teach them about Him and turn them loose in the world to image Him in their lives and repeat that cycle as the world is filled and dominion is achieved.

Children Need Discipleship

The things of God are taught and caught. They are not wired into our DNA. The dangers of apostasy, often redubbed deconstruction by recent generations, are only a generation away. The failure of parents to raise their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) primes the pump for sinful waywardness. Certainly God is faithful and kind and in His grace He will pursue His sheep, but His primary discipleship plan for your children is you. Let me say that again and more clearly...Parents, you are the primary discipler in your child’s life.

Just as the failure to raise our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord primes them for sinful waywardness, the opposite is true. Raising our children from an early age to know the heart of God, to teach them of the gospel and instruct them in how to think about the world and themselves in a biblical manner will turn the soil of their depraved hearts and soften them to a right understanding of themselves before God. As I said a moment ago, you are the primary discipler in your child’s life. To be clear, that is already happening the moment you have children. It’s not a switch you turn on at certain parts of the day. Your children are learning from

you out of the gate. Absolutely, family worship and family catechisms are wonderful tools for teaching your children about spiritual matters, but don't think that's the only time that they're learning from you. They're listening and watching to see if the things you say and teach to them are true in your own life.

Deuteronomy 11:18–20, speaking of this very law given by God, says, *“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates...”* Similarly, in Deuteronomy 6, God instructs parents to write the Law of God on their houses and teach them to their children and speak of the blessing of God on His people so that, *“When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.’”* As disciplers of our children we are to display it, teach it, talk about and then answer their inevitable questions in such a manner that they hear, not of mere moralism and good behavior, but of God's glory and righteousness to us bound up in His commands for us.

Children Need Discipline

You Have the Responsibility as the Primary Disciplinarian of Your Children

Good behavior is not the end goal of the Law of God, but it is also not irrelevant. One of the criteria for an Elder/Pastor is that, *“He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?”* (1 Tim. 3:4–5) The submission of our children, which is a good and godly thing, is the responsibility of the parent, in general, and the father more specifically. Unfortunately, the fall of mankind into sin was not only a problem for Adam. Our children, no matter how cute and adorable they are, are not different. Rebellion and sinfulness are already in them. A moment ago I said that the things of God are caught and taught, but let me also say that the things of the flesh are written on our very hearts (the heart that Moana's grandmother says holds the message from and to our truest self...she's right, but not in the manner that she means). From Adam on, none are righteous and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 3:10, 23). Letting your children follow their hearts and go without discipline and consequences for their sin is not loving them. Loving them is raising them up to know the Lord by introducing them to disciplinary measures that teach them from an early age that sin has consequences. Over and over throughout Proverbs we are reminded of the importance of disciplining our children:

- Proverbs 13:24...*Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*
- Proverbs 19:18...*Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.*
- Proverbs 22:15...*Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.*
- Proverbs 23:13–14...*Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.*
- Proverbs 29:15–17...*The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. When the wicked increase, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall. Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.*

I can hear the objections now...that's the Old Testament, that sounds harsh or abusive, we've evolved in our understanding of child psychology, etc. The Old Testament is not expired, none of this equals abuse and no one understands child psychology better than their Creator. Certainly abuse is forbidden in Scripture. Paul admonishes fathers, specifically, not to provoke their children to anger, which is, more often, the result of being harsh, domineering or dominating. There's a world of difference between abuse and a spanking and kids need spankings sometimes.

The writer of Hebrews, considering the discipline we receive as sons and daughters of God, says, "*And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.' It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*" (Hebrews 12:5–11)

The writer hits on the intersection of the vertical and horizontal here as he helps us to see the connection between our parents and God. God is a Father and I'm convinced that children are called to obey their parents because in learning to obey our parents we learn to obey God. As parents, it is our job to teach our children right from wrong. As a result, we should expect, and praise, the right, but discipline and correct the wrong. This is loving and godly.

Conclusion

I think that we can safely say that our culture has an allergy to authority. In other words, for many in our culture, the idea that someone can tell us what to do or has authority in our lives is frustrating. This frustration is the result of our fallen flesh, but is exacerbated when parents fail

to understand their own authority and the role they are called to play in raising obedient children. Candidly, much of the rebellion we see in kids today isn't disobedience; it's exactly what they've been taught. It is the result of listening and learning. For decades, parents and so-called professionals have redefined the terms:

- Rebellion is now just spunk or spirit
- Disobedience is now just strength of will
- Sin is now just a lack of impulse control

When we teach our kids that their natural selves are their best selves and give them excuses, we fail to frame their sin nature in a biblical way and we undercut their need for redemption and the gospel in their own eyes and teach them that disobedience is not that big of a deal.