



That video we just saw is a powerful reminder of the central place of the family in developing and nurturing the faith development of a child. Unfortunately, research shows we aren't doing all that well in passing on our faith to the next generation.

Today we are continuing our series, "Building a Home: One Room at a Time." We are going from room to room looking at what God has to say to us about family. Last week we visited the living room and Mark talked to us about communication in a family. Today we're stopping in the kid's room.

For any of you who are parents do you remember how unprepared you were for that room? I remember when our first child was born. We didn't want to leave the hospital. What do you mean we have to leave? We aren't ready. Can we just stay here for another month or so? We can go, but can we leave the baby with you? But they kicked us out. So I remember trying to fill out this carseat with our infant daughter in the parking lot of the hospital. She kept tipping over. Finally we propped her up in this carseat with rolls of paper towels from the trunk. I remember she didn't sleep well. After trying about everything, we stumbled onto the fact that she liked the sound of the vacuum cleaner. We wore out two vacuum cleaners in her first 18 months. We were not ready.

All this parenting stuff seemed so complicated. The books we read, the expert advice we heard, the homemade formula we made up, the expensive baby gym equipment we purchased, the angst we felt. I remember walking into our house one day, looking around, and I realized we were getting way too complicated. Our downstairs looked like a Gymboree and our upstairs looked like a Baby Gap.

Sometimes the last place we turn for advice is God's Word. God has a lot to say to both parents and children. Our text today is Ephesians 6:1-4. The text is profoundly simple. It describes submissive children, but also describes submissive parents.

Before we unpack the text, it is important to remember that Paul here is addressing specifically the nuclear family, the nuclear family that has a relationship with God. Also, Paul knows that every family is made up of fallen, broken people. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul already talked about unresolved anger, lying, stealing, drunkenness, lack of forgiveness. All this junk happens even in Christian families. Later he talks about spiritual warfare. We have an enemy that wants to destroy families.

Families are messy and hard. I remember a seasoned parent once said to me, "I remember before I was married that I had three theories about raising children. Now I have three children and no theories."

This section of scripture where Paul teaches us about families begins in Ephesians 5:22 with husbands and wives, and then in this morning's verses moves to children and parents, and then to slaves and masters, which is interesting because slaves in Paul's day were considered a part of the household as well. All of these household relationships are governed by this all-encompassing command in Ephesians 5:21, "**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**"

Wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters are to submit to one another. So with that in mind, let's look at God's instruction to children first.

"Children obey your parents in the LORD, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).

The context here is not adult children, it is young children, but old enough to obey and understand, learn and be shaped. Obey, or "continue to obey" means always being ready to listen and carry out the instructions of your parents. Can we only obey our parents partially or sometimes, even when it seems dumb, unfair or unpleasant? You mean you are telling me that I am to obey and follow my parents when I don't want to or even before seeing all the reasons why? Of course Paul is assuming that you parents would not ask your kids to do something that you know is against God's will. If your parents ask you to sin, don't do it. That's why he says obey your parents in the Lord. Kids, God wants you to obey your parents, and obeying is part of being a Christ follower.

Why? "For this is right." The idea is that it is right and pleasing to God, and it is right in every family, in every society, every country, every culture. Family life is built on this and it works. Kids, your willingness to obey your parents helps bring peace to your family. The Apostle Paul is saying that you kids know enough to know what is right. You know what it means to obey and disobey, and you know what it means to please parents and the Lord. And that you are a really important part of making the family work and be a great place.

"Honor your father and mother..." (v. 2a).

Now I want to ask you kids something. Do your parents seem a little odd to you? Do they seem to think and say weird things sometimes? Do they like weird stuff? Do they ever get themselves in weird situations? Do you ever just shake your head and say to yourself, "I don't understand my parents, and sometimes I don't think they understand me."? I want to tell you that some day when you get older you will begin to understand where your parents are coming from. And Paul understands you. He is saying, "until you get older and understand more, you need to respect and honor your parents, so starting now honor them."

Actually Paul is telling all of us who have parents no matter how old we are, we are to continue to show respect to our parents. Sometimes in society old people get forgotten. Paul is saying value your parents even more the older they get. My dad is pretty old; he is 84. He can't see very well or get around very well. Paul is telling me to honor my father.

"...which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (verses 2b-3).

Why are we taught to honor our parents? Not just because it is better for our parents; it is better for us too. He reminds us that honoring our parents is one of the 10 Commandments. It is number 5 and it comes with a great promise. Honoring your father and mother isn't just best for them, it is best for you too! This is what people who really study the Bible call a proverbial promise. It isn't a guarantee that obedient children won't die young or have struggles in life, but generally speaking obedient children will be kept from harm's way. They will be spared bad habits, bad friends, bad marriages.

King Solomon had something to say about this and he doesn't pull any punches. Proverbs 30:17 says, "*The eye that mocks a father, that scorns and aged mother, will be pecked out by ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.*"

So that is what Paul has to say to children. He goes on to address fathers. Why only fathers here? Why not mothers? Well, in this whole teaching on families, Paul is assuming fathers are leaders in their homes. But what he says to fathers also applies to mothers. But Paul wants us to take note the leadership role fathers need to play in the home.

It's very hard today with one in three births to unmarried moms with no dads around. But when there is a mom and dad, it's critical that moms and dads be on the same page when it comes to raising kids. Julie and I can attest to the fact that it isn't always easy to be on the same page and kids pick up on that and try to use it to their advantage.

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the LORD" (v. 4).

Notice he didn't say asphyxiate. There is a difference. Don't exasperate means don't irritate beyond measure. Paul is preaching restraint on dads who would come down too hard. Remember in that day fathers had absolute authority, complete control over his family. He had the legal right to sell his kids as slaves, make them work the fields in chains, he was the law and could punish them any way he wanted. Paul is saying that is not how Christ followers use authority. Remember, submit to one another.

There are many ways parents can mess up here. Making promises you don't keep, nagging your kids to death, always finding fault, micromanaging them, placing unrealistic expectations on them, playing favorites, being inconsistent in enforcing your own rules and discipline, ignoring your kids, imposing unnecessary rules and regulations.

Why is this so dangerous? Our kids are resilient and forgiving, but with continual exasperating they will lose heart, become resentful, bitter, depressed. Instead of being harsh, be proactive. In the years God gives you with them in your home train and instruct them in what God wants for your kids. Remember, not what **you** want, not **your** expectations, but what **God** wants for your kids.

Bring them up.... This is to nourish and care for, with gentleness and affection. Mark Mitchell put it well, "Men are never more real men than when they're tender with their children." Hugs—my wife talked with a hugging therapist this week. Her schedule is full.

in the training.... A strong word that means discipline, even punishment. Discipline is painful, it is the intentional infliction of pain. The scripture says in Hebrews 12:10, "**God disciplines us for our own good in order that we may share in his holiness.**"

and instruction.... This has to do with our words. It has the idea of warning, rebuking, or confronting our children.

of the Lord.... We have these dreams for our children—straight A's, best soccer player, great leader at school or church, cheerleader, bowler, whatever. But is that what God wants? A parent submitted to Christ wants what God wants—for their kids to not just submit to their authority, but to the Lord's authority in their lives.

Let's step back to the big picture for a moment. Step back from the car-pooling, the homework, the errands, the chores, the diaper pail. What does God want for your kids? To be followers of Christ first, that is success. That is more important than the tennis team, the piano recital, the starting defensive end position, that top graduate school. This is tough to hear, parents. God wants your children to be followers of Christ before following after a big house, a big paycheck, a big job. God wants your child

to follow Christ more than he wants you to protect him or her from a hard lesson, a hard test, a bitter failure.

Yes, they will get angry with you, but that doesn't mean you did something wrong. There will be lots of times your kids will be angry with you but you are just being a parent training them up in God's ways, different from the ways of our society. Don't walk out of here today thinking this is easy. It takes a backbone.

The key is use the power you have wisely, balancing nurture, discipline and instruction in the Lord. It has helped me with the balance to try to know my child's needs. Our kids are in college and I still am learning this stuff.

Parents, Know Your Child's Need for...

Secure love

No doubt parents, at one time or another our kids will have their sense of feeling loved tested through a relationship or a difficult circumstance. Where will your child be when they most need this secure love?

» Maybe sitting across a table from someone they gave their heart to who just told them that they didn't love them anymore.

» Maybe it's when the bottom has fallen out of their financial world.

» Maybe it's after they hear two painful words, "You're fired."

» Maybe it's when they have been betrayed by a friend.

» Maybe it's when they are wearing a uniform standing a lonely post, in a dangerous place far from home.

Our love for our children is incomplete when our child feels they have to compete against what they perceive as your love for your career, your friends, your hobbies. Our love for our children is incomplete when our children feel like they have to earn it. They will figure out pretty fast that they receive our praise and pride when they do things that make us look good or when they make our jobs as parents easier.

Children feel secure when they know they are accepted as they are and receive generous amounts of affection.

Significant purpose

When our children were born, God instilled in them a need to discover their purpose in life, a general purpose to put a value on others before themselves, to leave the world better than they found it.

A specific purpose. To use the skills and abilities that God has given them. A parent's job is to help their child develop workable skills in most areas of life, but then a highly disciplined skill in their special area of giftedness and passion.

A relational purpose. We are to teach our children that they are not an island, and that God made them to live in community.

A spiritual purpose. We know that we feel the weakest at developing this purpose. As Bob Dylan sang, "We got to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord but we got to serve somebody."

Strong hope

Our kids are completely helpless when they are born. Our kids begin the development hope when they have loving parents ready to sacrifice to meet their helpless needs. Hope continues to build when we show our kids that God can be believed, that he is indeed capable of doing what he says he will do for his children.

That means leading our kids to live life not necessarily down the safest road, the road most traveled, but to see life as a great spiritual adventure. Not necessarily the safest track, but the track that leads to the greatest spiritual impact.

To summarize, it's when a child hears and believes from their parents: I love you, I'm proud of you, you're good at....

Freedom to be different

That's right. Goofy, quirky, unique. I love history. My mom and dad so, so. They took me on a civil war battlefield tour that would bore most people to death, but I was in absolute heaven. No math and science involved and my dad still enjoyed it through me.

Our kids are different from us and different from one another. We knew they would be different from how they felt to Julie in her womb. Don't view them the same. Don't compare them. God made each one unique and very special with a special purpose.

Freedom to be vulnerable

We need to treat our kids the way God treats us. Peter tells us, "*Cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you*" (1 Peter 5:7). Those cares that are legitimate and those cares that our kids have over such things as childhood crushes, one's first poor test score, one's fight with a school mate. Of course our kids are not mature yet, but don't dismiss their cares because it seems through your adult mind that they are overreacting. Be open and inclusive of all the cares your child brings you.

Freedom to be candid

Are all the things on your child's mind safe for them to share with you? Does your child have a fear of punishment or payback if they are honest with you? I hope Julie and I have reacted appropriately to surprising news from our daughters that they know they shouldn't fear punishment for telling us the truth, no matter how ugly the truth is.

How about this, parents of teens? Is it safe for your child to tell you things about you that you might not want to hear? I have asked one of my daughters to tell me when I am judging her or anyone else unfairly, when I am majoring on the minor things and putting what I care about more than what God cares about.

Freedom to make mistakes

Remember what the Bible says, "*The wages of sin is death.*" "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" We all sin and we all make mistakes. Parents who are full of grace know when to

discipline and when to nurture and when to instruct. And always keep the porch light on for the prodigal to return.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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