

## “Being a Parent (or Child) is Not Easy”

Ephesians 6:1-4

Pastor Dan Erickson

April 3, 2022

Have you ever had a job you had no experience, no training, weren't allowed to quit and people's lives were at stake? That pretty much describes parenting. Being a parent is never an easy job, no matter what ages your children are. Six-year-olds, 16-year-olds, and 46-year-olds can all provide plenty of challenges for mom and dad. Parenting requires a lot of energy and a lot of wisdom. Often, we as parents, ask ourselves, “Am I really doing this the right way?” A cartoon shows a dad with a deep frown, looking at his son's sub-par report card. Junior says, “So dad, do you think my problem is because of environment or heredity?” as someone said, “The frightening thing about heredity and environment is that we parents provided both.” Like it or not, we have a big impact on our children's lives.

And guess what, children have a huge impact on their parent's lives. Our kids, whether they are six, 16 or 46 years of age, have the power to bring us a lot of joy or a lot of pain. Today, as we continue our journey through the book of Ephesians, we come to chapter 6:1-4. Through the apostle Paul, we hear words intended to guide both children and parents along a God honoring, joy producing path. Let's pause and pray the Lord would use His word to help both parents and children to honor Him and encourage each other.

The apostle Paul begins by giving us God's instructions to children. **Ephesians 6:1,2 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise.)** More than a few parents have had their kids memorize those two verses. That's okay, because children do need to know about two responsibilities. They are to obey and honor their parents. Children, your decision whether or not you are going to do that, has a big impact on your parents and on your life.

The first responsibility to which Paul refers is “children *obey* your parents.” This basically means when mom or dad asks you to do something, you do it. At our house we used to say, “You are to obey quickly and quietly.” Now, one question that pops up right away is this: “Whom does Paul consider a child?” None of us are the

production of spontaneous generation, so we all have or have had two parents. Are we supposed to obey them as long as they live, till death us do part? Or when Paul uses the term “children” does he just mean boys and girls under 12 years old? After all, in Jewish society, a boy is considered a man at that point. Is a 14-year-old under his parent's authority? We do know that when you get married you are part of a new family, which consists of your spouse and any children you may have. One of the commands God gives us is that when we marry, we are to “leave our father and mother and become united with our spouse.” A husband or wife no longer has an obligation to obey his/her parents. If you are single, but no longer depend on your parents, then this command to obey them likely doesn't apply to you either. Some of you are in a twilight zone. Maybe you are 19 years old, living at home and going to college. Your parents should certainly not treat you like a nine-year-old, but are you fully an adult? Now, there are many exceptions, but I think, the basic rule is this. If your mom and dad provide the bulk of your financial support, then you should accept their authority. If you don't want to do that, then you might want to figure out a way to pay your own bills.

So, what about teenagers? Here are a few words to those of you who fall into that category. There is a good chance you don't always feel like obeying your parents. Perhaps they want you in bed before 8:00 pm, won't let you date until you are 30 years old, and forbid you from doing anything that seems fun. Maybe your mom and dad are three-time winners of the year's strictest parents award. To be frank, I believe some parents have pretty unrealistic rules for their teen. But that is not really the issue. As a Christian teen, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you need to *obey your parents*. You need to do that, not because they are always right, but because that is the responsibility God has given you. Yes, try to reason with your parents. Explain why you think things should be done differently. But the bottom line is it is still your responsibility to obey.

Next question: Are parents to be obeyed when they are wrong? What if my dad asks me to rob a bank? Folks, I have had numerous teenagers ask

that question, but have never known anyone whose parents actually told them to do that. However, it is still a valid question. Paul's instructions in this passage are given to a Christian family. He doesn't expect Christian parents will tell their children to commit any crime. Paul commands obedience "in the Lord." God's authority is always above mom and dads. Thus, when a child is a believer in Jesus and his/her parents are not, difficult situations can develop. In most cases Christian children should obey their non-believing parents. However, they should disobey when they are certain what their parents have asked them to do goes against what God teaches in His word, the Bible.

The second instruction the apostle Paul gives to children is "honor your parents." **Ephesians 6:2,3 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise) "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."** Folks, this is a lifetime responsibility. When you are ten-years old, honor basically equals obey. As children get older, move out on their own, and are no longer under their parents' authority, they are not required to obey, but they still must honor their parents. You might be 50-years old; you have been totally independent of your parents for almost 30 years. In fact, they live 1000 miles away from you. However, they are still your parents, and you still are to honor them. Maybe your dad abandoned you and your mom 25 years ago, you still are to honor him. Perhaps your parent are not Christians, and they don't understand why you go to church almost every Sunday. Jesus said following Him may cause conflicts with your mom and dad, but you still need to honor them. Maybe your parents have been dead and buried for 20 years. You still are to honor them.

So, what does it mean honor your parents? It involves respect and acknowledging their position as parents. It might involve telling them you realize that even though they have not been perfect parents, you have benefited greatly from their care and support. It probably involves cards on Mother's Day and Father's Day. Sometimes Hallmark does have a good idea. Sadly, we live in a society where people, even Christians, sometimes treat parents poorly, especially as they get older. There are horrible stories about an elderly mom or dad being abused by one of their children. Some folks in the nursing home tell me

their children never come to visit them. Some of these people have dementia, so it might not be the case, but many are telling the sad truth.

Years ago, I saw a little movie called, "Peege." It was about a woman living in a nursing home. Her children and grandchildren came to visit her regularly, but only one of them, a teenage grandson, takes time to really talk and listen to Peege. In the New Testament and in most times of history, caring for older parents was not the job of the government, but the responsibility of the family. I am not saying it is wrong to use government services. In many cases putting a parent in a good care facility is the right decision. Yet, as Christians we should be committed to helping and care for elderly parents in a way that amazes the rest of society. I know many of you in this room have done a great job at honoring your parents. And folks, God promised that if you obey this command, you will be rewarded, in both the quality and quantity of life. A recent study found that people who go to church regularly live, on average, four years longer than those who don't. Maybe it is because they honor their parents more.

Friends, I think it would be good for all of us to evaluate our relationship with our parents. Children, have you been obeying your parents? If you are an adult, are you honoring them? If your parents have passed away, are you honoring their memory? If you are failing to do so it is wrong, it is sin. Yet, no matter how bad of a son/daughter you are or were, God offers free and full forgiveness through Jesus Christ. You need to receive that, and then ask Him to help you make the changes necessary to honor your father and mother. Do that today.

Of course, it takes more than children honoring parent to make a healthy and happy family. Paul gives us god's instructions to parents as well. **Ephesians 6:4 Father, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** Being a good parent involves a difficult balancing act. We must not "provoke" our children to anger. Other verses say, "don't exasperate your children." But we still need to train them. We need to express our love to them, but still provide discipline. We need to give them freedom to grow and learn, but we also need to protect them. Now, I am not an expert on parenting. I have been doing it for 34 years, but it sometimes seems I have acquired

more questions than answers along the way. However, the Lord does give some very clear instructions to follow.

First, he says don't provoke your child to anger, which I think often involves over-discipline. Too much of the wrong kind of discipline frustrates a child and makes him or her think, "It's impossible to please my mom and dad, so I am not going to even try." Paul realizes that fathers especially, need to be careful not to be overbearing in discipline. Now, some kids think any type of discipline is too much, but that is not the case. Children need parents who are willing to correct them. Yet there are some homes, including Christian homes where over-discipline occurs. Now, I think at times mild physical punishment can be appropriate. The Lord does tell us, **Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates the son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.** However, physical abuse, beating a child of any age, is a sin and detestable to God. It should never happen in a Christian home. It should never happen in your home.

There are other ways we can provoke our children besides over discipline. We provoke our children to anger when we make unreasonable rules for them. We provoke them when we put too much pressure on them to excel in school or athletics. That was a lesson that took me a while to learn. Often my boys would be frustrated because I didn't think they had done everything right out on the court or on the field. Eventually I realized that was pretty stupid on my part, and my perspective got better. We provoke our children when we don't allow them to become more independent as they grow older. If your 15-year-old son has the same rules he had at age ten or age five, there will be frustration. We provoke our children when we overreact and maybe over punish. A teen who is three minutes late for curfew should not be grounded for three months. We provoke our children when instead of giving clear "yes" or "no" answers, we frequently say, "maybe" or "later." Ogden Nash said, "A child need never be very clever, to learn that 'later dear' means never."

When we provoke children to anger, we often damage their souls. Their love for their parents may be diminished. They may become bitter, and their relationship will then be harmed because of that bitterness. Some of us parents have on

occasion provoked our children. Maybe last night you lost your temper with your 17-year-old son, or maybe 35 years ago you were terribly unfair to your daughter. Friends, if you are really guilty of something like that, you should confess that sin to the Lord. Remember, no matter how bad a parent you have been, if you turn to Jesus, God will freely and fully forgive you. Yet, you also need to let your children, whatever age they may be, know that you realize you wronged them. Then apologize and affirm that you really do love them. You may need to send an email or make a phone call this afternoon. Friends if you have provoked, exasperated or embittered one or more of your children, it is time to work on reconciliation. Even if you are only partly to blame for the problem, be willing to take the first step to mend that relationship.

Paul also tells parents, "Discipline your children." We need to help children learn to do what is right, love what is good, believe what is true, and appreciate what is beautiful. Remember how Paul puts it in **Ephesians 6:4 Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** In our society, and maybe in our church, some parents think they love their children, but fail to discipline them. Their idea of love is basically to give their children whatever they want, whenever they want. That is tragic. Failure to discipline children is really a form of child abuse. Kids who never get disciplined tend to have all sorts of problems. Yet, parents fail to help their children learn to do what is right. Anytime their son or daughter gets into a conflict, they insist it must be the other kid's fault, or the teacher's fault, because their child *would never do anything like that*. These parents will give their children maybe 13-14 years old birth control pills and tell them, "If you are going to have sex, just make sure you don't get pregnant." Or they give their teenagers keys to the cabin and say, "If you are going to be drinking, just make sure you don't drive." As someone said, "It is amazing how some folks can trace their ancestors back for hundreds of years but have no idea where their kids were last night."

Why do parents fail to discipline their children? Sometimes they are so focused on their own lives, they simply don't think about what their children need. Or they maybe unwilling to invest the time good discipline requires. Sometimes one parent think it is the other parent's job to discipline. Sometimes parent have picked up warped ideas

from popular psychologists about what good parenting involves. Many parents ended up raising a bunch of brats in the 60's and 70's because they followed the advice of Dr. Benjamin Spock. Some of you were those brats, who by the grace of God, have recovered. God has given parent the job of helping their children learn to do what is right.

And parents, if we provided good discipline, it is often appreciated. Some of you remember the old show "Leave It to Beaver." At the end of numerous episodes, the dad, Ward, would give the Beaver a lecture and then Beaver would respond with something like, "Boy, thanks, Dad. I guess I needed to learn that." Friends, it doesn't usually work that way in real life, but I do think kids like the security that comes from discipline. A few years ago, a survey of 12-year-old children found that 20% thought their parents were too strict, 35% thought things were about right, and 45% *thought their parents were not strict enough*. No, kids are not always thrilled about discipline. Yet, the important question is not whether children like being disciplined today, but rather what 20 years from now they will think about the discipline their parents provided. Mom and dads, if your discipline is fair and consistent, if you mean what you say, if you discipline not out of anger, but out of love, 20 years from now it is likely, not guaranteed, but likely your children will thank you for the discipline you gave them.

Friends, today's topic is important. Almost everyone wants to have a good relationship with their parents and/or children. Good relationships testify to the power of the Christian gospel. A happy, healthy Christian family can be a very good testimony to people around them. The foundation, the beginning of good family relationships, is a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Children who have never trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, have a tougher time honoring and obeying their mother and father. Parents will often find it a difficult task to consistently love and discipline their children unless they are able to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit which is available to all who are believers in Jesus Christ. So, I believe the first step in being a good parent, the first step in being a good son or daughter, is to make certain you are in a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Once you have done that, you need to ask the Lord to help you follow His instructions

and then do what parents and children are called to do.

As the thunderstorm raged in the night, the little boy called out, "Daddy, come here. I'm scared." "Son," the father said, "God loves you and He will take care of you." "I know God loves me," the boy replied, "but right now I want someone with skin on to help me through the storm." Friends, we don't need anyone but the Lord to make it through life. But if you are a parent, your children, no matter what age they are, could use someone with skin on, a mom or dad, to help them through the storms of life. And friends, if you have a parent or two still alive, they could use someone with skin on, that would be you, a son or daughter, to encourage them through the stormy times. May God help us to be parents and children who will honor Him and who will truly love each other, even when it is not an easy thing to do.