

RELATIONSHIPS – CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Maybe you heard the story about the three young husbands in a hospital waiting room waiting for their wives to give birth. The nurse came in and said to the first father, "Congratulations. Your wife just gave birth to twins!" The father jumped for joy and said, "This is an incredible coincidence - because I work for the Minnesota Twins!" A few minutes later, the nurse came in and told the second father, "Congratulations! Your wife just gave birth to triplets!" The second father jumped for joy and said, "This is an incredible coincidence - because I work for 3M!" When the third father heard this he shouted "Oh no!" and fainted. The nurse tended to him and when he revived, she asked, "What's wrong?" He replied, "I WORK FOR 7UP!"

Children are a treasure from the Lord. They are also an awesome responsibility. They are not a short-term loan, they are a long-term investment! As parents we have been given the responsibility to raise our children and encourage them in their own relationship with Christ. As one author wrote "Children are not things to be molded but are people to be unfolded."

Over the years many people have offered suggestions on how to be a good parent. Mark Twain suggested: When a kid turns thirteen, stick him in a barrel, nail the lid on top, and feed him through the knot hole. When he turns sixteen -- plug up the knot hole. I think the Bible provides a far better model for parenting:

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" - which is the first commandment with a promise -- 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

A child is not likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father.

1. Instruction for Children - (vs. 1-3) honoring your parents

In 1978, Thomas Hansen of Boulder Colorado, sued his parents for \$350,000 on grounds of "malpractice of parenting." He charged in his suit that his mother and father had botched his upbringing so badly, that he would need years of costly psychiatric treatment.

In researching this message I read so many alarming statistics about the state of the family today. Things have changed dramatically over the last 40 years. I do not want to dwell on the challenges today but rather on what God says about how to have a better relationship with your child.

It says here that children should obey their parents. What does obedience mean? The word for obey is the word HUPOAKOUO which comes from HUPO which means BY or and AKOUO which means to HEAR. Together they mean to listen attentively. The picture is of a porter waiting – ready to answer when there is a knock at the door. Is that an accurate picture of your child, waiting to respond to you the moment you speak? Obedience is more than just doing what you are told, it is a heart attitude.

The word honor is the Greek word TIMAO which means to value or set at a high price. It comes from a root word which means "to pay". Honoring your parents goes beyond just doing what they say which is obedience. It deals not only with outward behavior but also with inward attitude. Honoring means that you hold your parents in high regard.

Children need to understand that their parents are sinful people who make mistakes just like everyone else. In spite of their weaknesses children are told to obey and honor their parents. Holding your parents in high regard involves 2 attitudes: respect and trust.

- A. Respect - children usually go through four stages in learning to respect their parents:
 - i. They Idolize them - They can do anything
 - ii. They Demonize them - they blame them for all their troubles.
 - iii. They Utilize them - "Dad, can I have the keys?" "Mom, what's for dinner?"
 - iv. They Humanize them – They are not gods or devils. They are human, just like you.

Obedience flows from respect. To honor your parents means that you respect them. It means that you value them as a person. Do you recognize that your parents love you? Take a good look at your parents and think of what their good points are. Recognize also that your parents are human and that they will make mistakes but they are who and what God has given you.

- B. Trust - parents are entrusted with protecting their kids from making bad mistakes.

Obedience flows from trust. Do you trust them to make the right decisions for you? Do you believe that your parents have your best interests at heart? Are there times in your life that, if you had followed your parents advice, you would have been saved some heartache?

We knew a couple who felt called to go to the mission field. They finally had an opportunity to go but their grade school children did not want to leave. They sat their kids down and asked them to trust their decision. It ended up being an incredible experience for the whole family.

Respect and trust should lead to obedience. You may not agree with what your parents tell you but, if you respect and trust them, you will do what they tell you. Honoring parents is different than simple obedience. When you have a family of your own you can honor parents without obeying. There are times youth have to choose - parents ask for things that would hurt or pull you away from Christ. At times like these remember God comes first.

2. Instruction for Parents (vs 4) – do not exasperate your children

Parenting is a very difficult thing to do. You want to be the best parent in the world and yet each one of us fail so often with regards to our children. Parenting often involves discipline because children do make wrong choices. Discipline is a good thing and essential for raising healthy kids. We see this in both the Old and New Testament:

Prov 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

Heb 12:10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Discipline is a challenge for all parents. How do you guide your child into truth? James Dobson's offers Six Keys to Shaping a Child's Will:

1. Define the boundaries before they are enforced.
2. When defiantly challenged, respond with confident decisiveness.
3. Distinguish between willful defiance and childish irresponsibility.
4. Reassure and teach after the confrontation is over.
5. Avoid impossible demands.
6. Let love be your guide!

When Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus parenting was somewhat different than it is today. In ancient Greece, parents were at liberty to abandon children to cold, hunger, beasts and all with no threat of punishment. A father had life and death power over his entire household. He could cast them out, sell them or kill them. At birth, the father determined the child's fate. If the father picked the child up, it could stay in the home. If the father walked away, the child was disposed of. The discarded healthy infants were usually raised as slaves or prostitutes.

In spite of this culture Paul instructs "Fathers, do not exasperate your children". The principle applies here to both men and women. The word used for exasperate means to not provoke to anger. Anger usually is the result of broken expectations. How do you keep from exasperating your kids?

a. Are your rules understood? -

Do your children clearly know what is expected of them? Have the rules been laid out clearly? It is frustrating when you are penalized for something just because you did not know the rules.

I know what this is like from living in Kuwait. Every time I had to do something that involved the government it was a nightmare. I remember trying to get a driver's license. You would get in one line and they would tell you to go to another. You would go there and be told you were in the wrong line – go somewhere else. I spent more than a week standing in lines and being told something different from every person I spoke with. That just lead to frustration.

I once tried to illustrate this point to a bunch of youth that were meeting in our house for Sunday School. They came in like they did ever week wearing their shoes which was fine. The one week I had started the meeting and then stopped and began yelling at the youth for wearing shoes in my house. They were so embarrassed they all threw their shoes off and began taking them to the door when I asked – "don't you always wear your shoes in class. Have I ever told you that you couldn't. If so then why should I yell at you for something you did not know was wrong and had never enforced in the past?"

b. Are your rules consistent? -

Children will always test the limit of the fence. This provides security for them. When the limits are inconsistent there is fear. Rules need to be fixed and enforced. As the child grows the rules can be modified as long as this is clearly communicated.

A rule that is not enforced is not a rule at all. In Kuwait the speed limits were clearly posted but never enforced. What do you think happened. They were never obeyed. People did what they wanted to with no fear of punishment.

c. Are your rules demonstrated? - or do you apologize when you fail

Where rules are based on principles it is important that you hold to the principle yourself. You really cannot tell a child not to smoke when you yourself smoke in front of them. Rules must be modeled before they will be followed.

Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them. -- James Baldwin

The hardest job kids face today is learning good manners without seeing any. -- Fred Astaire

Billy Graham said: Children will invariably talk, eat, walk, think, respond, and act like their parents. Give them a target to shoot at. Give them a goal to work toward. Give them a pattern that they can see clearly, and you give them something that gold and silver cannot buy.

d. Are your rules surrounded with affirmation and praise?

A businessman had a secretary who was leaving to get married. On her last day the boss gave her a big hug and said "You've been just like a daughter to me -- insolent, surly and unappreciative."

Clearly that is a negative example of affirmation. It is always easier to correct when encouragement and affirmation is present. Condemnation and correction are not the same. Condemnation seeks to destroy, correction seeks to build up. Discipline is given to help and not hurt. It seeks to address negative issues of behavior with the hope that the young person will be healthier and happier. Accusation and criticism seek to destroy the person. It is easy to tear down but hard to build up. Remember to not just point out the bad but also the good in your child's actions.

The youngster brought home a report card heavy with poor grades. His mother asked, "What have you to say about this?" The boy replied, "Well mom, one thing is for sure, you know I'm not cheating!"

Greatness lies, not in being strong, but in the right use of strength. -- Henry Ward Beecher

3. Communication is essential –

Communication is often the key for building trust and gaining respect between parents and children. It is also the key to avoiding confusion which can exasperate your kids. Unfortunately most youth spend very little time talking to their parents. When we do communicate, it is often in confrontation.

Can you think of any stupid things you have said in a fight recently? Words that were intended only to hurt in an argument. Words spoken in anger can be devastating to a parent or child. We must always watch what we say!

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Choose your words very wisely. Knowing what to say, and when and how to say it, are the keys to successful communication. You are responsible for your own actions, not those of another.

This passage ends by saying that we are bring up our kids "in the training and instruction of the Lord". Our job as parents is to help our children accept Jesus and learn to walk with Him.

In 2 weeks we are moving back to two services. How is that going to affect you as parents?

We will be running the same children's Sunday School program that we currently offer during the first service. The service starts at 9:15 which means the Sunday School will start at 9:00 – that is 45 min earlier than it currently starts. If you as a parent would like to continue to do what you currently do – bring your kids to Sunday School, attend the service and then head home – then you can do that. Simply come 45 earlier than you currently do and attend the first service.

We are encouraging you as parents to do more than that. We are challenging you to come and drop your kids off in Sunday School and then attend an adult Christian Education class. There are lots to choose from. There are classes on marriage (talked about it last week), small group leadership, membership, Christian caregiving, the Truth Project and the book of Ruth. Take a class and then bring your kids to the second service.

Some parents don't like the idea of bringing their kids to church. "Isn't that boring for the kids and disruptive for the adults"? Let me try to address this question:

First, you say it is boring for the kids. Let me see by a show of hands, how many of you, when you were children, sat through church with your parents? Lots of people here survived that experience! There is growing concern amongst many different churches that we are doing a disservice to our children by completely removing them from the experience of adult church. Kids grow up in Sunday School and when they are older are thrown into adult church without any experience of it. The result is that kids, having not learned the discipline of sitting through church, end up rejecting it.

The way we teach children is through modeling. Kids watch us and learn from our behavior. If you want your children to stay in the church you must teach them to sit in the church from an early age.

You may argue, "but my kid doesn't like it". Your kid doesn't like vegetables either, but you give it to them. Why? Because it is good for them.

Second, you think it will be disruptive for the adults. Remember that we are still offering a nursery. These are older kids we are talking about. So what if they squirm during the sermon? As parents Naomi and I have found that the key is giving them something to do. We let them draw or color. It is amazing to watch kids doing an activity during the message. I will tell a story and they will stop what they are doing, focus in for the story and then go back to what they were doing after. Just because they are doing something else does not mean they are not listening.

Remember that we are a family. We are a community of grace. If a child fusses during a service it is not the end of the world. I would rather have the problem of hearing an occasional outburst than have it quiet as a grave in here all the time.

Having said that, while I challenge you as parents to try this with your kids I know that there will still be parents that would just rather prefer to have their kids not in the service with them and that is fine as well. What about parents who want to attend the second service and have something for their kids during the service?

One of the highlights of our church calendar is the annual children's Christmas play. The practices for that play start in September, just two weeks after we move to two services. Are children are welcomed to be part of this production.

As most of you as parents know, in the past those practices have been on Sunday afternoons, meaning that you had to drop your kids off after church and then come back later in the afternoon to pick them up. We are proposing this year that we hold the practices during the second service. Your kids would go from Sunday School to the practice and then be ready to be picked up at the end of the second service. That means we have something for all kids during the second service as well.

What about parents who want something during the second service for their kids but do not want them to be in the play practice – we are willing to work with you. If we need to add something like a Children’s Church in the second service we are willing to look into that.

Let me just end the service today by speaking with parents who feel they failed because their children are not walking with the Lord.

Does following the rules that we talked about today mean that my kids will turn out to be perfect? There is nothing that guarantees that since children make their own choices. I know a lot of great parents that tried their best to raise their kids to follow the Lord but at some point those kids walked away from the faith. You can be the greatest parent on earth and still raise kids that do not come to Jesus. That is just the reality of living in a fallen world. All we can do is try our best, be an example and trust that our kids will make good choices.

Raising kids is like flying a plane off an Air Craft Carrier

When a plane takes off from an aircraft carrier several things happen.

- 1) Point Aircraft Carrier into the Wind
- 2) Catapult the Plane down the deck
- 3) Planes are designed to respond to the laws of aerodynamics
- 4) The Pilot has ultimate control

The laws are designed to take affect if all the pieces are in place. When a child is raised in a Christian home several things happen

- 1) You must point the child in the direction he must go by teaching him.
- 2) You must give him thrust by living an example before him.
- 3) He is designed to respond to the laws of the Spirit
- 4) Ultimately they can crash by pilot error, but it must be a catastrophic choice.