

Children & Parents Ephesians 6:1-4

Introduction: When the Gospel came to the Roman Empire a revolution came with it. It was said of the Apostles, "***These men are turning the world upside down.***" The truth was, they were turning it right side up, that's the nature of the Gospel. It's revolutionary, and it works in all cultures, and always. **In the first century...**

MARRIAGE WAS REVOLUTIONIZED

- Normally wives were treated like a combination of concubine and household slave.
- Even in a Jewish home, men were permitted to divorce their wives for the slightest infraction. If she didn't do what he wanted, divorce. If she over-cooked the grits, divorce.

But God called His men to love their wives with an unconditional love. We talked about that last week.

PARENTING WAS REVOLUTIONIZED

In Roman society the head of the house, the father, had life and death power over his entire household. He could cast any of them out of the house, sell them as slaves, or even kill them-and be accountable to no one.

A newborn child was placed at its father's feet to determine its fate. If the father picked it up, the child was allowed to stay in the home; if the father walked away, it was simply disposed of-like unwanted, and unborn babies are aborted.

- Seneca, a statesman in Rome at the time Paul wrote the Ephesian letter, said, "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge a knife into a sick cow. Children born weak or deformed we drown."

- In a letter written in 1BC by a man named Hilarion to his wife, Alis, reads, "**if you have another child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, expose it**" (Papyri Oxyrhynchus 4.744).

Many times, Christians would come along and adopt these abandoned children.

The Roman culture had the idea that children were only good as far as they could be of some use to the parents. Children were your free labor, and they were your retirement plan.

Our own culture seems to follow two extremes when it comes to parenting.

Devalue Children

- 1/3 of all children that are conceived are aborted
- 1/3 of all births do not have anyone listed as father.
- 40% of kids will go to bed tonight without a dad at home.

Worship Children

- To consider them and their desires more valuable than Jesus and His word.
- Where do the kids want to go to Church? Do they want to go at all?
- I'll let my kids decide what gender they want to be.
- Parents who worship their kids have no concept of saying, "no".

We are not to devalue children or worship children. Tonight, we begin four nights of Vacation Bible School. I love having our church campus full of children running around. So, this morning is the perfect time, in our family series, to talk about kids. (Story: best day of my life)

The best place to go for a checkup is the bible, right? When was the last time you looked in a mirror? You probably look in one every day—maybe even multiple times! Why do you look in a mirror? You use it to evaluate yourself. And then, hopefully, you do something about what you see.

The Bible says that God's Word is like a mirror: ***"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like"*** (James 1:23-24 NIV).

Just as a mirror reflects what you look like on the outside, God's Word reflects what you're like on the inside.

Hebrews 4:12 says that God's Word discerns your heart's thoughts, attitudes, and intentions. And then hopefully we change what is out of sync with God.

There are so many verses I could use, like Proverbs 22:6 ***"Train up a child in the***

way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it."

And most of us would say, **how old is old**. I raised my kid in church and now, I've been waiting a long time for them to get their act together...live for God.

And then there is Psalm 127, ***"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate."***

My title would have been, **"Turning Crooked Sticks into Straight Arrows."**

But we're going to look at Ephesians chapter 6, and I will be real creative, and just use the title that is in my bible: **Children and Parents**.

It was several years ago when Dr. James Dobson wrote the best-selling book, **Parenting Isn't for Cowards**.

I love that title because anybody who has had the privilege of being a parent, you know that parenting is hard. Parenting isn't for sissies, and it isn't for cowards. It takes a lot of energy. It's hard work to be a parent.

A person asked a fulltime mother, "What do you do?" She responded, "I am socializing two homosapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia that God willed from the beginning of creation." She then added, "And what do you do?"

Parenting is hard work, but, hey, you know what? In our day and age, it's hard to be a kid. It's hard to do both. Too many times, along the way, something that was intended to be a dream, has turned into a nightmare. There are parents who have had in their hands that little soft, cuddly loving baby, turn into a teenage mutant monster.

Many parents are saying - is there a book we can read? Absolutely, hundreds of

them, but there is only one written by our creator, the maker of heaven and earth – the bible. God has a word for both parents and for children.

The book of Ephesians is so rich, because the Lord tells us who we are in Christ, and then tells us how to live our life in Christ. The first three chapters are all about positional truth. Next three chapters, chapters 4, 5, and 6, all about how to live it out. And it has so much about family life.

It tells us in verse 18 of chapter 5 that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because the only way you can live the Christian life is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And then it talks about marriage, and from verses 22 to 33, it talks about the husband's role in the marriage, the wife's role in the marriage, and how to have a godly marriage, one that experiences the blessings of oneness.

And then it goes into the family relationships, and it gives the job description of children in the family and the job description of fathers and mothers in the family. This is what it says: ***Ephesians 6:1-4***

1Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— 3“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” 4Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (NIV)

Let's PRAY

Here's the question I want you to consider: What is God's plan to help parents and children thrive at home, to prosper as a family?

The first three verses of Ephesians 6 are for children. ***“Children, obey your parents in the Lord. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise).”***

I. Children Obey and Honor Your Parents

When the Lord tells us about family relationships, when He talks about the home,

He gives job descriptions - for the husband, for the wife, for the children, the job description for the parents, and the job description for the children are very clear.

Most theologians agree that the children Paul is referring to were under 15, because at 15 they would "graduate torah school" and be able to marry.

And God gave every child a big commandment, so big that He wrote it on tablets of stone with His own finger, commandment number 5. It's the fifth commandment that's on the second tablet. You know, two tablets of stone for the Ten Commandments.

First four have to do with our relationship with God. The next six are our relationship with other people. And the top of the second tablet is, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER."

Every child is to do that, honor his father and mother. The word honor means "to value, to esteem, to revere." And we're to do that. It's the first commandment, Paul says, with a promise. And what is the promise? The promise is found in Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5 where the Ten Commandments are repeated, "...that it may be well you, and that you live long on the earth."

The word that's used here for "children" is, is a generic word. It's often a word used to talk about Christians. The Bible calls them children. When John said, "I have no greater joy than to see my children walking in the truth," he's not talking about his biological children. He's talking about his spiritual children.

So, we're all children of the Lord. But this tells us that the honor we give our parents is seen a little differently as we grow up.

A. **Young children, from toddlers to about 12, honor their parents through OBEDIENCE.**

Chapter 6, verse 1, "***Obey. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.***" The word for obey literally means "to hear under."

It's to submit yourself with compliant acceptance to your parents, and to do what they say. You can't have a successful home without having some rules about the house.

Typically, a mom and dad will set a rule that says, "Okay, this is bedtime." And so, that's a rule. You can have a rule that homework is done first after school before play time, video or TV time. And a child is to obey his parents in the Lord. Why? "Cause it's right to do that and to say, "Yes, mam, yes, sir."

Kids, oftentimes love to ask the question "WHY". And then sometimes, an exasperated parent will say, "Because I said so, that's why." That doesn't help the kid. But if you answer, "Because the Lord says so. And if you don't - you may not live long on the earth. It's not going to go well with you."

Young children honor their parents by obeying them. And because they're young, mom and dad can enforce that. Teenagers, do they have to obey? Yes, they still live in the house.

B. Teenagers honor their parents by RESPECTING them.

Respect is huge. Now, a little child naturally respects mom and dad. When we talk about honoring your father and mother, which is the first command with a promise, it really helps a child if mom and dad are honorable.

It's hard to honor your parents when they're dishonorable. But we're still commanded to do that. I'm commanded to love Nancy, even when she's not loveable. She's commanded to respect me, even when I'm not acting very respectable. And kids are commanded to honor their parents, even when they're not honorable.

So, Nancy can help me love her by being loveable. I can help her respect me by being respectable. And we can help our kids to honor us by being honorable.

But here's the thing: When a kid gets to be a teenager, what tends to happen? Mom and dad become out of touch, have you noticed that? To a teenager, suddenly, it's like, mom and dad don't know anything. Not picking on the teenagers. That's just the way it was for all of us when we got to be teenagers. You might have heard the quote by Mark Twain: "When a boy turns 13, put him in a barrel and feed him through a knothole. When he turns 16, plug up the hole."

And one of the problems that makes it so difficult is teenagers think, I know everything, and my parents know nothing. And so, there is disrespect.

I heard about a mom. She put a little notepad on the refrigerator. It had a little pen attached to it, and it said, "If we're out of it, let me know."

And the daughter came along and wrote, "Well, mom, I think you're pretty old-fashioned, but I wouldn't say you're out of it."

And that kind of missed the point. Mom was talking about groceries.

But teenagers can have this idea that mom and dad are out of it. They don't know anything of what it's like to be me. Now, I will say this: It is harder today to be a teenager than ever before. It's hard to be a kid because of the day and age in which we live.

Left is right, and up is down, and everything is turned on its head. And woe to those who call evil good, and good evil. We live in a society like that, and it's hard for kids, and it's hard for teenagers, I get that, but God's word remains the same, and Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen!

But to think that your parents don't understand anything of what it means to be a teenager, that's just faulty thinking. They were teenagers once. I was a teenager once. Dads know how kids think when you're talking about boys that want to date their daughters. They know because they were one.

Another Mark Twain quote that I thought was insightful. He said, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in 7 years." Isn't that interesting? Well, he just got smart!

We honor, in those teenage years, not just obedience, but through respect.

c. **Adult children honor their parents by CHERISHING them.**

You never get past the fifth commandment, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.

The goal is to grow up and raise your children so that they are responsible and mature; spiritually mature, emotionally mature, financially independent adults that can live their lives, and they're not dependent on mom and dad anymore. But that doesn't mean as an adult child that you stop honoring your parents.

We do that by cherishing them. We let them know that they're special to us. We value them and esteem them, and we include them in our lives. And we come to them for advice and counsel. Now remember this, mom and dad:

When your kids are little, you're the manager of those kids. But then you have more of a coaching role as they get older. And then you become a consultant, and you only consult when they ask you.

And listen! Adult children, honor your parents. Treasure them. Include them. Seek their counsel. It's important, and it makes a difference. And those who have a good relationship with mom and dad, it goes well with them, and their days are prolonged on the earth, and God can bless.

So, that is the command to children, and it's a BIG one; obey your parents and honor your mother and father. Now, let's go to the parents. Parents have an important job to do, a critical job to do.

Verse 4, "And, fathers, (parents) do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

I. **Parents Don't Provoke your Kids to Anger.**

Don't provoke them to anger. Don't exasperate your children. That word means "to irritate, to enrage, to rouse to wrath."

So, let's look at those two things, the things that we don't do and the things that we are to do. We must avoid the big pitfalls of parenting. Those are the don'ts.

A. **The DON'Ts of Parenting.**

1. **Don't be overly protective with your children.**

Don't parent your kid with a short leash, and you're just watching them like a hawk. And, you know, we do that when they're little. You'd better watch them like a hawk because they can get into all kinds of trouble, quickly. **(Story)**

But as they grow, it doesn't need to be short leash anymore. You must let out the line, so to speak, so that they can grow. But a parent who is overly protective, what happens? He doesn't teach his kid how to be an adult. He doesn't teach them how to grow up. It's always fighting the child's battles for them. Always coming in there, helicopter parents, always taking up for their child, always doing everything, making all the decisions for the child.

I heard a story about a guy. He was out in the forest. And he ran across a cocoon. And a butterfly was coming out of the cocoon, and he was struggling to get out of the cocoon.

And the man thought, "I'm going to help this butterfly." And he reached into his pocket and grabbed a pocketknife and slit that cocoon open so that the butterfly could easily get out. And when the butterfly got out, the butterfly could not fly.

The butterfly was not developed. The butterfly was a sitting duck. The butterfly could not be a butterfly because he had let him out of the cocoon. And what he realized was: I thought I was helping the little butterfly, but that struggle in the cocoon is necessary for that butterfly to mature and get strong enough so that when it gets out of there, the wings can work right.

So many parents, because you are overly protective, you are not teaching your kid how to grow up to be independent, how to be emotionally healthy and spiritually healthy, and you make them attached to you and dependent upon you, instead of on God.

If you do that, you will provoke them to anger. You know why, because they're not going to be able to fly, and they're going to say, "Why didn't you teach me, mom and dad, how to fly? Why were you hovering over me all the time? Why did you have me on such a short leash? And now I'm not developed enough to make it on my own."

Two words to parents who tend to fall in this category, and there are good people

that fall into this category. **Back Off!** Land the helicopter. Let your kids figure out some of their own problems and give them some space and trust them. And you say, "Well, what if they make mistakes?" Help them learn from making mistakes.

What happens when you're an overly protective parent? You exasperate your child. You provoke your child to anger. You may not see it right away, but it's going to be simmering in there because you're not giving them the space that they need as they get older. Don't be overly protective.

You know what parenting is? Parenting is going from being the **administrator** when they are little to being the **advisor** as they get older. And sometimes parents don't make that transition very well.

2. **Don't be overly permissive with your children.**

See, you got the two extremes. You got the short-leash parent over here, and then you have the parent over there and their kid is, "Off the leash. Do whatever you want. I just want to be your friend, the cool parent. Do whatever you want to do. You don't want to eat your dinner? Just have another bowl of ice cream." And everything is permissive, and there are no rules.

Now, if there are boundaries, they struggle with that. And if things aren't fair in the family, they really struggle with that. "That's not fair." Have you ever heard that with kids? They have a keen sense of fairness. And so, you need to be fair, and you need to have boundaries, and there needs to be rules in the home as your kids are growing up, but they need to be reasonable.

Think about parenting this way: Parenting is like flying a kite. And when you fly a kite, you get the kite on the string, and you only let out a little bit of string as you try and get that kite up in the air. You don't start with 500 feet of string and run for 500 feet before you'd even get the line tight, to get this thing up. It wouldn't work. So, you have 10 feet, and as it gets up in the wind, what do you do? You let out more line and more line and more line and more line until you can get it high up in the sky. That's a good picture of parenting.

The Bible says this, talking about being overly permissive: "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Proverbs 22, verse

15, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child..."

3. **Don't fail to praise your children.**

Some parents tend to have a problem with praise. We can see the things that our kids aren't doing, and we think, well, I'm helping you by pointing out your failures, and I can nitpick you to death. And you do that to a kid and after a while they say, "What's the use? I can never do anything right. I always seem to be failing."

Find something they're doing good and praise them for it and brag on them and encourage them. Warren Wiersbe says, "The opposite of provoking them to anger is to encourage them so that they would say, "Yes, I can do this."

Many of us remember the actor, James Caan in the movie, Elf, Brian's Song, and he was in The Godfather. He's been in a lot of movies. In an interview once, he was talking about his dad, and he said, "I was a good athlete when I was growing up in high school." He said he was a good basketball player, a good baseball player. He said, "My dad would come to my games and he would just talk about all the things I did wrong." I'd go 3 for 4, and all he could talk to me about was my one strike-out. Didn't talk to me about the 3 hits."

He said, "I'd play a basketball game, scored 25 points, and the kid on the other team scored 28 points, and my dad was just telling me how good the kid on the other team was." And James Caan said, "You know, after a while, I was like, what's the use? I just gave up."

This is a true story. I heard about a girl who grew up in a home like that, parents pushed and pushed and pushed, especially her mother. She was a straight A student. She was a cheerleader. She was a homecoming queen. And she ended up in a mental institute. She had a nervous breakdown. She said, "No matter what I do, it's never good enough for my mom."

We need to learn from God the Father how He treated God the Son. Before Jesus began His public ministry, He was baptized. And the heavens opened, and the Spirit descended on Him like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, "***This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.***"

And every child needs to hear that from dad, especially. "Son, daughter, I love you, and I am so pleased with you. I'm so proud of you."

You are so good at creativity. You are so good in writing. You are so good in art. You are so good at sports. I love the way that you interact with people. You are so good at making people feel welcome. You are such a friendly person." And you build them up with words of encouragement.

4. **Don't fail to parent your children.**

You're not called to be their pal. You're not called to be popular. You're called to be their parent. And so, don't abdicate that and say, "Well, I don't want to do something here because they might get upset."

If God leads you to intervene in a situation, especially with friendships that you see is going bad - bad company corrupts good morals - you need to intervene.

If they get mad at you, so be it. You're called by God to be their parent, not their pal. If you will parent them when they're young, you can be their friend, when you all get older.

We must avoid the big pitfalls of parenting.

B. **The DO's of Parenting.**

1. **Give them the gift of a loving, lasting marriage.**

That's so critical. The best gift - I heard this years ago and it's so true - the best gift a father can give to his children is to love their mother.

2. **Give them the gift of education and an example.**

Look at it again. "...but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The word discipline means "education." Bring them up to maturity. Nourish them to maturity so that they can be healthy, well-adjusted adults.

That's the goal of parenting. You're not keeping that little girl to be your little girl your whole life. We educate them so that they can become adults. And then we start treating them like adults. We give them more and more responsibility. We let more and more of the kite string out so that they can flourish, and if they don't flourish, wind the string in and educate them.

It says of Jesus (Luke 2:52), "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." That was when He was 12 years old.

And those are the areas where a parent is to train his child.

Wisdom, that is mentally, to understand what is going on in the world, to understand how to do life: how to do a checkbook. How to run a household. How to have skills.

The main goal of helping kids to grow spiritually is to move them from parent - directed decision to self-directed decision to **God directed** decision.

God says BRING THEM UP, in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

Here is what I've learned after growing up being the oldest of 9 children; having 3 brothers, 1 sister, 1 step-brother, 1 step-sister, 1 half-brother, and 1 half-sister. 45 years of marriage with 5 children and eleven grandchildren, and working for many years with youth and children's ministry.

1. **What I have told you today is general revelation from God's word. It's the starting point. But we also have access to specific revelations from the Holy Spirit as to how to love the people in my life.**
2. **Our kids are God's kids, and He would that none perish, but that all have eternal life.**
3. **Because I love all my kids equally, I treat them differently, because they are different.**

Conclusion: I want to close out with this story. It is a father looking back. His kids are already grown. He's looking back at the process of parenting and training

camp in retrospect, and he said this: "If I were starting my family again, I would love my wife more in front of my children. I would laugh with my children more at our mistakes and our joys. I would listen to my children more, even to the littlest one. I would be honest about my weaknesses and not pretend perfection. I would pray differently for my family. Rather than focusing on them, I would focus on me. I would do more things with my children. I would be more encouraging. I would give more praise. I would pay more attention. I would speak about God more intimately. Out of every ordinary thing of every ordinary day I would point them to God."

I don't know where you are in your parenting, but I know this: God wants to help you. You say, "Well, pastor, my kids are already grown and gone." It is not too late for you to have a great relationship with them, to love them, to be an encouragement to them as they raise their own kids. Let's today, as we close, bring all our weaknesses, all our failures, difficulties, joys, and successes to the Lord and say, "Lord, here's my situation, help me to be the parent You want me to be."