

## XXVI. God's Blueprint in Biblical Perspective

### *Foundations From Genesis*

#### The Family: Parenting – Part 3

#### Ephesians 6:1–4

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We will be back in Ephesians 6 where Paul, after establishing marriage, the foundation of the family, he addresses the relationships between parents and children giving both sides of the coin. First, he looks at the view from the child to the parent. Ephesians 6:1 says *[1] Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

In other words, children are taught submission in the authority structures of life by the call to submission to their parents, the God ordained authority structure that's in the Lord. Now, this phrase 'in the Lord' has three dynamics to it. Dynamic number one is that this affirms the fact that part of parenting is evangelism. It's a crucial part. You want them to be in the Lord and the Lord to be in them. Secondly, you are teaching them that their confidence when they submit in obedience is not in those whom they obey, but in the Lord, that He is ruling, overruling and He can be trusted. Thirdly, obeying your parents in the Lord is stating the limitation of obedience. This includes whatever authority structure we find ourselves in – government, the church, in business, etc. The limitation is that we must never obey that which would cause us to transgress the commands of the Lord. With those three things in mind here, Paul gives this exhortation in Ephesians 6:1.

How does this obedience work with our parents? We are called to honor our father and mother. When we are under the authority of our parents, then that honor is to be seen through obedience. So, we teach our children to honor us through obedience with their eyes fixed upon the Lord. He is the circumference and focus of their obedience and it's in the context of trusting the Lord that we teach them this. As we teach them obedience, we have to realize the honoring of parents is a lifelong, but the honoring of parents through obedience is for a season of time.

I want to remind you of the five parenting seasons I gave in the last study. The first parenting is control. They are utterly dependent upon us. Therefore, in the initial stages of life, we have to exercise a benevolent control – when they sleep, how much they eat, what they eat, etc. These are crucial because of their dependency upon us. Secondly, we begin to teach the commands and the precepts of the Lord. So, we give the commands that they are to obey. Thirdly, that leads us to coaching them in life. Not only have we in command shown them what to do, but now we're also teaching them how to make decisions in life as they process and move from immaturity to maturity. We call that stage adolescence. Fourthly, we find ourselves moving to the area of counseling our children in the decisions that they're called to make in life. Finally, particularly as they leave us and cleave to another, they're no longer directly under our authority structure. That means what was once their immediate family is no longer their immediate family for, they now have their own immediate family. We as parents have become a part of their extended family. Thus, we do not control or command. We've moved beyond coaching and counseling into consulting.

One of the great blessings of a pastor is that he gets a chance to follow up on sermons through the inevitable questions that the people who hear the sermons ask him. Last week was no different in the morning or the evening. After I laid these five out, I was not deluged, but I was given a number of questions about these seasons of parenting. How many of you can identify the

predominant question that I received about these five seasons of parenting? The question was, what is the age we parents go from control to command, to coach, to counsel and to consult. It's not so much age for that will vary from child to child. In fact, it has varied greatly in my span of life. Adolescence was considered finished by age 18 in the 1950s. Today it's age 27. So, you can see there are no fixed timetables here whatsoever.

You do need to look at what their process is, where they mature and what station are they in currently in life. When they leave and cleave to another in marriage you are now just in their consultation society. One of the reasons why I refrained from giving you time's hard and fast is because not only the seasons of life and our situations in life affect this, but the dynamics of the particulars in life. For instance, I basically followed a rule of thumb that as my kids were in high school, I tried to teach them how to make decisions, what decisions to make, and wherever it was appropriate, I would let them make that decision. I could give you many examples of that and then live with the consequences of the decision that they made, because that would be a learning experience also. They didn't always make good decisions, and that was okay because when they got the bad results of the good decisions, they might learn how to make a better decision next time. So that was part of that process. Then as they went off to college, we kind of started moving clearly into the counseling area.

One of my kids who said I could share this went through a pretty challenging time while he was in college. My concern was so great for him, I would get in my car, and drive 8 hours to just to spend 3 or 4 hours with him and to talk through some issues. I was into the counsel season, but I went back to direct coaching even though I thought I had moved to counsel. Due to his response or lack of response, I then had to go back to command and I had to go all the way back because of the dynamics of that situation. Perhaps you were hoping I'd give me some clear cut information but once they leave you and are married, it's consultation and you don't ever go back to the other. But when they're on their way and under your authority, even as they've set up geographical separation, maybe living in an apartment or whatever, and you know you're in the counseling arena, there may be times that you have to step in. They would be few and they would be extraordinary, but there are those times, which is why you as a parent always need to pray for wisdom.

This isn't a formula. Parenting is not a science. It is a God blessed art and skill and these guidelines are exactly that, guidelines. You always need the wisdom of God as you go through the process of guiding your children in the Lord. Now let's go further in Ephesians 6. Now he speaks to children to not only obey, but your obedience comes from a broader sanctity of the family, in which, as a child in the home, you were to honor your father and mother. That means we need to teach biblical principles of civility and manners to our children. How do you sit at a table? How do you talk to an adult? How do you shake hands? How do you meet people? All of those things are part of life. Sometimes in our child centered homes, we just expect people to respond to our children instead of teaching our children how to respond to people.

Ephesians 6:2-3 says [2] "*Honor your father and mother*" (*this is the first commandment with a promise*), [3] "*that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.*"

What is the one perfect case of childhood development in the Scripture? It's Jesus. Luke 2:52 says [52] *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor*

*with God and man.* Mary and Joseph raised Jesus to know how to establish relational skills in the lives of others. How do you do that? How do you speak to a peer? How do you speak to a sibling?

One day at Christ Covenant, I had been away for our two week vacation and I came back and when I walked out between worship services, I walked into the restroom and two 10 year old boys were in there laughing. When I walked in, they got quiet and they looked at me. One of them looked at me and said, “Hi, Pastor Reeder, we're so glad you're back. It's good to have you home.” I said, ‘thank you.’ The other one came up, kicked me in the shin and said, “Where you been, Harry?” That was a dead giveaway as to how my name was being referred to in that family. I know where they learned that. I know what that reveals. You see, we are in that moment where if you want civility reestablished in the culture, it needs to be taught in the culture of your family by parents, and you need to take the time to do that.

I'm not going to give you a list but I would encourage you to think through, what it means to teach your children how to speak with respect to their peers, to you and to others. I had an opportunity to learn this on a number of occasions. My dad was in baseball. I played baseball and so one of the great things in my life was to go into the backyard and play catch with my dad. One time we were in the back playing catch and my dad was teaching me how to throw a knuckleball. Across the street, lived Rusty and Rodney Whitaker and they were good friends. I was always nice to them because they had a car and I could ride to school in the 10th grade with them. Rodney yelled across the street and said, “Hey, what are you doing?” And I said, “Oh, I'm throwing the baseball with my old man.” The next pitch that came from my dad sent me about 25 yards into the next yard and he looked at me and said, “Son, when you learn how to speak about me in public, we'll catch again.” I was taught pretty quickly that my terms of my father and the way I talked about him to others was not to be an occasion for me to elicit humor, but to always respect him – he's my father. I am so grateful that he taught me that. I am not grateful for the fact that I could hardly use my hand to touch anything after he threw that fastball, but he got my attention.

It is absolutely crucial that we teach our children how to function in relationships with other people in life as we give them commands, coach them and develop them in life. Honoring your father and mother teaches you how to honor others in life in appropriate situations, and as Paul says this is the first commandment with a promise. I'll never forget how my dad and mom just taught me about modesty in clothing, not to brag on yourself, and modesty in conversation. Those were things I'm so grateful that they taught, they expected and if they weren't there, then they would step in to correct me appropriately. I long for our children to have that and that you love them enough to be able to give them those kinds of directions. I'm trying to be as practical as I possibly can in light of that. The way you dress is making a statement to the people you are going to meet.

My grandfather had seven brothers who all came to Christ. They were godly men and they were called ‘the Reeder brothers.’ I remember I would go to church every once in a while, with my granddaddy and his brothers, Lonnie and Otis. I learned two things from Lonnie. We would sit at Calvary Independent Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, and they would pass the offering plate and I'd see my Uncle Lonnie reach in and put in a \$5 bill or a \$10 bill or something like that. I said to him, ‘Uncle Lonnie, I know that you tithe every Lord's Day morning. Why are you still giving on Sunday night?’ Realize in hearing this story what children pick up. He said to me, ‘Well, yeah, I've already tithe, but the Bible says, ‘Shall I appear before the Lord empty handed?’ Young man, we have appeared before the Lord tonight, and He is

here.' He was always so neatly dressed, probably only owned one suit because he was a mechanic and he said, "I've come to see my King." I remember how that impacted my life and watching dad and mom participate in the offering every Sunday. I pray and ask that our children be able to see their parents worship the Lord with His tithe and His offerings for that's how I learned it.

Then a promise is given in Ephesians 6:3 that you may live long in the land. We don't obey God's law to be saved but we can out of love to the Savior, obey the law and God has built in consequences. There are consequences to disobedience and there are consequences to obedience. When we learn a commandment that comes with a promise, like the one quoted in Ephesians 6:2-3 – honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and you may live long in the land – now is a general promise but if I want my children to have a long life for Christ, I can't control the dictates and sovereign providences of God, but I can minister to them that they live in such a way that they are on that trajectory for life – that they may live long in the land for Christ and by the patience of Christ with them.

Then Paul turns from the children and he looks to the fathers, their parents directly, by addressing the father. Ephesians 6:4 says *[4] Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* It is the absence of the father's presence, leadership and guidance that becomes the provocation for anger. I covered this extensively in the last study, so I'm not going back over it again.

As much as I believe we need a rebirth of Biblical parenting, I believe we also need a rebirth of an understanding of the distinctives in parenting – fathering and mothering. What does it mean to be a father? My heart, my admiration and my affection, go out to every single parent that is trying to fill in the gaps. I'm grateful to see in a church like this the desire when there's a single parent that we step in with spiritual uncles, aunts, fathers and mothers in the faith. But the fact is that God designed children to need a father with the attributes of Biblical masculinity and Christian manhood, to put the touch on parenting that only he can give and then the mother is then set up to put the touch that she gives.

We are not going to embrace a model where the man goes out, lives his life and brings the checkbook home while the mother raises the children. I am certainly aware in the early stages of the maturation of a child, the mother has a leading role in her nurturing gifts, biological gifts, and Biblical femininity. There's a reason why at an infant baptism the fathers name their children and give a blessing, then I baptize the child and I always give the child back to the mother, because I know she has this primary gift of nurturing, but that does not mean the absence of the father. There is an increasing need for the father to lay hold of that moment.

I do a lot of study of leadership on the battlefield, and I've tried to learn from the battlefields of life because I believe I'm in a war as a Christian. It's a war that's been won by my Savior, but there are still various battles to be fought. Here is something that I remember as I would continually write in my journal about those moments; there would be the amazing moment when somebody would receive a lethal wound on the battlefield and their immediate response was always to ask for their mother, always. Then if in that moment it became obvious that life was ebbing away, many times that combat soldier would say, "Tell my daddy I did my duty. Tell him I died facing the enemy." That's what we want our father to know, even as we cry out for the touch that only a mother can give – fathering and mothering are both important.

I remember how this came home to me in a moment of athletics, when I had a play at the plate, the runner came in, we collided and I tagged him out. It was a pretty big collision and I looked down to make sure I hadn't dropped the ball and there in my glove was the ball. But then I noticed that the arm that had the glove on it was now in an L-shape, literally. The coach says, "Come here, let me help you." I said, "No, I want to go see Mama." The baseball field was two miles away from home. I just started walking toward home to find my mother because that's where I wanted to go. My mother heard me yelling her name about three blocks away and she came out and to me where I was. I don't necessarily recommend the ethics behind this, but you can see the mother coming out. She looked at me, saw how big my eyes were, because by this time, walking home, looking at this for two miles, I was pretty well convinced I was about to get an amputation and she saw what was happening. She took the dish towel that she had in her hand and she threw it over my arm, put her arm around me and said, "Son, it's going to be okay. I think it's just a bad sprain." I think that's kind of called an outright lie. I don't know where that fits in ethics or not. I don't think it was speaking truth in love, but there's a lot of love in what she said. When my mama said that I calmed down immediately.

We went to the doctor. The doctor was not happy because he got called off of the golf course. He had to come in on a Saturday afternoon and he looked at it and said, "Well, this one's a bad one." He did not have my mother's instincts. My dad had just arrived. Now, back then we basically went to health clinics because my dad was in minor league baseball, and we didn't have a lot of money at the end of the year. There were no health insurance plans whatsoever, so this was all cash and I could see my dad's meter was running, knowing it was going to cost. The doctor said, "I'm going to need to put him to sleep, to set this." My dad said, "What does that mean?" He said, "I'll need to keep him tonight. We'll have to give him some anesthesia to put him to sleep." The next words out of my dad's mouth were "how much is that going to cost?" The doctor told him and my dad said "Is there another possibility or another solution?" The doctor said, "I've got a shot I can give him and it's going to hurt, but I think I can do it." My dad said, "Let's do that. He can handle it." I'll never forget what happened and I'm just trying to get this point to across about fathering and mothering.

They did a study and found out that when a mother corrects her children, there is a default position they move to. They come alongside of their child, usually put their arm around them and tell them what they did wrong and then correct him. Fathers have a default position. It's face to face, eye to eye. I'll never forget that happened when I was with my day in that emergency room. As soon as the verdict was in, the doctor went and got the needle and that was largest needle I've seen in my life. Then my mother came over, put her hand on me, and said, "Son, I'm right here. I'll be right with you." My dad was at the end of the bed. He looked at me and said, "Son, you can do this." I have been reminded so many times of those two dynamics when I face challenges in life. It's like I can hear my father say, "You can do this. The challenge is in front of you. You can do this." When my dad said that, I believed him, and when my mother said that, I knew she would be there.

Fathering and mothering have overlap in the raising of children, but they are distinctive and our children need both. As a father, I don't want my children not to have my presence as a father, and I don't want them to be robbed of the presence of their mother, because we, by God's providence, brought them into the world. God has placed us there for them, that they may live long on the earth and I don't want to provoke them to anger, but I want to raise them in the discipline, the nurture and an environment of clarity, with framework and direction that a father

and mother are designed to give to their children. Each one brings the uniqueness as they overlap together in their marriage.

This brings me to a statement I have to say; good parenting begins with the priority of maintaining the integrity, the vitality and the intimacy of your marriage. Your children need your unity, but your children are not the reason for your unity. They are the result of your unity. That which God has called you and equipped you to do, you are called to do in each other's life so that one plus one equals one and we speak with one voice, which now allows me to make another point.

Have any of you ever noticed that the last thing a child wants you to do, if they want their own way, is for the father and the mother to be united and speak with one voice? Have you ever had your children create amazing strategies to divide you? I mean, I had one growing up. I'd say something like "Daddy, mother said that I could go out Friday night if you said so" and then I'd go back to mother and say "Mother, daddy said I could go out. Is it all right with you?" Now I lied, and never would I have asked them that question in the same room. I made sure they were in separate rooms and would go to them separate acting as if they each said what I had told them they said. I knew if I could divide, I might conquer. The best way for your children not to divide you is to be one in Christ, not one for your children. The blessing is to be one in Christ and that's what your children need. So, make it your priority to intentionally work on your relationship as a husband and wife.

When my wife and I were in the early stages of ministry, a lady, came up to us and said, "I pray for your marriage and for your three children. I want to give you something, Cindy. I notice that you do needlepoint sometimes, and this is a needlepoint I'd like for you to work on. Then when you are finished give it to Harry for me." So, my wife worked on the needlepoint and I knew I was about to get a gift from this lady through my wife needlepointing what this lady had bought for her to develop. Cindy finished it and gave it to me. I'll never forget it and I still have it. The needlepoint said "The best thing that a father can do for his children is love their mother." I understand there are places you can critique there, but I have never forgotten that. I cannot say I have been perfect in it, but it is something I will always remember; the best thing a father can do for his children. It's not the only thing your fathering begins by loving your wife well and by learning how to love her better in the dynamics of life itself.

Here is one of the last things I want to say from this Ephesians 6 text is give you five crucial principles and then give you a take away in parenting. Number one, when you're parenting your children remember, they are born with a sin nature. Adam and Eve had to be talked in to sinning. Right? Yet, ever since then, the offspring of Adam and Eve can't be talked out of sinning. Why? It is because we have a sin nature. It is only God's common grace that keeps us from being as sinful as we would be. We have a sin nature and your child has a sin nature.

Secondly, remember, you parent from God's promises and you parent, according to His precepts – Biblical parenting – and your best practices must line up with God's promises and precepts in His Word. Those promises that guide us and encourage us. Promises like; I'll be a God to you and to your children after you, I will remember My covenant to you, to your children and your children's children, believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household, the promise is for you and your children. Those wonderful promises undergird us, motivate us and encourage us. Then

there is the general wisdom of God, the precepts such as; train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he'll not depart from it. Notice that it doesn't say in his youth he won't depart, but when he is older what you have poured in God will use to bring him back. Now that's not a promise. That's what we call divinely ordained common sense, but it's encouraging.

Number three, your objective is your child's conversion. Your objection in parenting is not their college degree, even Auburn and Alabama. Your objective is not that they make the All-State team. Your objective is that they repent of their sins, confess it and come to Christ alone as Savior. Your objective is a heart focus. Yes, you let your children know from your heart you may not want to do this, but in this home, you're going to do that. Yes, you have to do that for the orderliness and the environment of the home, but your objective is not to raise a Pharisee who is outwardly obedient. You want to address their heart.

Number four, parenting is a family affair. You need the extended family, the immediate family, and you need God's family. One of the things I greatly love is to read Luke 2 and study Mary and Joseph and their parenting of Jesus. As you look at their parenting, there's one thing that stands out. In Luke 2, it says that they were in the synagogue regularly and in Luke 4, when Jesus is doing His public ministry, He came back to Nazareth to His "home church." I've actually been there and I take people there on the Israel trips I do. That synagogue now has a church built upon it in the same frame and architecture of a first century synagogue. I've thought when I am standing there that Jesus stood right there, and He opened up Isaiah for the next reading, because in the synagogue they did what we tried to do here, expository teaching verse by verse, and they would read it each week. It was the year of Jubilee, the reading, and He read it. Then it says this in Luke 4:16; *as was His custom.*

I was talking with my wife, Cindy this last week and I said to her, "One of the things I look back on in life is when I was younger was the simplicity of life as opposed to so much complexity today. Secondly, the weightiness of life that I feel as a husband, a father, a pastor and presbyter that I didn't have in my childhood. But one thing that's helping me navigate this is what I learned; my daddy and mama didn't send me to church. They took me and I know they thought this is a waste of time. He is not listening but I was and what was planted was watered, what was planted and watered was cultivated and then it bore fruit and the perfection of God's timing in my conversion. Jesus and I have something in common. Our family was in the church to learn about Jesus, and the church was in our family because of Jesus."

We didn't treat it as a specialty store we might go to if they've got a good sermon topic this Sunday. It was something that was a vital part that my dad and mom had been taught to do by my father's dad and mom. They had embraced it and it bore much fruit in my life - family, immediate family, extended family, God's family.

Finally, number five, be God centered, not child centered. Don't be child centered and don't be parent centered. How many of us are parents centered? Here's what I mean. We have our children for ourselves. We think, 'we didn't get to do this so we're going to have our children and live our life out through our children' or our significances in what our child does. Therefore, our children are not allowed to face adversity because we simply want them to be marked by success because that reflects on us. Be God centered. Take the long view and be faithful in your parenting. It's not about us and it's not about them. It's about God's glory through His grace in their life.

I'll conclude with this takeaway on Biblical parenting from Ephesians 6. Biblical parenting from Ephesians 6 is a parental commitment to nurture, evangelize and disciple your covenant children. I really believe that's parenting – evangelizing and discipleship. Bringing

Christ to them and bringing them to Christ and then teaching them the Word of God to follow Christ. To go a step further, it's a parental commitment to nurture, evangelize and disciple your covenant children in the context of the Covenant community, His church, according to God's covenant promises and Biblical precepts. You do it by the grace of God that they may enjoy God and glorify Him forever and then we will know what the Apostle John has said from III John 1:4, *[4] I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Bless the fellowship of Your people. Bless our attempt to disciple one another and help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Thank You for the institution of creation – the family. Thank You for the institution of redemption – Your Church. Unite our families and the family of God together that our children would know our Savior and bring His Good News to the next generation, even as we rejoice in the Gospel taking hold of their heart, in Jesus' Name, Amen.