

A Mother's Day Sermon for Parents and Children

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Sunday, May 10th, 2015

This is a special morning for us. At the end of this service we're going to have a parent / child dedication, which is simply a way for us to recognize the blessing of children and publicly pray for God's help in shepherding these children in the ways of the Lord. Today is also Mother's Day and therefore an opportunity to honor our moms.

I want to say at the outset that I recognize this can be a sensitive and even very difficult day for many of you. Maybe you never had a mom, or you've had a very strained relationship with your mom. Maybe your mom has passed away. Therefore Mother's Day could simply be a reminder of those feelings of loss, and that could make this a sad day for you instead of a happy one. Some of you may be in the place wanting to be a mom, but that has not happened yet in your life. Maybe you're a single woman who longs to be married and have a family. Or maybe you're married and are longing to get pregnant. Those unfulfilled desires could make this a difficult day.

I simply want to acknowledge this up front, asking that we all be sensitive to those situations. And also asking, whatever your situation, that we could devote our attention this morning to some biblical instruction regarding parents and children. This is a very important matter for us, and a fitting one for us to discuss on this particular day.

I have 3 things I want to do in this sermon. First, there is an exhortation to children. Second, an exhortation to parents. And finally, I want to encourage and honor moms. The main passage we'll look at together is Ephesians 6:1-4

An Exhortation to Children (verses 1-3)

Children, you need to listen up, because these verses are written directly to you. You may think that obeying your parents is no more than an annoying expectation in your home. But as we come to these words of Scripture this morning, we find that God Almighty commands children to obey their parents. Look at it with me, in verse 1 of Ephesians 6, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Do you know what this means? It means that when you disobey your parents, you are not only disobeying dad or mom. You are also disobeying the sovereign,

all-powerful God of the universe. Think about that the next time you're tempted to disobey.

If we were sitting around talking about this, you might say to me, But you don't understand, I have lousy parents. How can I be expected to obey my dad or mom when their lives are a mess? They aren't setting a good example for me. They aren't leading our family in godly ways. Their expectations are too high. They might not even be believers. How can I be expected to obey and honor someone I don't even respect?

I should first say that if your parents are telling you to sin in some way, or if they are abusing you in some way, you should ask for help. Talk to your Sunday School teacher, or one of the elders, so that we can help in that situation.

But aside from that, you are expected to obey your parents, even though your parents have many faults and shortcomings. Notice that the verse doesn't say, Obey your parents when they are perfectly righteous. Obey your parents when they deserve to be obeyed. Obey your parents when you think that what they are asking you to do seems reasonable. That's not what the verse says. It says, Children, obey your parents in the Lord. You see, the command here is not so much about the parents. It's not dependent on how well they are doing as parents. You are to obey them, not because they themselves deserve your obedience, but because the Lord deserves your obedience and demands your obedience. You must obey your parents in the Lord, meaning you obey them as you obey the Lord. A very significant way that you must honor and obey the Lord is by submitting to the authority of your parents by honoring and obeying them.

I hope that every child here will do some soul-searching right now and consider what a serious thing it is to obey your parents. Don't think of it as a frustrating limitation on your freedom. Don't become bitter or angry because it seems like your parents are always telling you what to do. That's the way God designed it! You need someone to tell you what to do at this point in your life. You need your parents to help you and instruct you and discipline you so that one day you'll be mature enough to make it on your own.

I'll tell you a story . . . an embarrassing story about something that happened to me when I was a teenager. This story came to mind because I was thinking of Jane Derrick being here this weekend. She spoke at the women's retreat. Jane is a dear friend of our family. She's been friends with my parents for decades now. And I remember one time as a teenager when my

family was visiting her in her home in Richmond, Virginia. It was summertime, and I was supposed to be staying in shape for the upcoming football season. So I headed out for a jog around Jane's neighborhood. I didn't take a map. This was before smartphones, so I had nothing like that to help me. I didn't ask anyone what a good route would be for me to jog. I didn't even think to make a mental note of Jane's address. How foolish of me.

Well, I enjoyed my jog for quite awhile . . . until I realized I had no idea where I was or how to get back. I wasn't sure what to do. I needed help. I needed direction. I remember the embarrassment of walking into a dentist's office, because it was the nearest place I saw that I figured I might be able to get some help. I walked in there all hot and sweaty, into the waiting room. I went to the reception desk and told them I was lost and asked for a phone book so I could look up where Jane Derrick lived, and then asked these kind folks to tell me how to get there.

We all need help navigating the confusing journey of life. And God graciously ordained the family structure to give children that support and guidance. What I hope you'll understand, young people, is that you need that help. You may pridefully think that you know exactly where to go, like I did when I headed out for that jog. But in reality, you need some older and wiser people to point you in the right direction.

Let me say this particularly to teenagers. You may think your parents don't know anything about anything. I remember thinking that as a teenager. My parents are so out of touch with reality, it's hard to believe we live in the same universe. But you know what, over the course of just a few years I began to see how wise my parents are. And I began to see that the rules and expectations they had for me were not their attempt to make my life miserable. NO. They wanted the best for me. They loved me and wanted to protect me from my own foolishness and wanted to teach me how to be a responsible, mature adult.

Mark Twain said something that I can totally identify with. 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." Do you get the point of what he's saying? It's not that the dad learned so much in 7 years. Rather, the son's perspective changed so that he could recognize his father's wisdom.

My encouragement to you is to recognize NOW that the guidelines and expectations of your parents are good for you. Your parents do know what they're talking about, and you need to

humble yourself to realize that they actually know more than you do about a lot of things, and they are wiser than you are, and they still have authority over you, and therefore you need to respect them and honor them and obey them.

That's verse 1. Verses 2-3, then, give a quotation from the 10 commandments. This is the 5th commandment. "Honor your father and mother." Then Paul inserts this comment and points out that this is the first commandment with a promise. And then he quotes the rest of the commandment, which is the promise, "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." In Exodus 20, this was referring to the Promised Land that God was giving to the Israelites. But Paul changes it a little to make it a more general statement. He says if you obey and honor your parents, your life will go well and you will live long. This is a general principle, and there are certainly exceptions, but the point is that your life will go better for you when you obey your parents. You may not believe that right now. You may think that your life would be better if you could just have your own way all the time.

But think about it for a minute. If you are constantly battling your parents over every little chore and every rule, first of all, you'll be punished in some way. And that's not fun. Also, that kind of attitude will carry over into school and other areas of life, where it will result in conflicts with teachers and other authority figures. And when it comes time for you to get a job, no employer is going to put up with laziness or disrespect. But if you learn how to obey and honor your parents, your parents will give you more freedom and more responsibility, and you'll be able to enjoy more of the things you want to do. And you will know how to obey and honor your teachers at school, and you'll know how to respect and meet the expectations of your employer someday. Obeying your parents will bring all kinds of benefits, both now and for the rest of your life.

A Word of Exhortation to Parents

Verse 4, then, addresses parents. Specifically fathers are mentioned, and there is special application for fathers. But today I'm going to apply this generally to parents.

Paul describes this task first by saying what it should not be, and then saying what it should be. It should be done, NOT by provoking our children to anger. I think the key here is remembering that my position of authority over my children is not about me. It's about God. And when my children disobey me, the more significant issue is that they have disobeyed God. Tedd Tripp, in his book *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, says, "If you

correct and discipline your children because God mandates it, then you need not clutter up the task with your anger. Correction is not your showing anger for their offenses; it is rather reminding them that their sinful behavior offends God. It is bringing His censure of sin to these subjects of His realm. He is the King. They must obey.”

If I think of my children’s disobedience primarily as an offense against me, then I’ll be more prone to get angry and then provoke my children to anger because I’ll end up down at their level bickering and quibbling about this or that. But if I recognize that God has put me in the position of authority, and He has commanded my children to obey me and my wife, then I can deal with disobedience by pointing out the sinful attitude or action that has been done against God, and reminding my child that I’m under God’s authority, too, and it’s my responsibility to discipline them.

Anger is an all-too-common emotion that rises up in our sinful hearts when we don’t get our way. When my children are not acting the way I want them to act, when their behavior is conflicting with my plans or my schedule, then I am so susceptible to the sin of anger. And when I’m angry, or when I discipline in anger, I will provoke my children to anger. My anger will be felt and caught by my children. When this is happening, it means that things have become too much about me.

This brings us to the second exhortation of verse 4, that we must bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. First there is a negative prohibition, then a positive exhortation. So on the one hand, we must not be angry or provoke our children to anger, which will mean that we must fight against the tendency to be selfish and domineering and the temptation to abuse our leadership role. But on the other hand we must also make sure that we *are* leading. We can’t be permissive parents who shirk our responsibility by letting our kids do whatever they want. That’s not loving. That’s neglect.

Let me comment on “discipline of the Lord,” and then “instruction of the Lord.” These two terms, discipline and instruction, are almost synonyms, and they summarize how we must shepherd and lead our children. There will be a correcting component and a teaching component, and these two must overlap significantly. As we correct wrong behavior, we are teaching. And as we teach, we are warning against wrong behavior and presenting a vision for godliness.

First of all, then, we are responsible to discipline our children. We must correct their disobedient and sinful behavior.

There need to be consequences for disobedience. For younger children this will involve spanking. I know that's controversial. But it's not my idea. It's a biblical idea. Proverbs 13:24 says, "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." There needs to be that clear consequence for children, exercised in a controlled and loving way by the parents. The children must know that they are under your authority. They must know that you are in charge, and that God designed it that way.

As the children grow there can be more probing conversations that address the heart and appeal to the child's conscience. On all of these matters I would strongly recommend the book by Tedd Tripp, which I just quoted from, entitled *Shepherding a Child's Heart*.

The second broad focus here is the instruction of the Lord. There will be conversations at the dinner table, conversations about Sunday School and the worship service, conversations about school, conversations about endless topics and questions that will come up that can (and must) be connected back to the biblical worldview. And then there must also be intentional times of family worship—reading the Bible with our kids, praying with them, asking them questions to see what they're comprehending and to make sure they are growing in their knowledge and understanding of spiritual things. I exhort you, parents, to make plans for how you are going to instruct your children in the ways of the Lord.

We must be reminded at this point that all of our efforts in discipline and instruction are unable to bring our children into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This is not something we have control over. There's not a 10-step plan that assures our kids will become Christians. This is why we must also pray for our children. Only God can change their hearts, and our hope is that He will use our Christ-centered discipline and instruction as a means of doing that. But only He can save.

We want to be clear about this today, especially since we'll be having a parent / child dedication later in the service. That dedication time does not in any way ensure the salvation of these little ones. What we're really doing is dedicating ourselves as parents to obeying Ephesians 6:4. We want to raise our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and we want this church family to help us and hold us accountable in that calling.

On a related note, this is one of the reasons we don't sprinkle babies with water. Maybe you've attended churches

before where that is done. And you may wonder why we're not sprinkling these babies. One reason is that we don't think that's biblical. There are no instances of babies being baptized in Scripture. What we do see in Scripture is people being baptized who have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. And then baptism, being immersed in water, is an outward symbol of what has happened to that person . . . they have been buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life. To sprinkle a baby with water confuses the meaning of baptism. And it also has the strong potential to confuse how we are to view that child. If we baptize an infant and therefore consider them to be part of the church in some way, does that mean they are already saved, or are surely going to be saved? Many churches that practice infant baptism will deny both of those statements. They're not claiming that baptizing infants guarantees salvation. But it can be confusing, nonetheless, to both parents and children.

What I want to be clear about as we're applying Ephesians 6:4 is the fact that we must evangelize our children. We have no guarantee that they are going to be saved. We need to pray for their salvation and talk to them about their soul and their standing before God. We need to point out their sin and show them their need for a Savior. This is part of the godly instruction we need to be speaking into their lives.

This can be done so effectively in the midst of discipline as well. Pointing out that their behavior has not only hurt others and been disobedient to their parents, but they have sinned against the holy God of the universe. That's a great teachable moment to try to impress upon our children the fact that they need a Savior. "You just lied, or lashed out in anger against your brother or sister, or just blatantly disrespected your mom. You know that means? It means you're a sinner. And God hates sin." And then we can point our children to the cross of Jesus Christ, where God poured out His wrath against sin on His own Son. Jesus died in the place of sinners, so that everyone who trusts in Him will be forgiven. This is the Gospel. And this is the God-centered message that needs to permeate our homes. In those moments of correction and discipline. Also at the meal table, in the car, at bedtime, in the morning, in the evening. This discipline and instruction needs to be woven into the daily life of the family.

Remember the words of Deuteronomy 6 that were read earlier, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk

by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”
(Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

This is an awesome responsibility and privilege, parents. To be on the lookout for teachable moments. To continually be looking for opportunities to talk about the Lord. To connect the dots for your kids of how God relates to all of life. There are endless things we can talk about, and everything we talk about relates to God in some way.

Just the other day at lunch we were eating clementines, and Milaina commented on how neatly they can be divided into little sections. In fact, they're the perfect size for our one and half year old, Micah. He loves those things. About as quickly as I can divide it up and put it in front him, it disappears. And I commented, Yeah, it's almost as if these were designed to be eaten. Isn't it good of God to have created these tasty foods for us and even packaged them so nicely.

Another little conversation from this past week was about eyebrows. As we were walking home from the park Friday evening and talking about random things . . . Noah mentioned Gandalf, whom Tolkien describes as having eyebrows that stick out from under his hat. Again I thought about God's good design. I was pushing the stroller up the hill, some sweat on my forehead, so I talked about how cool it is that God gave us eyebrows to keep the sweat out of our eyes. Not that they need to be as bushy as Gandalf's, but they do come in handy. We can thank God for our eyebrows.

So as you're sitting in your house, and as you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise, instruct your children in the things of God.

And one more thing . . . As you discipline and instruct your children, and as you pray for God's grace to do these things well, remember that your influence includes much more than the words you speak to your children. They live with you. They watch you. They know you. And they will see what kind of difference the Gospel makes in your life. If you're ornery and impatient and selfish and angry and discontent, and then you sit down to teach them about the Gospel, what kind of effect do you think that will have on a young person? On the other hand, if your children see you confess your impatience and selfishness and anger, and they see you fighting for joy in the Lord, then you'll be communicating something very different. We're not going to be perfect. That's not possible. But we can at least be humble, admitting our faults and asking for forgiveness when we've sinned

against our kids. Our children need to see in us a passion for God. They need to see that we are desperate for God, that we cling to the cross of Christ and that we go to the Bible for help and for hope. It's with that kind of passion that we must instruct our children.

A Word of Encouragement to Mothers

Finally, I want to share a word of encouragement to moms and an encouragement to all of us to encourage moms.

Moms, you have a mighty position of influence in the world. You need to know that. You have the opportunity to shape the minds and hearts of your children in a way that nobody else has. The difficult thing is that young kids aren't usually very good at expressing appreciation for all that you're doing for them. They probably won't be putting together a cheering section to applaud your fine meals or your stellar job with the laundry. They very well may forget to say thank you when you correct their behavior or make them go to bed or when you read them the Bible. And they certainly aren't going to sit down with you for a year-end review and complement your hard work and reward you with a big raise.

So here's an important area in which you need the encouragement of Scripture to motivate you. You need to see through the eyes of faith that this role of being a mother is immensely significant. I love how the Apostle Paul, when he is writing to Timothy, highlights the faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother.

This is a passage about the inspiration of Scripture that many of us are familiar with:

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:14–17, ESV)

Timothy had the great blessing in his life of receiving biblical instruction from a young age. Kids, if your parents read the Bible to you and teach you about God, you should be very grateful for that. And moms, don't be discouraged when you feel like your efforts for your kids are unfruitful. Persevere. Trust that God is at work through your godly influence and instruction.

At the beginning of that letter to Timothy, Paul mentions more specifically where that godly influence came from.

“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” (2 Timothy 1:5, ESV)

God uses mothers and grandmothers to pass along a legacy of faith.

I want to conclude, now, with Proverbs 31:30, which says, “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” This is a good exhortation to all of us today to honor those women in our lives who fear the Lord, who have a passion in their lives to honor the Lord. It is appropriate for us to find great joy in all the manifestations of God’s grace. When we see evidences of grace in our wives, or mothers, or sisters, we ought to praise them for these things. We ought to celebrate what God is doing. Proverbs 31:28 says, “Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.” Isn’t that a great Mother’s Day verse! That’s what this day should be about. Children, make sure that today, and other days too, you express how much you appreciate your mother and her godly virtues. Husbands, be intentional about noticing and complementing the godly characteristics you see in your wife.

What a blessing it is to be married to a woman who fears the Lord! This is not something to take for granted. The first verse in Proverbs 31 makes that very point, “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.” I want to say before all of you that I am so grateful to God for giving me a wife who fears the Lord, who is a godly role model for our children, who prays for them and for me. It is an unspeakable blessing, and one that I come to appreciate more and more with each passing year. Stacy is more precious to me than any treasure. She is an encouragement to me when I’m down. She points me to the Gospel. She spurs me on to love and good deeds. And so I, today, am glad to have this opportunity to voice my delight in her.

I hope that we will all cherish and honor the godly women in our lives. And let’s look for meaningful ways to communicate that.

Children, obey your parents. Parents, bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. And moms, I pray that you will be very encouraged in the great calling God has given you. And I hope you will feel very loved and honored on this Mother’s Day.