

The Parents' Assignment
The Family Assignments
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Grab your Bibles and let's go to Ephesians 6. One verse this morning and then we'll certainly cast our eyes on numerous others. They will be on your screen. We're talking about "The Family Assignment," how we are creatures, we are not our creators. We are under the authority of our Lord God Creator and he has assigned how he wants the social order of this earth to be lived out and because of the new birth, because of the power of the Spirit in our hearts, we have been liberated from blindness and self-centeredness and worldly wisdom, liberated unto the ability to embrace and celebrate our Creator's all-wise design for family life. We've been looking at that together. We've talked about the husband's assignment, we've talked about the wife's assignment and now we will talk about this morning the parent or parental assignment in two subtitles here that came out to me and literally, I usually entitle my messages right before the service starts because I don't want to pin anything down. I want it to be free in my heart and mind until right before we come out, but I thought these two words fit very well: God-centered and balanced. Parenting that is both God-centered and balanced.

Let's look at Paul's brief exhortation here as he comes to talking about parenting and, of course, we're going to talk about this as our first main point here in just a moment. Notice the first word, Ephesians 6:4,

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now, you don't have to turn there but just right quick, Colossians he gives the same basic exhortation in Colossians 3:21. He says,

21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

So, I. When we come to parenting, we understand again and clearly it is a father's responsibility. The father takes the lead role and he assumes a responsibility for bringing up the children or parenting according to the word of God and for the glory of God. Both Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 remind us that it's the father who assumes this, that he would discipline his own children, he would lead them to respect authority and he would

raise them in such a way and bring them up in such a way that he does not exasperate them or provoke them to anger. That's the clear biblical instruction.

Now, the Old Testament spelled this out very well also. Genesis 18:19 referring to Abraham,

19 For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.

So here we have God's clear instruction, the father is the leader in this. Now certainly mom has her role, an extremely valuable role, but she doesn't bear the burden of accountability for the parenting that the father will bear. Did you hear that? Mom does not bear the accountability to God that the father will bear.

Also in Exodus 20:12, we know all of God's law is summed up in the Ten Commandments and he says in Exodus 20:12,

12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Again, the honoring of the parents and that emphasizes the parents' role and the father's role in parenting.

So in Ephesians 6:4 it is the father who is instructed to bring them up. This speaks of the totality of childhood and the adolescent years and it is to be God-centered. Now, I'll emphasize this more strongly at the end of the message but let me say a word or two about that. When I say God-centered, I mean that we categorically reject what I would call segmented parenting, and by segmented parenting, I mean we kind of look at our parenting role as a pie shape and one wedge of the pie is maybe there is school life, another wedge of the pie is their church life, and a third edge of the pie is their home life. We let the school teach them their secular education, the home gives them their social education and then the church gives them spiritual education. But that is wrong. That's not the way God has ordained this to be. All of it is to be under the Lord. All of it is to be about him. All is to be centered in him. It's like a wagon wheel, if you will, where God is the center and everything flows from him. You don't have these separate pieces like a pie, you have one whole that's centered in the Lord, and it is the fathers that must have the wisdom to see the difference and implement this God-centered approach.

We know very clearly that when fathers are weak or when fathers are absent, that there is a deep void left in the home and in the upbringing of children. Paul Meyer, a psychologist said and I quote, "A vast majority of neurotics have grown up in homes where there was no father or the father was dominated by the mother. Studies show that in households where there is no father present or a domineering mother is present, the incidence of young boys involving themselves in homosexuality greatly increases."

Notice what else the Bible says about fathers being responsible in the home in 1 Samuel 3:13, "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them." So here this is referring to Eli, his sons brought a strange and unapproved approach to worshiping in the temple and their father did not rebuke them and so God brought a judgment on the father. In the New Testament again in 1 Timothy 3:4, an elder "must be one who manages his own household well." Again, the father having the responsibility.

It is the father who must see that the household is managed well. Now, in his management, he utilizes many things and one cannot underestimate the great and essential value of the mom, the mother in the home. Certainly she is deeply involved. As a matter of fact, she may be more involved in the daily instructions and in the daily discipline because often she's there more hours, at least I would prefer and I would hope that she is, but nevertheless the burden before God is still on the father. The wife is the extension of her husband in disciplining the children.

Now, not only does a husband discipline his children sometimes through the agency of his wife but also sometimes, especially in the Bible days, there were tutors or servants. Now, we might make the parallel today of schools. Sometimes fathers choose to send their children to schools, sometimes a public school, sometimes a private school or a private Christian school, and these are helpful and we don't draw any lines on that at Grace Life because the Scripture gives that opening. So it's open to an interpretation of what's best for you and you to seek the Lord. You may home school, you may public school, you may Christian school but be mindful of one thing, fathers, you will give an account to God for this part of your children's lives. We do know that the Scripture refers to tutors and servants being used in the education and upbringing of children, especially in the Roman and Greek churches, and the Bible never condemns that but nevertheless we fathers can't say, "Well, the school is doing that. Well, mom does that." No, it's our responsibility. So while the father cannot do it all personally, again, he's ultimately responsible to God to "bring up his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." So you may think, "Well, we men have been getting it lately. When it comes to the marriage, we are greatly responsible and have all this accountability to God. When it comes to the children, we are responsible and have this great accountability before God." Yes, God has given you a headship and with headship comes responsibility.

II. The secret. Here's what makes the Christian approach to parenting very very different. As we already know from reading a while ago, Paul has brought something out both in his letter to the Ephesians and his letter to the Colossians that would be quite radical for most, if not almost all of the fathers of this day who were non-Christian, and that is when he says, "Don't provoke your children to anger and do not exasperate your children that they may lose heart." This would be a radical concept. The idea of provoking them means to push them to anger and the idea when he says, "Don't exasperate," means to drive them to extremes. The Greek amplification there of "exasperate" is the idea of "taking the wind out of their sails; disciplining the life out of them," if you will, "breaking their spirit

instead of just taming the will." So he tells fathers from the get-go about their parenting, "Wait a minute, you're to have a deep concern for your children. Children are different. You can't raise every one of them the same way, that you're not pushing them into anger and you're not exasperating them in your discipline of them so that they lose heart and you take the wind out of their sails." That would have been a radical concept. That's probably the last thing a Greco-Roman man in this culture would have thought about when he thought about raising his children. Charles Hodge said that this means, "Do not excite the bad passions of your children. Make sure your conduct does not nurture evil in the heart of your child."

Now, if Paul had only said what is recorded in Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right," just like we said about husbands and just like we said about wives, the fathers of the congregation in Ephesus or Colossae would have just kind of laid back in the pew and yawned and said, "What else is new? My goodness, in Greek and Roman culture, we have always firmly expected our children to totally yield to our authority. That's been settled forever. What's really new about this?" Well, let me say this: we know that in Roman culture historians tell us that the authority of fathers was very extreme at times. A father could legally and often did sell his own children as a slave or he could have his own children killed if he wanted to. You say, "That's bizarre." Yeah, we caught up with the Roman culture, it's called abortion.

John MacArthur notes in his commentary that they have a letter that anthropologists have uncovered written in 1 BC by a man to his wife and he writes to her, "Heartiest greets, Note that we are still now in Alexandria and do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria and I beg and beseech you to take care of the little child and as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If you have another child, if it's a boy, let it live. If it's a girl, expose it." Just matter-of-fact. That's the authority fathers had over their children.

Another papyri that was dug up by anthropologists has a man named Seneca, now Seneca was a renowned statesman in Rome at the time that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians and the Colossians and he said and I quote, "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." That's the culture of the day.

They tell us that newborns in this day were laid at their father's feet, if he picked it up, it remained in the household, if he didn't, it would be discarded, taken to a farm or picked up to be used as a slave or a prostitute. So when Paul writes to these churches and he actually says, "Be very concerned for the heart of your child as you discipline him or her and raise them," that would have been new. Actually, a father loving his own child was not really in their thinking but Paul takes it so far, so much further than where they were. He says, "As a parent, you parent in love and you raise your child in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord." Now those men in the Ephesus and Colossae churches are no longer sitting back yawning and saying, "Oh, we know children are to submit to parental authority," and that's true, but what Paul now is saying brings everything into a new balance.

You see, fathers and moms under fathers, we do not parent for our good and our convenience, we must strive to parent for the glory of God and the good of our children. That changed everything and what really changed everything was the power of God in their lives because, you see, everything we're reading about all the way through the end of chapter 5 in Ephesians and down through the top of chapter 6 is you're talking about all these ways that we're to function as family members. All of that is based upon Ephesians 5:18, "do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." The Spirit of God has changed your hearts. The Spirit of God has radically reformed you and now you have the capacity to see and do things in a different way that you did not have before. Look, we are not in the behavior modification business as a church. Did you hear me? We are not in the behavior modification...we'll leave that to the secular educationists. That's not a word, is it, educationist? It works though.

That's not our job and that's the thing they keep running into as they keep wanting us to have this sane, loving, decent, fair, just society. They don't have the power though to change the nature of men's hearts but we do. "God has changed your hearts," Paul says. "You now have the Spirit in you to enable you to understand and grasp things you could not previously understand and grasp and not just understand and grasp them but to embrace them and celebrate them and to begin to live them out." So Paul is saying, "Let me give you some practicals on how you're going to live out the new wisdom you love and embrace." And that's what Christian truth is all about. That's why the primary function of the church is to preach the Gospel that men's hearts may be changed because if God doesn't really change you, all the preaching in the world is not going to help you do better. Now, he does change people through the preaching of the word but it's just preaching stuff for you to do to be a better husband, be a better wife, be a better parent, be a better child, whatever it is, it's not going to work because I'm dealing with an old heart that can't do it. "But now," he said to these guys, "you've been born again. You've received the Spirit of God and now you can be different because Christianity through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit is this new great liberator. Christianity does not liberate you from God's law but he liberates you to love and thrive within God's law." So as they hear these truths, they now know they have a new love in their heart first for God, and now that the word is convicting them as Paul instructs them, they have a new love for their own children they didn't have before. Now they're far more than a cold and harsh father and mother demanding submission, but now they want to lead, nurture and love their children and discipline their children so that they would never be provoked to rebellion or pushed into anger and they would never be exasperated and lose their spirit and the wind be taken out from under their wings, if you will. They now will lead their children in a very different way. That's the secret, God has changed them.

So when you're out in the public square or you're in the office or you're at the school and you try to say, "Well, Christian truth says this," and they are just obstinate and refusing and saying, "You're from the Stone Ages," brothers and sisters, they can't receive it if the Spirit doesn't enable them. It doesn't mean we don't speak truth. We still must speak the truth but don't expect a good response from someone who doesn't understand the Spirit of God or maybe hasn't experienced the Spirit of God.

So now we come to this new aspect and I call it balanced parenting. Now, once again, in the Colossae, Ephesian and the churches in general of the first century, they had the children submitting to the absolute authority of parents, that was down, they had that part, but they were way out of balance on the other part. They are way out of balance on a father and mother's heart being passionately committed to how is God pleased and how is this best for this particular child. I want to be careful how I raise my child so that God will be pleased and my children will be bettered by the whole experience.

So can I give you a collection of stuff that are practicals, if you will, to build on the other side of the balance as we are striving not to provoke our children to rebellion; as we strive to not be exasperating our children that they loose heart. 1. I would say this in the overall balance: do not forsake the rod. Do not forsake the rod. Can I tell you something? A child who is not disciplined firmly when they know they've misbehaved is a child who is not sure that they're loved. Corrective discipline still has its place in parenting, in fact, it's essential if we love our children and if we love God. Hebrews 12:7, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" We hold to this form of corporal punishment in the church. It is, if you will, according to God's superior wisdom. You see, children should be made to obey and God's key method for smaller children is a good spanking or what the Bible calls the rod. Listen to these verses. Proverbs 22:15, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him." Proverbs 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother." Proverbs 20:30, "Stripes that wound scour away evil, And strokes reach the innermost parts."

Now let me give a little addendum here. I'm not here to tell you that this is an absolute but it is the clear pattern and the general approach of Scripture. There can be exceptions based on unique situations and I don't think that I have any biblical authority to say this is absolutely required but I do think it's very very wise for the great majority of families and I'm convinced it's the quickest and most merciful discipline that is out there. Take our prison system today, we imprison prisoners in these incarceration institutions, if you will, and they call them places where they can rehabilitate but nevertheless we don't find any real rehabilitation going on in a lot of them and in the majority of them. Perhaps 39 lashes would be better for some of them, then the guy could be released and go rebuild his life.

I remember when I was flying through Singapore, we were on our way or coming back from India, and as I walked through the streets of Singapore, it's an amazingly beautiful clean place. Everybody seems well disciplined. It's just a nice place. Then I found out later that if children write graffiti on the walls in Singapore they get caned. So there is not graffiti on the walls in Singapore. You say, "You're barbaric." Is that really barbaric? Have you thought it through? For example, when your child misbehaves and you do your timeout or you put the restriction on them, you know, I know people who are in their 50s today who are restricted for life. I know that because their parents said, "You're restricted for life." That's how exasperated they got. And I can understand that. I restricted all of mine by the time they were 2 or 3 for life. No, restrictions, listen, all they do is prolong

the punishment and they're not more merciful than a good spanking. It's like stretching the child on a rack. Mom and dad have to remain cold and negative toward the child, the child is in the doghouse for days on end, the parents are on the outs with all this. Is that more...that's not merciful, that's torture. Who told you that was better? Some person who's raising up these new modern kids who won't work and think everything out to be handed to them?

Boy, I don't want to chase this rabbit very far but I listen to usually sports radio or Christian radio or news radio and I hear all these advertisements about how absolutely nothing is your fault ever. If you've got a student loan, you're not supposed to pay that back. Look, if you go to school and you borrow money, you're supposed to pay it back. I paid mine back. I don't understand this. If you have children, you're not supposed to raise them, somebody else is supposed to raise them and the government is supposed to pay for it. And on and on we could go. College education is supposed to be free now. I mean, what in the world are we... It just baffles me. I just don't know the thinking of this stuff.

I said all that to say that's the new got to be merciful and caring to everybody instead of helping children grow up to learn to face responsibility. But I don't think this restriction thing is any better or is as good as a good spanking. You see, with a spanking, there's a quick and effective punishment, then it allows for tender affections and immediate reconciliation. The punishment is over. You don't have to stay cool or negative toward one another for days. The child may scream, kick, holler and cry but then you can take him or her in your arms, the penalty has been paid and it's over, and I think that's much more like the way God disciplines.

It's quite old but James Dobson wrote this and it still fits very well. He said psychiatrists and psychologists told us that if we spoke softly to our children, held, rocked and cuddled them, let them stop soiling their diapers and panties when they decided it was time to stop, allowed them to get the anger out of their systems, being careful never to say, "No, you can't do that," unless they started to burn the house down, then they would develop healthy egos, grow up to be well adjusted young men and women, self-assured, highly motivated and a joy to us all. We beat down our natural instincts, slavishly adhere to the teachings of these "experts," and develop dark circles under our eyes and high blood pressure while our children talk back to us, spit on us, hit us, broke their toys and threw themselves in the aisles of supermarkets or department stores until they got their way. These same kids turned out to be selfish, spoiled, hostile, disrespectful, lazy and unmotivated. They had no respect for us, their teachers or the law. To add insult to injury, some psychiatrists charge us up to \$100 an hour to tell us now there are no bad children, only bad parents. The sad truth of the matter is that for too many years parents have been bamboozled by these so-called experts and have softened up half-baked theories and how-to books instead of using the brains God gave them and reacting in their natural instincts and when their kids pushed them too far in an attempt to test limits. I think he hit the nail on the head. Let me exhort you to seriously consider, certainly balance, never hurting a child in the way of bruising or anything like that but spanking is a wise and effective means of correcting your child.

Let me give you some other things now that I've kind of laid that foundation and got that out of the way and I've got to hurry on. We want to strive for balance. Paul writes to the church at Colossae, the church at Ephesus, they had the authoritarian submit to authority thing down but they didn't have my heart must be now that Christ has changed my heart, the glory of God and the good of this child as I discipline them. So in balance, let's strive to be balanced in our rules. The rules in our homes. Just some thoughts here, dads and moms. Be careful with unannounced rules. That is, when a rule is only communicated after the child has broken it. Don't do that stuff. Talk about a way to exasperate your child.

Also, no changing of the rules at the parent's whim whenever the parent wants to go in a different direction. They're like, "Well, that's not the rule anymore. This is now the rule." You've got to show them that the right to make rules didn't start with you, it started with somebody else and God doesn't do us that way. He doesn't throw one set of absolutes out and then throw another set out. So be careful with changing rules. The child never knows where he stands because you're changing all the time.

Then excessive rules. Just one on top of the other, on top of the other. And when you have excessive rule-making in your home, this leads to two things. First of all, you become a full time policeman and, secondly, you don't enforce them. Every rule you make in the home should be enforced or you shouldn't have it. Far better to have a few rules and enforce them completely than to have 25 that you never follow up on.

So let's be balanced in rules and making rules in the home. Secondly, let's be balanced concerning punishment. We talked about that, of course, under the rod but I want to elaborate on that. Be careful with over punishing a child. Now, when Paul warns the men in Ephesus and Colossae and, of course us by the authority of the word of God, to not provoke them to anger, to not exasperate them, that would certainly include over punishment. Sometimes this happens when a child's motives were good yet unintentionally does something wrong and they get punished. I read about the little boy who is out in his yard. I did this as a little boy, picking weeds. He called them flowers because he wanted to give them to his mom. So excitedly he has this collection of flowers in his hand, he bursts in the door and mom's just mopped the kitchen floor and he has soiled feet and he stomps across the floor and she explodes and she over punishes. She realizes she blew it as she's holding the little bouquet of weed flowers. She feels terrible. She doesn't know what to do but instead of just sitting him down and asking his forgiveness, that's a great way to keep from exasperating your child, and getting it right, the next day she let's him get by with murder and doesn't punish him and this child doesn't know where he is. One day he picks his mom flowers and he gets murdered, the next day he commits murder and nothing happens. He doesn't know where he stands. So be careful with over punishment.

Along this line, I would say yelling and nagging is always a bad idea, now I'm preaching to Brother Jeff this morning too, by the way. But when yelling and nagging is your modus operandi, this just results in frustration and chaos for all and your children will learn to be comfortable next to the waterfall. In the end, the parent appears foolish in the

eyes of the child and the child just grows up looking for the exit strategy, "When can I get out of here and how quick?"

Be careful that you don't let your first answer to your child always be no, and don't follow the children around with one complaint after another. They'll soon appear to be deaf. Be an encourager, not a nag. I just think that we ought to never discipline our children when we're in the moment of emotion and anger. Pull that back and get out of the nagging and yelling mode.

And also remember that not every mountain is a mountain worth dying on as you're raising your children. Sometimes parents want to be, "I want to make sure my brothers and sisters know that I'm firm and my kids behave," and you make every mountain or everything, rather, a mountain to die on. As a kid grows a little older, maybe he wants to have a little longer hair than he ought to have, well, that might be okay for a while, you might can live with that, that may not be a mountain to die on. Or maybe they never clean up their room. Their room is just too messy during those adolescent years. Well, I don't think a kid should have a messy room but there are times when that's just not a mountain to die on. Or the 12 year old girl that keeps asking and asking and complaining and nagging to her mom about wanting to shave her legs at 12 and mom's got an age in her mind and it ain't 12. The family counselor said, "Buy the girl a razor. She respects you. She's trying to do right. She's not a rebellious kid." That's just not a mountain to die on. You know, and I think there's great wisdom, moms and dads, when we listen to a 12 year old and when they say, "Can I just not..." and we think it through and say, "Do you know what? I think you're right there. I think I'll let you do that." But do you know what you're saying when you do that? "Yes, I have the right and the authority under God to make the rules but God has the ultimate rules and my rules may can be adjusted. My authority is never adjusted but my rule may need to be adjusted." And they'll know you're not just out to be the great rule-maker and rule-keeper of the home kingdom. But, then again, when an issue is important, drugs, you name it, out-and-out insubordination, whatever it is, when an issue is important enough, defend it at all costs, dig in, brace yourself and make your stand. Children need that too.

But I would encourage you to always end punishment with unconditional love. I used to always tell my girls, especially when they were smaller, "Daddy loves you when you're good and daddy loves you when you're bad. I always love you but I want you to be good." We tried to always end our spanking sessions with them sitting in my lap and me holding them and us praying together that they would understand God's wisdom in giving them a father and God's wisdom in them obeying and doing right, but then I would pray for me, that I would be humble and I would have wisdom to love them and raise them in the proper way for the Lord's glory.

Well, in balance in our parenting as Paul tells these men, in effect, "You've had one side right, the children submitting right but make sure you're caring properly for their souls and loving them as you discipline." Let's strive to be balanced in authority and what I mean by that, to have clear lines of authority in the home. Moms and dads, we must work out the rules in private and never overstep one another in public. If a child picks up that

mom and dad both have authority and mom and dad go back and forth and they don't know who's in charge, listen, children are sharp, they pick up on that quickly and they'll play it to the hilt. Now, mom or dad can enforce the rules but if a child challenges your right and authority to make the rules, dad must step in and say, "Sweetheart, this is the way it is," because, again, he's the final authority there. He is finally responsible.

In balance here, let's talk about communication, striving for open communication. In other words, we don't want our children to have the habit of interrupting our conversations with others. Let them know that there is an appropriate place to have manners and respect for another conversation but in balance, we want to be concerned that we don't stifle their communication with us, being so concerned about backtalk that we kill all communication. I think it's very important as a child gets older as they are wanting to communicate with us, that we let them know that it's your spirit, it's the tone, it's the attitude that's the most important thing that, "I will never tolerate a smart-aleck, a sneering or disrespectful attitude and, sweetheart, if you'll show a tone, the way it comes out of your voice, the way you say it..." by the way, this is excellent for them the rest of their lives. "You appeal to those in authority with a humility, with a respect, that kind of tone and, sweetheart, if you do," let your children know, "I'm going to hear you. I'm going to make the time to hear you." So as we think about children under our authority, they're to be seen and not heard, no, not exactly. There are times for that but not exactly and that's where the men in Colossae and Ephesus, I think, were out of balance and sometimes we men are out of balance there. One family counselor said that you could designate a phrase, a key phrase and when your child was really serious and they really didn't understand, they had a question, they could use that phrase and they would know that, well, daddy's going to hear you or momma's going to hear you out on this now. And fight for that time with your kids to just listen and talk, be nurturing, develop the relationship. Boy, in our busy lives, we so often fail there. I don't know if I quite believe this thing about quality time. Be careful that there is just good times of communication that have not that much to do with discipline and correction and authority.

Also in your child's life, be balanced about expectations. Don't push them beyond bounds. Try to discern where your child is and what they can do and where they can't do. Don't be that parent where nothing the child ever does is sufficient and every time they accomplish one task you quickly are throwing out another task and pushing them onward and onward and onward.

Let me just give you this thought, pretty personal to my family because I know a lot of you wrestle here and I respect where you land on it. I don't have the final word on this but in extracurricular activities, we live in a world today that that can absolutely consume you and your family and it's hard to know. When my girls were playing ball, you know, we told one of our girls, "You can't play this sport or this sport, you can play this sport." That may not be God's will for everybody but we just got to thinking of the balance and the time and realized she's pretty athletic and if she goes in all those directions, I don't know when we'll get back to church again, get back to family life again. And especially if God seems to have blessed your child with abilities, whether it's music or academics or

athletics, be real careful. There are so many groups and so many entities and so many organizations that want you to do everything.

I remember when Anaclaire was real little, we went through the gymnastic thing. You know, your child has to go to gymnastics or they can't get into heaven. You've got to go through gymnastics. And she was good at gymnastics and they said, "Hey, we want to put her in an advanced program," I forget, Pam, "four days a week, four, five hours a day," and we said, "No, we're not doing that." And then she started playing basketball and I remember thinking all my life I've had girls, there goes athletics, I'll never be involved in athletics, I've had girls. Boy, God has surprises for you, doesn't he? And when coach started saying, "Will Anaclaire play college ball if she wants to play? Probably at a junior college, maybe a division III school or something," and we said, "Okay, we're open to that." So we let her play a little of this travel ball because in basketball, if you don't travel, the coaches don't see you unless you're LeBron James. I mean, that's the way it works. But I went to one of the coaches, I don't know, it might have been her sophomore year, who coached one of those travel balls with the college coaches and I said, "Look, I'm a pastor, I'm a Christian and I know these tournaments are on the weekend so most Saturday nights we'll be leaving the tournament and we'll be coming home." And I found that if you'll go respectfully and just respect them and tell them where you are, they'll give you a pass on a lot of these things. I mean, by God's grace she started on all those teams. They could have used her but he said, "Fine. She can leave." And we were tested. It might have been between her, I think it was sophomore and junior year we were up in east Tennessee, Johnson City, and her coach came to us on Saturday morning and said, "Man, I've got exciting news. There are two Christian colleges that want to come and watch Anaclaire play in the morning, Sunday morning." It was the first time we had really had that serious of an interest and so that was a test for us because I had already committed to be back in the pulpit. Now, you would have understood. I have no doubt if I had called and let Matt...you'd have said, "Hey, that don't happen every day. That don't mean you're worldly. That's okay." But I thought, no, I think this is good for us, this is good for Anaclaire. So we packed up and we came back and I preached that Sunday morning. Nobody knew it but us. But, you see, God knows what he's doing because in the next year, Anaclaire got scholarship offers from a lot of division I schools where she plays today that's worth upwards to \$200,000 a year.

So my point is don't just...seek the Lord. I don't know where you're going to be on that but make sure the Lord's really in that and it's not us living our dreams through our children. Look, you can prostitute your child to these kinds of things if you're not careful. Now, Pam and I will be the first to say we're not the perfect model on this. We probably blew it some and we're still learning but it's too late now, they're gone. I wish you could start parenting when you're 50 but then you're too tired. You really are. And I just have to say this because nobody but God could have figured this out because we genuinely have prayed all along that God, as she plays ball, it's for your glory, that she's got to treasure you first and it's for your glory first. And after we said no to that staying on Sunday and playing that weekend and came home, we got another phone call and it was a real special, special ball organization where every single player on every single team gets a division I scholarship. Those are rare and they only play in July and I'm always off in July. You

couldn't figure that out. You can't make that happen and I just believe God will put the pieces together if you'll be centered. Now, don't be a fuddy-duddy. Your kids should be involved in things. They should excel in things and I get excited when I read about my kids at my church doing good stuff so don't think I'm saying you don't do that but there are times when you must say no and there are times when you must say we'll go this far but not this far, and if you'll do that starting at the beginning, it gets pretty easy. And I will say that, you know, it's been a real blessing and I think part of the reason why Anaclaire has had a strong commitment to Christ through her college days so far is that she knows that that's really most important to us and it's most important to her.

So let's all be careful about being balanced with expectations. One final point and I'm done: God-centered parenting. God-centered parenting. This brings us back full circle because as Paul writes to the church at Colossae, he writes to the church at Ephesus and he words it this way particularly in Ephesus, "Raise your children up in the discipline and instruction," here it is, "of the Lord." It's as the Lord approves. Raise them up as the Lord approves. It's all centered in him. Children must obey because they're in the Lord, the Bible says. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Parent, nurture, cherish, discipline, raise their children in the Lord." That means it's for his glory, it's by his word and it's through his power. Dads, we must, we must communicate, not just verbally, including that but we must communicate to our children that we are desperately weak and we're doing the best we can under the Lord to love them and raise them but at the end of the day, we're trusting God to change our children's heart, not our great parenting. Are you with me? Now be the best parent you can be but we are desperately dependent as strong, vibrant, hopefully spiritual men who are fathers to say, "We are weaklings though, only God, sweetheart, can change your heart. You must know Christ." Why? Because it's all God-centered. It's for his glory. It's by his word. It's through his power. He's the reason we do what we do.

Along this thought, let me challenge you afresh to refuse all notions of neutrality. A person says, "Well, I don't prejudice my child toward my faith or my beliefs." Trust me, the world, the flesh and the devil do not share your commitment to neutrality. Their friends do not. The liberal professor at the university does not. The drug dealer doesn't. It's like the person that has this beautiful garden, I mean, the soil is just worked beautifully, just a beautiful seed bed there and then he doesn't plant any flowers and he says, "Well, I don't want to prejudice the garden in favor of the flowers." Do you know...weeds are going to be all in it. We don't do that. We reject the whole... Yes. You say, "Well, you're about brainwashing." Yes sirree, we're about brainwashing. We want to take the true living word of God and wash our children's hearts, minds and souls from the time they reach the nursery on the first day until the time they graduate from high school. Yes, it's brainwashing. We're not going to let the world wash their brains with their filth, we're going to give them the truth. We reject all notions of neutrality.

Another thought under being God-centered, the parent must never present himself as the ultimate end. I just...hey, I probably did it. You've probably done it. We should not do it, "Because I'm your parent and I say so. No, because God is our authority. He's our Creator. He's our God. He has given me this job and so therefore I must require you to

obey me." Now I'm not saying you have to verbalize it like that every time but they should understand that's where you are.

I just had a funny thought. My friends called my mother Sergeant Geraldine and she didn't talk much about the glory of God but she did talk a lot about belts and fly swats and whatever else she could get in her hand and it worked pretty good most of the time.

God in his glory is the ultimate end and, of course, moms and dads, and dad you're responsible to be God-centered in your parenting, this includes that your family life be centered in a solid local church. Listen, God's local church, the church is the centerpiece of God's heart, God's purposes and God's glory. Don't you think if you as a father, if you're not centered in your church from your heart, that your children will understand that you're centered in God. They know. You cannot love the head, Jesus, and not love the body, the church. If you're going to be God-centered in your parenting, your family should be centered in a local church.

Then the last thought and I'm done: shepherding the child's heart to Christ. We talk a lot about this around here, how we raise our children, shepherding them to have a heart that loves Jesus. And I think one key and important way to do this, I did this with my girls but I failed too often also not to do it and that is, a father must, a mom must go to their children in humility and say, "Will you forgive me? I was wrong. You see, daddy needs a Savior too." Are you with me? That's powerful. If you mean it, that's powerful. "I was angry. I shouldn't have yelled at you and that just shows you daddy needs a Savior too and I need to ask you to forgive me."

I talked with a man, it's probably been 25 years ago, who had a rebellious boy. He was already like, I don't know, probably 18-20ish, and we talked and I asked him, I said, "Sir, have you ever asked your son to forgive you for where you failed?" He was blown away because the boy was a rebel. He said, "No." I said, "You might just prayerfully consider that. That might tenderize his heart." Do you know what? That boy is now in his 50s and he's still a rebel. There is a place for us to shepherd our children by showing them that we fail as parents and we need a Savior too. Now, once again, we never shirk our authority because even if we're imperfect, we're still required to be their authority.

Children are not looking for perfect parents but they are looking for parents. I remember Katy Lee telling me one time after she had shared with her class some of the things I do and one of her friends said to her, "My parents never tell me anything I do is wrong." And you could tell by the way the little girl said it that she wished her mom and dad would be parents too.

Now, if we parent biblically, if we take our God-ordained assignment, we will be going against the grain of our culture and we will be going against our own fallen flesh. It will be hard but we can live for the Lord and we can do as he says and, listen, and God can bless our families and he will. And all of God's people said, amen.

Let's stand together and let's pray.