

The Godly Father

Ephesians 6:1-4

Pastor John Miller

Ephesians 6:1-4 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.' And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

Someone said, "A child is not likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father." I like that. Fathers have such an important role to play in the fashioning and shaping of our children's lives and how they relate to God as their heavenly Father. Isn't it interesting that when God reveals Himself in His Word, He reveals Himself as our Father in heaven.

Remember how Jesus taught us to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." He used the word "Abba," which means "Papa" or "Daddy." My grandchildren call me "Papa." What a blessing it is. And I pray that somehow they'll see God in my life, in their dad's life, and that will have an impact on their eternal destiny and their temporal existence here on earth.

There are three great joys in my life. Number one is the day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and I surrendered to Him in genuine repentance. I'll never forget that August day sitting on the beach north of Ventura. It was a beautiful day, and I began to weep and cry and to call out to God to forgive me, to come into my heart and be my Lord and Savior. I felt what the Bible calls "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). I was born again, and God became my Father in heaven.

Number two was the day I married my beautiful bride, Kristy. "And the two [became] one flesh" (Matthew 19:5). The Bible says, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). That was 48 years ago. What a blessing my wife has been all these years.

Number three is my children: the birth of my daughter, Sarah; my daughter, Bethany; my daughter, Amy; and my son, Jared. And now it's 10 grandchildren later. What a blessing!

And what a blessing that I have that relationship to God, to my wife, and to my children and grandchildren.

But it's not easy being a father in today's world. Marriage is under attack. There are three reasons for that. Number one is the drifting away from the Biblical pattern. It was a sad day when America thought to redefine marriage, when it took away the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman, male and female, as God has laid out in His Word.

Number two is the decay of morality. We see around us today the decline and decay of the moral fiber of our nation. As goes marriage, so goes the family; as goes the family, so goes the

nation. We need secure, sanctified marriages and homes to have a secure, sanctified nation. Marriage is the building block of society.

Number three is the description of the last days, in 2 Timothy 3:1-4. "In the last days...men will be lovers of themselves...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." They would be "without natural affection" (King James translation). This phrase means "without family love."

So we see the drifting away from the Biblical pattern, the decay of morality, and in the last days, there will be no natural affection or family love.

Yet as Christian fathers, we have God's Word, His precepts, His owner's manual, on how to be a husband and how to be a father.

I want to set the context for fatherhood. That we find in Ephesians 5:31-33. In the context, we discover that we first have God's design for marriage, then God's design for children, and God's design for fathers. "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

This text comes from Genesis 2:24-25. It was Moses' divine commentary on marriage. It also appears in Matthew 19:4-6, where Jesus says, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" And Matthew adds something else: "Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate." Marriage is to be a commitment for life; "Till death do us part," or until the Lord comes to rapture us home.

So it starts with a godly marriage and a godly father. Notice in Ephesians 5:33 that this is the summary: "Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects..." or "reverences" ...her husband." So we must first be committed to our marriage before we can be godly fathers or grandfathers.

There is a popular trend today not to get married. Another popular trend is to have kids without getting married. That's not God's design. Children need a biological mother and a biological father in the home, following God's principles and design for marriage. That's God's ideal. I know sometimes that doesn't happen, but that's what God has designed for the home.

We want to be committed to this principle of marriage: "leave...joined...become one flesh." This is a picture of "Christ and the church." "This is a great mystery."

So husbands should love their wives, and wives should be showing respect or reverence and submission to their husbands.

Now in our text in chapter 6, Paul first talks to the children, in verses 1-3, and he sets out for the

children a twofold command. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" is the first command. The second command is "'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.'"

The first thing that children are to know is that they should have the action of obedience, verse 1. "Children, obey your parents." I guess we should have brought all the kids from Sunday school into the sanctuary to hear this sermon today. But you can always fire it up on the computer and set the kids in front of it and say, "You're going to listen to Pastor John Miller today."

The word "obey" here means "to listen under." Have your parents ever said, "Are you listening to me? Do you hear me? What did I just tell you?!" Kids just totally zone out their parents. So this means that your ears are open, you're listening to Dad and Mom. And not just listening; listening with an intention and a commitment to obey them. Notice verse 1 says, "for this is right." It is a fitting thing to do, a right thing for children to do. What a novel thought! Children who actually obey their parents!

Then notice that they're not only to have the action of obedience but also the attitude of honor, verse 2. It says, "Honor your father and mother." Out of the whole Decalogue, it is the first commandment with a promise. And how do children honor their parents? By obedience, which is what it says in the text. By respecting them, "honor" means to "respect" them. It is to love them, and if need be, to care for them. Why should they do this? Because it is a command, "the first commandment with promise."

John Phillips said in his excellent commentary on Ephesians, "A child who grows up to love, honor and obey his mother and father lays the foundation for a happier, more stable and more successful life than does a child who is rude, disrespectful, self-willed and rebellious." So, obeying your parents has the result of having a blessed and fruitful life.

I can think of so many times that I disobeyed my parents, and I paid a price for doing that. I have scars on my face because I didn't obey my parents. Remember those old, wooden garage doors with the springs? If you opened them up and climb on top of the car, you can get onto the garage door. It's a cool hangout place. But our garage door had a glass window in it. My mother told me, "John, do not climb up on the garage door!"

"Yes, mother; I won't climb on it." But what did I do? I climbed on it. Then I heard my mother coming out to the garage, so I quickly scampered over to the garage door. In doing that, I went over the window, it broke under my weight, and I went headfirst through it. I sliced my head wide open and bled everywhere. My mom came toward me, and the first thing I could think of was, Run for your life! So I took off running down the street bleeding all over myself and saying, "Mommy, don't spank me! Mommy, don't spank me!" And the neighbors dialed 9-1-1. It was crazy! I think now that I wouldn't have this big, old scar on my face if I had just been obedient to my mother and father.

Proverbs 10:27 says, "The fear of the Lord prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened." So this commandment with a promise is a general principle. It doesn't mean that all godly kids will live to old age, but as a general rule, it's the case.

And Proverbs 30:17 says, "The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it." Read that to your kids when you tuck them in at night! "Pleasant dreams, little Johnny! Watch out for the ravens; they're waiting out in the yard for you right now!" What a crazy verse! Remember that these are principles and not promises.

Now in our text, Paul moves in his instructions to fathers, verse 4. And this is our focus. "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath." This is the negative instruction. This is what you should not do. "But bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." This is the positive; this is what fathers are to do.

The three key phrases or words in this verse are "bring them up...training...admonition of the Lord." The Bible is a balanced book. God does not command children to obey their parents without telling their fathers not to provoke their children to wrath. It also tells wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives. It tells slaves to be obedient to their masters and for masters to care for their slaves.

Here, Paul gives instructions to the fathers, specifically. The responsibility for managing a home and raising children falls primarily on the leadership and spiritual headship of the father. This is why fathers are so very important. They partner with their wives and with the Holy Spirit and God's Word. But they should take the leading role as priest and pastor in their home.

In one pungent sentence, Paul gives the principles that we need to be faithful fathers. It comes in two parts, in verse 4. The first part is negative and the second part is positive. It is not exhaustive but is really good, rubber-meets-the-road instruction for fathers. First Paul says, "Do not provoke your children to wrath." The NIV translates that "Do not exasperate your children." This is the negative; do not do that. "Exasperate" means "to goad" your children to resentment. "They might lose heart," as some translations say. Fathers can easily misuse their authority and abuse their leadership in the home.

How do fathers "exasperate" or dishearten or discourage their children? This is not from the text but just some thoughts. Number one, by criticism. Dads can be overly critical, fault-finding and judgmental of their kids. They might criticize them publicly and make them feel ashamed. So they need to be careful not to do that.

A parallel passage in Colossians 3:21 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." There are a lot of kids who have lost heart and become discouraged, because they are never good enough for their dad. They never hear any encouragement; only criticism. So it's important that you build them up.

Number two is by being overly strict. Being overly strict and controlling can be detrimental to

your children. I've often used the analogy of holding a bar of soap. When you squeeze it too tightly, it splits out of your hand. If you hold it too loosely, it slips through your hand. So there is a delicate balance.

Many times we become overly strict in Christian homes, because we want to keep them from the world—rightly so—but we become legalistic about it, and the kids rebel. Or we don't live by the grace of God; we're concerned only about our reputation as parents and not the good of our children. Your kids can tell the difference. Parents don't want their kids' names in the paper, because it can reflect upon them. You're not concerned about your children's well-being.

Number three, dads can exasperate their children by being inconsistent, by telling them "Yes" and then telling them "No." One time you can go and another time you can't go. So there's no standard but inconsistency in their lives. They say one thing; they do another thing. Their lives don't match their commitment to God.

Number four, they show favoritism. Isaac favored Esau over Jacob, and it created big problems. Then Jacob himself, falling into the same error as his father Isaac, favored Joseph over his brothers. And we all know what happened to Joseph. So be careful not to show favoritism, because one child is more athletic, gets better grades or is more cooperative than the other. So the other children are shunned, and we don't show affection for all of them equally.

Number five is being irritable. How many kids have been the brunt of dad's bad day in the office? He comes home stressed, upset and angry. When dad comes home, it's basically, "Run for your life! Hide in the closet! Dad's had a bad day."

And number six, neglecting your children. I think of David, who neglected Absalom. R. Kent Hughes said, "God has created our children with their hearts turned toward ours. Our power is awesome! We must take God's Word and take it to heart." So Absalom rebelled against his dad, because his dad neglected him. Neglect can lead to rebellion. And when Absalom was killed, David felt remorse and cried out, "Oh, my son, Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place!" (2 Samuel 18:33). But David neglected his son and knew that he was reaping what he had sown. God, help us not to neglect our children.

Now we come to the positive side, beginning in verse 4: "Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." There are three things here: "bring them up," "nurture" them (in the King James) and admonish them in the Lord. These are the "do's." Paul provides the formula that will prosper a child and help fathers to be faithful to God's calling on their lives.

The first "do" is tenderness. Notice it says, "Bring them up." You say, "Where do you get the idea of tenderness here?" In Ephesians 5:29, it says, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church." And the very same Greek word is used in verse 4 where it says, "Bring them up." It means to nourish and cherish them. And the cool thing about this word is that in the Greek, it literally means "to warm with body heat." So it means to hug them, to cherish them, to show affection toward them.

We're hearing a lot today about "toxic masculinity"; that men shouldn't be men. Men should be men and be masculine. And a masculine man is a tender man—with his wife and with his children. So dads should hug their children. Dads should kiss their children. Dads should show their children affection. Dads should tell their children they love them.

Many people have grown up and said, "Never once has my dad said, 'I love you.'" I can't tell you how many dads have been in my office with tears running down their face and said, "I don't know how to show love to my kids, because my dad never showed love to me. I don't know how to be affectionate toward my children; my dad was not affectionate toward me."

Dads, it's time to break that cycle. Hug your kids. Kiss your kids. Tell them that you love them. Even when they are adults. Let them know you love them and you appreciate them. Hug them and kiss them. So tenderness is the number one mark of a godly father. Kiss and hug them and listen to them when they talk.

A while back I was with one of my granddaughters, and she was talking a thousand miles an hour. And I actually liked it! I thought, This is awesome! I loved it. And then I thought, When my three girls were talking like that, I used to say, 'Let's play a game called "Be quiet." Who can go the longest without talking?' That was daddy's game. But now that I'm a grandpa, it's like music to my ears! But I know, too, that if I start to freak out, I can just send them home. But I love to hear their voices. I love to hear them talk. So dads, we need to listen to our children.

And you should spend time with them. That's how you show tenderness to them. Plan daddy-child dates. Plan a special trip with one of the kids and then with another one of the kids. Show them individual attention. Give them a special time with you as their father when you listen to them.

The second thing dads should do is discipline them. The word is "nurture" or "training," in verse 4. So you "bring them up" with tenderness, and you "nurture" them, which is discipline. Discipline is to be done in love. It should be done by verbal instruction and discipline, when it's needed, in a way to correct them and train them. If we love our children, we will discipline them. Hebrews 12:6 says, "For whom the Lord loves He chastens..." or "spanks."

You could get thrown in jail for spanking your children today. I've actually seen parents I wish I could spank! So if you love your children, you'll discipline them.

Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly." And Proverbs 19:18, in the King James, says, "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." They start screaming and you haven't even touched them yet. Remember the good old days when parents said, "I'll give you something to cry about!" That was awesome! Proverbs 29:15 says, "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." And Proverbs 22:15 says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him."

I heard a story about Franklin Graham when he was a tot. Billy Graham was away on an

evangelistic campaign, and Franklin was being a naughty boy. Ruth had to leave him with one of the caretakers for a while. She came home and found out Franklin had been a very bad boy. She said, "Franklin, I understand you've been disobedient. So you're going to get a spanking."

Franklin said, "The devil made me do it!"

Ruth then said, "Well, we're just going to get the stick and beat the devil out of you!"

So God has given us instructions in His Word that we should discipline lovingly and faithfully.

The third "do" for fathers is in verse 4: "admonition of the Lord." This phrase speaks of children being instructed or taught verbally with warnings. Literally it means "to place before the mind." It is a father's responsibility to instruct their children in spiritual matters.

So, number one, you must be a man who is born again—born of the Spirit and filled with the Spirit—and you must be living by the Word of God, loving your children, disciplining them and instructing them.

Years ago, the Houston Police Department put out a pamphlet titled How to Ruin Your Children. Number five on the list of how to ruin your children was "Never give them any spiritual training. Let them wait until they are 21 years old to decide for themselves." You know that's not going to work. While they are young, they are like clay; we want to mold them and shape them. We want to pour into them. So start very early.

If we are followers of Christ and are to instruct our children in spiritual matters, we must know the Word of God, we must be committed to God in the fear of God and we must pray to God to fill our lives and make us godly examples in the home. In Deuteronomy 6:4-7, the Lord is speaking, and He says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." So God has given us His Word, and we need to know His Word.

A lot of times dads let their wife become the Bible student. She reads and studies the Bible, but dad just kind of sits around. I can't tell you how many times when I'm preaching that the wife has the Bible, she's taking notes but the dad has his arms crossed, no Bible and is just looking at me. He'll look over at his wife once in a while and say, "Huh!" I feel like stopping and saying, "Could you give your Bible to your husband right now? He needs the Bible!" So many times men don't even carry a Bible or read the Bible. "Oh, that's a wife's thing!" No, it's not! You need to be a man of the Word. You need to set an example by letting your heart soak up the Word of God.

Guys, read Psalm 1:1-3. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,

nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." So be a man of the Word. Know the Word, so you can impart the Word to your children.

In 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15, in writing to his protégé Timothy, Paul says, "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also....From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." So children should be instructed by their parents, and preferably dad should lead the way.

So in summary, dads, you must be, number one, right with God and have salvation. You must be living a life of sanctification. You must be a man who reads the Scriptures and a man who serves the Lord. Number two, you need to be right with your wife. You cannot be a godly father, if you're not committed to your wife. The best thing you can do for your children is to love your wife and be committed to her. And number three, be right with your children. Don't exasperate them but love them, cherish them, discipline them and instruct them.

This is going to take time and work and be difficult, but do it. Psalm 127 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from 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. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate."