



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

The Garage: Engaged Fathers

Colossians 3:20–21

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series: Building a Home: One Room at a Time

A garage is a sacred place for a man and can be a reflection of what is important to him. For example, my dad's garage was filled with things that were important to him and because they were important to him, they became important to me. Now to be honest, the garage was a little creepy because it was poorly lit and I'd seen my dad kill black widows in there. Thankfully it didn't hinder me from spending time in there getting fishing poles ready for the next fishing trip or taking down camping supplies stacked on the shelves.

Time in the garage has changed since my childhood. Having a smaller garage now doesn't provide the room we once had. Honestly, even if there was room, the longer we've been married, the fuller our garage has become. We still have fishing poles but some are now pink Barbie poles for my daughters and the camping supplies are minimal. From boxes stacked on shelves to pink bikes, pink scooters and pink tricycles, there just isn't much room in our garage. The garage began as a place to work on things, but it seems it has turned into a modern day storage unit.

Turn to Colossians 3. Our current series is called "Building a Home: One Room at a Time," and this morning we're in the garage. Being Father's Day, we felt like the garage was the best room for us to work in and we want to focus on encouraging dads! I would like to say that I'm going to focus the majority of my attention on dads this morning but this doesn't mean the message won't be applicable to everyone. Some of the principles we're going to address really have to do with relationships. Relationships are something we can always be learning about.

We also understand the topic of "father" may not fare well with everyone. Currently in the United States, roughly 45 million children under the age of 18 go to bed at night with no father present. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24 million children in America, one out of every three, live in father-absent homes. A lack of a father has impacted so many of us. Some people have no relationship with their father while others have an amazing relationship with their dad.

Wherever you fall in your relationship with your father, what Paul writes to the church in Colossae is fitting for us to focus on.

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged (Col. 3:21).

In this larger section Paul addresses the relationship between wives and husbands, children and parents, and finally slaves and masters. Fathers, we are specifically called to not embitter our

children, knowing it will discourage them. What does Paul mean when he talks about embittering our children? *The Message* says it like this: "Parents, don't come down too hard on your children or you'll crush their spirits." Let's dig a little deeper to see what else we can find out. Paul actually uses the Greek word ἐρεθίζω (erethizō). ἐρεθίζω is used only twice in the New Testament. Here in Colossians it means to embitter, but it can also mean to "stir up" or "provoke." If we read the verse using one of these synonyms, it reads, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they will become discouraged."

The way Paul uses this word is extremely important. It's a present, active, imperative word meaning fathers were embittering their children. Paul uses this form of the word as a command, or strong exhortation. In other words, Paul is saying "Stop embittering your children." Fathers may have been embittering their children by constantly picking at them, perhaps refusing to acknowledge their efforts. The children might have concluded they were not good enough. If correction was needed, it should have been toward the behavior of the child, not the child's personhood, and it should have been enforced quickly. Discipline was not to be prolonged so that nagging occurred.

Three Ways to Embitter Our Children

There are times I've provoked my children and come down too hard and too long. Let's look at three ways we can embitter our children.

Being overbearing

Fathers, instead of taking the time to explain things in a caring way to your kids just be overbearing in all your actions. Give your children strict rules with little affection. A lady once told me about her relationship with her dad and how his overbearing attitude in her daily chores incited bitterness towards him. Her dad would give her chores to do, but it seemed like she was never able to do the task correctly, and as hard as she tried to please her father she was unable to do things exactly how he wanted them done. This grief she experienced in her inability to please him embittered her.

Being permissive

This is the opposite end of the spectrum from the overbearing dad. This is the dad who sets no boundaries for his child. To make his child happy, he allows his six-year-old daughter to eat anything she wants for dinner, "forget about nutritional value, I

don't have time to focus on that." Think about how the lack of structure will impact his seventeen-year-old son who breaks his weekend curfew and stumbles in the house drunk for the first time. This father is so lax in his parenting he won't engage his son who desperately needs correction. It's a home with lots of love but no rules. Children need rules to live by and therefore they become embittered.

Being inconsistent

Inconsistency in a home is where the rules change all the time, which could be based on external circumstances or just flat out on how you're feeling. Sometimes you might be overly strict and crack down on a certain behavior, and sometimes you're too lenient because you just don't have the energy to engage the behavior you want to correct. This can be played out in forcing your child to do their homework at a certain time every day for one month, but during the next month taking no interest in their school work. It might mean ignoring their dirty clothes on the floor for months, and then yelling at them for the next week to pick up their clothes. The inconsistency confuses the child and eventually embitters them.

These are only a few select examples of how we can embitter our children. These examples are applicable not only to fatherhood but can be applied to all our relationships. Hopefully this provides a better understanding of fatherhood based on Paul's writing about not embittering our children, which leads to discouraging them.

We all know the opposite of discouragement is encouragement. Let's now turn our attention to the positive impact fathers can have by looking at three ways we can encourage our children. What we look at next is going to be based on this statement: Engaged fathers encourage their children, not embitter them.

Three Ways to Encourage Our Children

Now we're going to examine ways for fathers to encourage their children.

Being present

Being present is more than just being there; it means being present physically and mentally. As an engaged father, you want to do your best to encourage your children and being present is the first step.

Thirty-five-year-old James was playing with his kids at the park. While running around the play structure, a young girl about five years old looked inquisitively at his behavior. She then asked James, "What are you doing?" His quick response was, "Playing with my kids." To which she quickly replied, "Can I play?" She joined in playing with a complete stranger and his children while her father sat on the bench with his face glued to the screen of his phone.

James continued running around the park chasing his kids, playing hide and seek, and pushing them on a swing when a grandmother approached him. She had a good eye on her grandson while she began to encourage him. If I remember the story correctly, she said something like this to him, "Thank you for playing with your kids. It's amazing you are running around with them like you are. I am shocked at how many parents come to this park and almost completely ignore their children to be on their cell phone."

Your being physically present with your kids communicates more than you think! This week on Facebook I asked people to share some of their favorite childhood memories they have with their dad, and here they are: playing catch, baking bread, playing soccer, going fishing, playing miniature golf, having you share what you learned in your Bible, riding down the street in the truck, how excited he was opening up his present, going camping, playing baseball with all the girls in the street, going out for a cinnamon roll, swimming together in the pool. Fathers, I need you to hear this—your presence in your kid's life is a big deal.

Being present throughout our children's lives is a big deal. When they're young our presence shows we care, but how do we respond when they begin making their own decisions? What if these are decisions that don't align with what we know is best for them? In Luke 15 we see a story of a father who sets a great example for us of simply being present through negative and positive decisions his son made.

Jesus tells us there was a father who had two sons. One day his youngest son approached his father and asked for his share of the inheritance. After cashing the check at the bank, this son went to a distant land, probably Las Vegas, where he spent everything he had on booze, parties, fine food and loose women. After losing everything he had, he finally came to his senses and decided to head home and beg his father to simply hire him as a worker. The whole way home he prepared his speech to his father, but when his dad saw him off in the distance he ran to his son, threw his arms around him, kissed him and welcomed him back home. Immediately he fed him and provided what he was lacking.

The older brother of this son became angry and resented his father for acting this way. His father was always present with him but the older brother couldn't understand the love and compassion he displayed to his wild son. Listen to what the father says to his son. *"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found'"* (Luke 15:31–32).

The key phrase is, "you are always with me." In other words, the dad is saying, "Son, I am with you, do you see my presence in

your life?" This father was present physically and mentally for both of his sons, no matter what their life situation was.

Engage emotionally

The second way we can encourage our children and not embitter them is by engaging emotionally. Being present is the large amount of time you spend with your child that allows you to have the moments to engage emotionally. In his book, *As For Me and My Crazy House* Brian Berry writes "Quality time is an accident that happens in quantity time." Being a father brings a lot of blessing, a lot of joy, and a lot of fun and laughter. But it is also quite costly to be a father. The biggest cost is not financial; it is emotional. Fathers must make an emotional investment in their kids. Kids need affirmation, encouragement, and expressions of love. Most of all kids need to be pardoned and forgiven.

Think back to your childhood. Do you have a specific memory of your dad that you've never been able to remove from your mind? A memory so vivid it's almost like you're still there? Mine comes from when I was about eight years old. I was playing outside and got hurt. I was crying, tears running down my face crying for my dad to help me. Through my tears I kept screaming, "Daddy, help me!" I will never forget my dad coming to my rescue, and the rescue mission changed when he looked me right in the eyes and said, "Don't call me daddy again, I am your dad. Stop crying, men don't cry." I was heartbroken but obeyed my dad. I started calling him dad and have done my best to not cry since, which is extremely unhealthy emotionally. My dad never asked me to forgive him for his actions.

In all honesty, the Bible gives us a whole bunch of examples of inadequate fathers. Noah wasn't a perfect father; he got so drunk he passed out and his children had to cover up his naked body. Jacob had multiple wives and exhibited such immense favoritism to one son that his brothers threw Joseph in a pit and sold him into slavery. David failed to discipline his oldest son, creating a rebellious child who attempted to take the kingdom from his father and eventually died.

Realistically, there is no example of a perfect father here on earth. To find a perfect father, we need to turn our eyes to God the Father. Move to the New Testament and we find it was a big day for Jesus as he walked down to the Jordan River to be baptized. As he came out of the water, Scripture records what happened next. ***"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"*** (Matt. 3:16–17).

Speaking from heaven, God the Father makes a bold declaration to the world saying, "This is my Son!" In other words, he's saying, "No one make a mistake about it, he belongs to me. I am his Father and he is my Son!" God the Father makes no ambiguity

surrounding His relationship to Jesus Christ. God was affirming Christ during a monumental time in the life of His son.

The affirmation doesn't stop with God boldly declaring Jesus is his Son. God goes on, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Affirmation is powerful and we all desperately need it! Right here God tells the world that he loves Jesus and is well pleased with him. Think about this. At this point in his life Jesus has not yet preached a sermon, healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out any demons, called any disciples, or done any miracles. However God the Father validates Jesus not for what he has done or for the future works he will do. The Father affirms Jesus solely because of who he is—his beloved Son. What an encouragement!

If you've experienced a lack of encouragement from your father growing up, please don't hold back encouragement in your children's life. The power of our words can bring life to our children. Fathers with older children, keep in mind the age of Jesus at his baptism. God remained engaged in Jesus' life through every step and every stage of his life.

Lead spiritually

The third way we see to encourage our children and not embitter them is lead spiritually. Dad, you have a leadership role in your home no one else can fill. God has called you to lead your family. In their book, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* Jack and Judith Balswick write, "For the most part, busy modern families have relinquished the responsibility of teaching moral beliefs and values to their children to other institutions (church and school)."

Fathers, now is the time to lead spiritually. Where can we learn this role of spiritual leader? Let's begin with The Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 6:9 Jesus starts his prayer with these familiar words: ***"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."*** Fathers, I'm not saying you should require your children to keep your name hallowed! Instead, this verse reflects the most basic priority you have as a father: for the name of God to be hallowed in your life. When we say "hallowed be your name," we're asking that God be set apart as holy in our lives. It means we don't try to whittle him down to size. It means we acknowledge there is no one else like him. It means we know he is above all other things. He alone is glorious, infinite, eternal, righteous, pure and just.

Fathers, if we asked your kids, what would they say is most important to you? Not what **you** would say, but what **they** would say? Is the name of God the hallowed thing in your life? Someone once said, "truth is caught, rather than taught." You might say God is the most important thing in your life, but your kids see beneath the surface. They will "catch" what's really important to you by what you say, the choices you make with your time and your money, what you talk about the most, seeing what gets you excited and, what you say behind people's backs.

Leading spiritually may mean making minor or serious adjustments in your life and embracing discipline from the Lord for your actions. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon writes about the Lord's discipline. ***"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in"*** (Prov. 3:11–12).

Discipline comes in many forms and is a specific consequence in relation to a specific action. If you find yourself under the discipline of the Lord, you are in a good place. On the other hand, you may need to make adjustments in the way you're leading yourself. This could sound like a scary thing, but Solomon tells us God disciplines those he loves. What comfort a verse like this can provide in the spiritual growth process of a father. Being disciplined by God is the safest kind of discipline you can find yourself in. The writer of Hebrews affirms this. ***"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it"*** (Heb. 12:11). The greatest thing you can offer your children is a healthy relationship with the Lord.

If you have never lead your children spiritually before, it might seem awkward. A powerful start is reading the Bible with your children in the morning. It may require you to wake up earlier, but it's worth it. To make a deeper impact, after reading, ask them what they learned and what they think about the story you just read. Another idea is to pray with your children. This works for fathers with four-year-olds and forty-year-olds. Pray based

on the conversations you've been having with them regarding what is happening in their life. A final idea is to serve alongside them. We have so many different places you can serve with your family at CPC. These are just a few ideas for fathers to continue leading spiritually.

We did a lot of work in the garage this morning, learning how to encourage our children and not embitter them. Fathers, you need to leave here knowing you have an invaluable role in your children's life decisions and spiritual growth. The body of Christ needs you to focus on engaging with your children. The Peninsula will become a better place because you engage with your children, even when you don't understand why your seven-year-old is crying or why your teenage daughter likes that boy. Your children will have more stability because of the spiritual example you model for them. Your desire to avoid sin and accept the discipline of the Lord can give them confidence to stand strong for the Lord in what could end up being compromising situations. The best thing about all of this is that if we do these things—in the midst of our imperfection, our flaws, our mistakes, our inadequacy, and our sins—we can be a reflection of our children's perfect Heavenly Father.

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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