

On Dads and Kids

Ephesians 6:1-4

June 21, 2020
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It is Father's Day. Personally, it's one of my favorite days of the year because I am a dad. As many of you know, it took me quite a long time to be qualified to say that. In some ways this gives me a unique perspective on this day. We have many here or watching online who are not dads but wish they could be. They may be single and desire a wife and children. They may be married but struggling with infertility. Perhaps other reasons. I went 44 Father's Days without being a dad. My 45th I was. So, I get that. By this message, don't think I'm assuming every home has a dad or that every dad is a Christian. When that is not true, praise God for godly women who stand in that gap.

Some of you became dads young and there was no real time between wanting to be a dad and becoming a dad. My long gap included despairing of not getting to be a dad, which in some ways makes me treasure it all the more.

Being a dad is truly one of the greatest experiences of my whole life. Unlike a dream vacation or one-off experience, I get to be a dad every day. Does that mean being a dad is awesome every day? No. But it is most days.

Today's message is for dads and those who have dads: *kids*. Kids, you may be wondering, when is it kids' day? I used to ask my parents that. All the parents know the answer. *Every day is kids' day*. Every day God has something very special that kids can do that pleases him.

This is a message for dads and kids. Did you know the Bible has a lot to say about how to please God as a dad and how to please God as a kid? You may think these roles are self-evident, but isn't being a dad more than biologically reproducing, and being a kid more than being a reproduction?

Humans reflect the image of God and that God is a triune God and in that Trinity there is one person who is himself a father: *God the Father*. Don't think of that as a description of what God is like. It is essential to who God is. He is a father and from the paradigm of God the Father in humanity is the archetype of all human dads. It's a huge privilege and a massive responsibility.

How do kids please God in being kids and how do dads please God in their fatherhood?

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "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." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4, ESV).

Let's take these in the order Scripture does. Scripture starts with children. If we took the time, we could see how the Bible is the basis for the dignity and worth of children. The Roman culture of the first century generally did not value children. Even the Jewish culture, which was very family-centric, failed to meet Jesus' value standard for children. You remember when children were brought to Jesus, the disciples tried to shoo them away assuming the important rabbi Jesus had more important people to give attention to. Jesus

rebuked them and said, "Let the children come to me...for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14).

In societies where power and money are idolized, children are marginalized because they have neither. Christianity is countercultural and it values people not based on their net worth or what they have to offer, or how big they are, but who they are in God's sight. Where Christianity goes, you always find children's hospitals and orphanages and families that value little people. Certainly, that is true here at Bethel Church.

But kids, listen, that doesn't mean you have a free pass to be little tyrants around the house or the church. No. God has something for you specifically in the way that you relate to your parents. What is it? "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*" (Ephesians 6:1) Kids, that's it! All you have to do is obey your parents. How hard can this be? Obey. Let's discuss what obedience means. Obedience is:

- *Right away* – delayed obedience is disobedience. Delayed obedience is a power move on your part where you will obey, but on your terms, your schedule, when you get around to it.
- *All the way* – Partial obedience is disobedience. We think of King Saul who obeyed partially by going to war but didn't kill the livestock. God viewed his 90% obedience as disobedience. Obedience strives to meet the full expectation.
- *With a happy heart* – this gets at the text in Ephesians.

"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" (Ephesians 6:2).

Obedience is the required action. Honor is the required attitude. I hope you are learning the Ten Commandments. That's a must list for every Christian home. If so, then you know that the 5th commandment that God gave Moses is mentioned here, "*Honor your father and mother.*"

Honor. It means, "to give weight to." It means, essentially, to always respect them. Hold them in high regard. This commandment is an attitude. Think a moment, what does disrespect sound like? What tone of voice? What emotion is behind it? But honor has an attitude as well. You may not say it, but inside you are thinking, *yes, sir; yes, ma'am.* Their opinions matter and as long as you are living in their home, their opinion is more important than your opinion. *Did I just see the rolling of eyes?* Yes, that's what this command is about. Even as adults we are to honor our father and mother. The requirement to obey disappears, but the need to honor remains.

Paul notes that honoring parents is the only command of the Ten Commandments that brings with it a promise. "*That it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.*" Is this a divine guarantee? No. But it is a general truth that children who honor their parents form character qualities that bless them over the course of their lives. A child who doesn't honor his parents, likely won't honor his teacher, his boss, or anyone else—including God. Parents, this is one reason insisting on your children obeying with a good attitude is critical. Either they learn early on to have a healthy respect for authority God has placed over them or they will struggle with authority all their lives. A defiant child grows into a defiant adult. That doesn't go well for them. Discipline both actions and attitudes. Obedience requires both.

Parents with very young children, I would urge you to not be lax in requiring full and immediate obedience now before habits form in your child's heart or they get the idea they are in charge of the home. Once you abdicate authority in the home to the four-year-old, it's very hard to get it back.

Kids, a good parent isn't your best friend. They are even better than that, they are the parent God placed in your life. Honor your father. *Just on Father's Day, Pastor Steve?* You know the answer, but make sure you do it today too.

Paul turns from kids to dads. Not kids to moms. In fact, in the parallel passages and here, Paul doesn't address mothers directly. Each time it's fathers. Here's what he says,

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Paul gives one thing not to do and four things every dad must do.

What Not to Do – Do Not Provoke Your Children to Anger

There are many other things dads shouldn't do, but this is the one Paul mentions. *"Do not provoke your children to anger."* Why? It must be because Paul observed this to be the most prevalent and damaging dad mistake. Parenting is essentially the process of nurturing children to adulthood. Nurturing is like gardening or landscaping. I've done some of that during this pandemic. Some of my plants have done well; some have not. There generally is a reason. Poor soil. Too much water. Not enough water. Too much sun. Not enough sun. Plants have a threshold of need in these categories. Either too much or too little stunts the growth.

Parenting is similar to that. Too much and too little have to be avoided. These precious little souls are delicate and need a gentle and steady hand.

John MacArthur lists nine examples of parenting behavior that provoke resentment in children.¹

<i>Overprotection</i>	<i>Unrealistic goals</i>
<i>Overindulgence</i>	<i>Favoritism</i>
<i>Discouragement</i>	<i>Neglect</i>
<i>Condescension</i>	<i>Withdrawing love</i>
<i>Excessive discipline</i>	

I would add one more: *passive aggressive parenting*. That is more about manipulation than character development.

Isn't that the temptation all parents face? Rather than developing their character we simply want them to make us look good. Be well-behaved. Get good grades. Do decent in some extracurricular activity: march in the band or be 3rd chair trombone or something. Just enough for my friends and family to think I did OK.

Dads and parents, we have to resist making our kids reflections of our own self-worth. Few things provoke more anger than if kids sense we just want them to make us look good. That is self-oriented parenting. Love is not selfish and parenting love must not be either.

¹ John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting*, p. 136.

Well, then what is a dad to do? If the goal isn't to make my son a mini-me, what's the point?

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Don't tear them down, bring them up. The Greek word means "nourish." The gardening image is helpful. Like a gardener provides the necessary water, sun, and nutrients for a plant to establish itself, a dad is to nourish the garden of each child's heart. This certainly includes providing for their physical needs. That goes without saying.

The focus is more on nurturing their spiritual life. Bring them up in the discipline of the Lord and instruction of the Lord. Discipline and instruction are very similar concepts. The root for instruction has to do with the mind. Spiritual knowledge. Truth. Discipline leans toward the application of biblical truth to life. Instruction is what they know. Discipline is applying what they learn to how they live.

Dads, as a dad, I know this is not easy to do in our culture and with demanding jobs and a thousand things vying for our time and attention. I want to encourage you to regularly project forward in your mind to your deathbed. When you are lying there preparing to step into eternity, what regrets might you have regarding your kids? Nobody wishes they worked more. Nobody wishes they made more money. The deathbed crystallizes what is actually important in life. There, in the last hours of life, will you wish you could go back to today, June 21, 2020, and start over? *I wish I would have nourished their spiritual lives more. I wish I would have cultivated their spiritual character.* At that point their GPA is irrelevant. Their accomplishments in sports or music or whatever are irrelevant. At that point you will think, I want my kids to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord of their life AND I want to see my kids in heaven.

Men, if you just go with the flow of our culture, you won't parent toward spiritual priorities. The schools and the sports fields and the parks and dance studios are everywhere saying to parents, *this is what great parents do.* There is huge parent guilt over having your kids in all the right programs and activities. Let's ask this question, which of those activities did Jesus himself participate in? The Apostle Paul? Moses? Esther? How did they turn out? What does God think of them? To be a kingdom of God parent these days requires you to NOT think the way the world thinks. I wish all our parents felt as guilty about not disciplining their kids as they do not having them in Little League or ballet.

I guarantee you on your deathbed and one second after you die, those things won't matter. It pains me to see parents leveraging their weekends and money and time and focus on the unimportant things and by doing so missing the most important thing.

Let's get practical. How do fathers nourish the spiritual lives of their kids?

What to Do

Earnestly pray for your children and with your children

If there is low hanging fruit here, prayer is certainly it. Nothing brings God into the home like a dad earnestly praying with his kids. Does that mean every day is *Valley of Vision* level prayers? No. It's not in our home either.

It's the consistency of praying. And yes, pray before meals and bed. That's good. If you're doing that, well done. Pray spontaneously when you hear a family member is in crisis or the

little one has a boo-boo; these bring God into the culture of the home. That's the point. Prayer brings God into the home and into the heart. Fill your home with prayers.

Create a spiritual culture in the home

My parents did this really well. Regular devotions and prayer. Never missed church. Every week seeing dad write a check to give to the church and missionaries and other kingdom causes.

We were blessed to have missionaries often in our home. They would tell their stories and I would sit there in rapt attention wondering, *does God want me to be a missionary to remote Africa? I hope not. God I'll go, but I'm not very mechanical and I might not do well.*

I've told you before we had verses and spiritual sayings in plaques around the house. Joanna Gaines may not decorate that way, but I could quote most of them to you to this day. It depends on what's important to you, I suppose.

Every home has a culture. What's yours? Is God a part of it? How? It doesn't just happen. Be intentional. Someday you will be glad you did.

Teach them biblical truth

But I'm not a theologian! I'm no Billy Graham. I don't know what to say. Do you have a Bible? Just reading the Bible gets you 2/3 of the way. Then ask, *Kids, what do you think God is saying here?* They are going to say the craziest and funniest things, but it gets gospel conversation going. It doesn't have to be very deep to be effective with children.

Don't farm this out to Sunday School or Awana. Teach them. Drip it in as life allows.

Here is the important of all:

Model what seeking first the kingdom of God looks like

I don't remember much of what my dad taught me. I don't remember any specific prayer that made a difference in my life. I don't recall any particular moment of instruction or discipline making a huge impact.

Biblical fathering is the cumulative effect of a life observed up close. Eventually, your kids figure you out. They know what makes you tick. There at the core of your being needs to be the love for Christ. Imperfect? Ebbs and flows. Mistakes? Yes!

Notice I didn't say perfection. Super dad. Awesome-all-the-time dad. It needs to be real. The gospel is that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior. If our kids see from us our own sense of unworthiness, and we seek from them forgiveness for our failures, and they receive from us grace in their failures, and all this is done with a sense of God's glory, it will powerfully impress on them that Dad thinks Jesus is great. Does that guarantee heaven forever with your kids? No. Each child must make their own life choices regarding Jesus.

But here's what we know, while faithful fathering can't guarantee salvation, unfaithful fathering can spiritually hinder a child. They take their cues from us. If a sports team is the big deal, they will likely cheer for that team their whole life. If fishing is the big thing; they

will fish their whole life and remember days fishing with you. You are setting a lifelong direction and priority.

Remember, Jesus said it is better to have a millstone around your neck and be cast into the sea than to cause one of these little ones to stumble (Matthew 18:6). Dads, let's take this Father's Day to renew our purpose to nourish our children's hearts toward a personal faith walk with Jesus.

One second after you die, you will be so glad you did. Happy Father's Day.

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