

God's Wisdom for Parenting

*“Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
(Proverbs 22:6 ESV)*

*“Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.”
(Proverbs 4:23 ESV)*

Basics in Raising Kids God's Way

April 28, 2024

Ephesians 6:1-4

Pastor Steve Paul

Good morning, Cornerstone. Good morning, Coldwater. Let's thank God for our kids' ministry workers in both locations!

Today is the last Sunday of April. Mother's Day is two weeks away, men! Father's Day follows shortly after. The ladies are on it! In anticipation of honouring our parents, it might be good, as a multi-generational church family, for us to CELEBRATE the fact that God gave us life through the mom and dad he chose for us, AND to allow God to REHEARSE and RESOURCE us with what the privilege of parenting entails.

In that vein, would you open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 6, verses 1-4. (on p 979)

Not all of us are parents. Not all of us are kids. But, whatever our age or life stage, whether we're THIS SIDE of parenting, BEYOND it, or not parents at all, God wants to remind us ALL of

The Basics of Raising Kids God's Way

Why do I say that? Notice, God put this paragraph addressed to kids and parents into the flow of a letter addressed to the entire church family at Ephesus—for them ALL, at every age, every

stage. God wants the whole church to be tuned in to the essentials of the parenting process. Why might that be?

God gave Cathy and me the privilege launching 3 men into life. But here's the small print: We're not experts. We're still learning. If we had another go at it, would we do better? The fruit of our influence is still unfolding and unfinished. But we have experienced a great deal of God's grace along the way.

I remember bringing our firstborn home from RVH in his brand new, clean car seat. It didn't take him long to change that. We got home, set him down, and went, "Now what? How do we do what we've never done? How do we do what we get one run at doing? No reruns!" And then we blinked. One's a nurse. Another one's a worship pastor. And all three are still in school. When you're in it, it feels like forever. But whew, where did it go?

There's a 10-year span between our oldest and youngest, and over that decade the opposing headwinds on our influence increased dramatically. Today, your challenges as parents are fiercer by far. But the basics stay the same. You don't need a whole new approach. The basics are still reliable.

If there's one thing we learned from the process, it's this: **Parenting is humanly IMPOSSIBLE** but **God SPECIALIZES in the impossible**. In fact, God DESIGNS and ORDAINS impossible things FOR US, to teach us to reach out to him for grace and mercy. So, let's run to the One who IS the expert ... the Final Authority on parenting. Ephesians 6:1-4.

Hear now the Word of the LORD:

¹ Children, **obey** your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "**Honor** your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

⁴ Fathers, **do not provoke** your children to anger, but **bring them up** in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4, ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

These four short verses are not an afterthought scribbled like a P.S. at the end of the letter. They flow from all the apostle Paul has written so far. Our God (chapter 1) is gloriously good. He has worked through Jesus to bring us from dead in our sin to alive in Him as masterpieces of His grace (chapter 2). He's fit us together as His household (chapters 2-3), so that powered by His Spirit and as ONE, we can live as children of light (chapter 4), live lives of love (chapter 5), and reflect HIM in our three primary relational units: in marriage (husbands and wives), at work (boss and workers) and in the family (kids and parents). That's the flow,

Here are **The Basics of Raising Kids God's Way.**

God gives TWO COMMANDS to kids with key details to help kids do them.

And then God gives TWO COMMANDS to parents, with important detail to help you do them.

Keep in mind. Paul assumes the whole church family is listening in on this.

Let's remember that COMMANDS aren't suggestions ("think about it"), they're not practical principles ("hey, this might help"), they're **MARCHING ORDERS** ... meant to be **ACTED ON**.

Kids/youth, by addressing 3 of these verses to you, God shows He values you as a BIG part of the process! So, he begins with you.

Children: OBEY and HONOUR your parents. (Verses 1-3)

See v1?

"Children, OBEY your parents ..."

(Ephesians 6:1, ESV)

OBEY is the priority lesson our Maker knows we need to learn the minute we become aware of ourselves and of others. OBEY means LISTEN. One who obeys is a GOOD LISTENER. It's *more*. Whenever mom and dad say, "Listen up!" our job is to COME UNDER and LINE UP with whatever it is they're telling us to do. Our job is to GET IT and GET AT IT. To make sure our ACTIONS line up and MARCH IN STEP with what they SAY.

That's easier said than done, isn't it! So, here's some help: (back to v1):

"Children, obey your parents ... IN THE LORD ..."

(Ephesians 6:1, ESV)

God's not saying OBEY *only if* your mom and dad are Christians, *only if* they love Jesus. No, He's saying, listen and align to them like you would if it's Jesus telling you what to do. Jesus couldn't love you more than He has or lead you better than He does; obey your folks as you would Jesus.

When you ignore your parents (or worse, disobey them), you ignore and disobey Jesus. That's a big deal, isn't it! Your parents are God's good gift to you. They are your first, God-given window to help you learn how to come under ALL KINDS of authority for the rest of your life.

Our youngest son came home from JK early on. "Hey Mikey, how did school go?"

Phfff! "My teacher," he huffed.

What's up with your teacher?

"She's so ... BOSSY. She's always telling me what to do!"

Hmm. Yes. Get used to it. That's life. Life is full of authorities. Teachers. Coaches. Employers. Police officers. Lawmakers. GOD! A first life lesson is, "You're not the boss; God is ..."

ultimately.” And even when you become the boss, the best kind of boss (or parent) is the kind that never forgets they too are under some kind of authority—and always under God’s.

“If you LOVE me, (says Jesus in John 14:15) you will DO what I COMMAND.” Obedience is the way we show our love for God and for mom and dad. Isn’t God good to let the first authority in life be the ones who gave you life and who love you most—they would DIE for you—so that, ultimately you can learn to trust, love and obey JESUS who DID die for you?

Yet, as we first learn to talk, the word that jumps the quickest from our mouths when we’re told what to do is, “WHY! Why Mom? Why obey?” God helps us with that, too. Right here:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, FOR THIS IS RIGHT.

(Ephesians 6:1, ESV)

Do you love puzzles? I love the Spanish word for puzzle: Rompe cabezas. Head buster. How good does it feel when you’ve worked long and hard (breaking your brain), you pick up that last piece and finally ... it FITS in place. AH! It’s beautiful! It’s complete. Young people, obedience fits you like that! It’s good. It “pleases the Lord” (is how Col 3:20 puts it). You want to make God smile? Listen to your folks, trust what they’re telling you is good, and DO IT.

It’s right. It fits.

I know how hard it is for you to imagine that I was a kid once. I remember how often my heart wasn’t into obeying. I knew *what* I should do, I just didn’t *feel* like it. [“Mooooom!! Oh okay!”]

That’s why your 2nd command (kids) is

“HONOR your father and mother” ...

(Ephesians 6:2, ESV)

OBEY is the action; HONOR is the attitude, the heart posture God commands from you.

RESPECT your parents. DIGNIFY them. HUMBLE yourself by HOLDING them HIGH in your heart.

That's not a new command. "Honor your father and mother" is number 5 of God's top 10 (Ex 20 and Dt 5). It's a command Jesus thought important enough to repeat 5 times on record (twice in Matthew, twice in Mark and once in Luke.) You think it should be important to you?

Jesus said (John 14:31) "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." Even Jesus obeyed out of deep affection and high esteem for his Father.

God wants you to know that having that attitude is not only good (fitting), but it's good FOR YOU. So, He says,

"HONOR your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

(Ephesians 6:2-3, ESV)

God wants the quality of your life and the number of your days to be as full as He has planned them to be for you. He doesn't want your life messed up and cut short.

The next time you're tempted to go, "Mom's wrecking my life!" remember, mom and dad have learned from hard knocks and by trusting God's Word what the difference is between right and wrong, between safe and dangerous, between wise and foolish. Learning to hold them high in your heart will help YOU learn right from wrong, safe from dangerous, wise from foolish ... and that will keep you from a ton of needless heartache, mess-ups, or disasters.

Cathy and I had older friends just a stage ahead of us in parenting that worked diligently at helping their kids learn to respond respectfully and without delay to the sound of their voice. To obey their words. When they instructed their kids, they didn't count (3-2-1) or cajole ("pleeeeeease, come on, do it for daddy"). For them it was, "Obey (!) right away."

One day, they were on a busy city street with other friends whose parenting style was chaotic. It was hard to tell who was in charge in that household. The kids in both families were racing down the sidewalk, when a car swerved dangerously toward them. My friend shouted, “Kids (!) Stop!” His kids did! The others didn’t, and only narrowly escaped getting hit by the car.

“A respectful, obedient child will be spared the bad habits and bad friends which tend to ruin and shorten life.” (Kent Hughes)¹

Proverbs agrees:

“Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many.”

(Proverbs 4:10, ESV)

“The fear of the Lord adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.”

(Prov 10:27, ESV)

Kids, God picked your parents just for you, to teach you how to walk in the awesome respect of God’s authority. He wants you to enjoy the full length of life He’s planned for you.

As you grow older and leave home, the way you OBEY will shift. As you take on more mature responsibilities, your mom and dad’s authority will shift from commanding you, to coaching, to advising, to ... being quiet and praying hard! But we NEVER outgrow God’s command to HONOR our parents. Learn now to treat your mom and dad with dignity, because one day they’ll grow old and gray and totter around toothless with walkers and utterly depend on you. And then, you’ll be well-prepared ... to hold them high, to care for them from the heart. You’ll be thankful you learned it at this stage of life.

So, Kids: OBEY and HONOR your parents. Got it?

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Ephesians, p. 199.

Church, these commands are useful for us all, because they teach us how to PRAY for OUR kids, for our grandkids, for our church kids so they get good at this with God's help. They need our prayers and our encouragement to flourish in these basics.

Now, moms ... dads. Here's what God COMMANDS of you. First, a DON'T! Then, a DO.

Parents: DON'T EMBITTER your kids; but DO TRAIN them. (Verse 4)

Fathers, **do not provoke** your children to anger ... (Ephesians 6:4, ESV)

God addresses dads here as the leaders in your home, but this is meant for both dad and mom. The RISK in being entrusted with authority over little, weaker ones is that we CAN be selfish and misuse our influence, abuse our power, and cause our kids to simmer and seethe.

They'll have enough hurdles to GET OVER in life, so let's make sure WE aren't the detriment in their growth. How would we do that?

By being unreasonable and expect something beyond our child's capacity.

By not giving them freedom to make mistakes.

By forgetting that they're wet cement--God's masterpieces in process.

By being sarcastic and demeaning so that your child feels like they'll never measure up.

By withholding forgiveness. Playing favorites.

Being inconsistent—making promises and not keeping them, telling them something is wrong yet doing it yourself.

By using your love to manipulate rather than loving them no matter what.

By making your parenting "all about me", rather than all about "what God is making of them."

Think back to your own upbringing. What is it from your upbringing that you had to GET OVER?
We too make mistakes, don't we!

The secret to undoing those blunders is this: Ask God for the humility and the courage to ask your kids for their forgiveness. "Michael, I'm so sorry. Will you forgive me for speaking to you like I just did?" Then, model how you too have to live near the cross and confess your sin, receive the relief – pray with them there. Show by your example how we all need to walk in repentance and receive God's free-flowing forgiveness!

Don't embitter your kids; instead, TRAIN them. V4b says,

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger BUT

BRING THEM UP ... in the discipline ... and instruction ... OF THE LORD.

(Ephesians 6:4, ESV)

Notice those four important components parts.

In our efforts to raise good kids, well-rounded kids, successful kids, it's easy to lose sight of that last part ... **OF THE LORD.**

Where do you run for parenting advice? TikTok reels? Facebook rants? Midwives or mommy bloggers--self-styled 'experts' you'll never meet so you never find out if their advice really is worth considering or not. This command cuts through all that. "Bring them up ... in the discipline ... and instruction ... **of the Lord.**" Get your advice there. Get books and blogs that are anchored there!

What does that mean though?

Do you know what the difference is between parents of infants and parents of young adults? An 18-year humbling. The kind of parenting God commands of us here is humanly impossible. What's expected here is influence we can participate in, but that really only God can do directly.

All you and I have is outside-in influence; only God can shape the heart. It's like growing a plant.

Imagine I have an apple tree in my front yard that produces ugly, wormy apples. I'm embarrassed. What will the neighbors think? So, I go to Zehrs and buy a bushel of Honeycrisps. I run to Home Depot to buy fishing line and a staple gun. That night, I go to my ugly apple tree, shake off all the ugly, and staple the whole bushel of apples one by one to the tree.²

Really? That's what it looks like to get my kids to behave 'good' so I look good.

What I *should* be doing is working the ground at the roots of the tree, weeding it, watering it, feeding it, pruning it, spraying it ... doing all the BASIC things ... all the OUTSIDE IN things ... that will NURTURE healthy apples to grow. But only God makes things grow like that.

The same is true of nurturing our kids.

Where does good behavior come from?

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

(Proverbs 4:23, NIV)

BRING THEM UP. The kind of UP-BRINGING commanded here goes deeper than controlling or modifying behaviour. It goes to shaping the wellspring. It goes to nurturing character.

When God says "**BRING THEM UP**" He means nourish them, the way a man (cf 5:29) feeds and cares for his own body, the way Christ nourishes and cherishes His church. Do what it takes to feed and care for your kids physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, but above all aim SOUL DEEP.

² An adaptation from Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*, pp. 49-50.

“Bring them up ... **IN THE DISCIPLINE** ... and instruction ... of the Lord.”

(Ephesians 6:4, ESV)

It USED to be universally accepted that you don't have to teach a toddler to be selfish. Selfishness comes naturally. Every human being is born with a self-ward bent that the Bible calls the sin nature, and until God transforms that heart, it needs positive patient nurture. It needs careful corrective discipline. It needs to be trained.

The dividing line between childhood and adulthood is self-control. Self-discipline. How will our kids learn to discipline themselves, to say “no” to themselves, to self-regulate or to self-correct unless their parents first model it and then lovingly correct them? How will they learn to heed God's correction in their lives unless you lovingly discipline them?

Discipline is no fun. Aren't timeouts great?! How about appropriate spankings? No fun for either party!

“Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; don't be a willing party to his death.”

(Proverbs 19:18, ESV)

Kids, if you have parents who take the care to lovingly correct you, thank God. Thank them!

He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.

(Proverbs 15:32, ESV)

For [our earthly parents] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the

peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(Hebrews 12:10-11, ESV)

Parents, “bring them up (cherish them, nurture them) ... in the discipline (correct them) ... **AND INSTRUCTION** ... of the Lord.”

Teach. **Fill their minds with what God says is true about Himself and about them.**

Heart-deep, character transformation cannot happen in a child unless you (mom / dad) clearly, consistently, patiently helping them see what we can only learn in God’s Word. What we learn in the flow of Ephesians, for example: Teach them how good and glorious God is. How we’ve sinned and are guilty and unresponsive to Him. How we CAN’T be good on our own. Only God can do the work in our sinful hearts that we ALL desperately need. How He’s done that by giving us Jesus, who lived and died and rose again so that ONLY by grace (as His gift) and by faith (saying “YES” to Him) we come alive to God, and by His Spirit’s powerful help grow into the masterpieces of holiness and godliness and love that God intends us to be.

God intends for YOU parents to be your kids’ main soul-instructors.

Instruct them in the Lord.

Your target isn’t to have good kids that make you look good. It’s to have kids that know they need Jesus (like you do), who trust and treasure him (as you do), and are being trained how to walk in God’s Word with the help of God’s Spirit and grow in godliness (like you do). Making God look as glorious as He is.

Instruct them in the Lord.

In the 1990’s, there was a strange experiment in the Arizona desert called Biosphere 2. Seven scientists sealed themselves off in a glass-domed, self-contained ecosystem to see if they could do something like that on Mars and survive. Everything was in place. Water. Plants. Animals. Food. Sunlight. EXCEPT ... among the many difficulties they encountered, perfectly healthy trees kept falling over! Why? No wind. Nothing challenged the trees to help them grow strong.

Parents, your God-given role is to decide what winds will help your child grow strong.

The headwinds you face today are fiercer than ever. Everyone and everything is vying to sideline you from shaping your kids. Our pastor often references the epidemic of anxiousness, depression, self-harm that began with the smartphone and social media. Those little devices pack gale force winds. Mom/Dad, what are you doing to put age-appropriate limits and controls and accountability on screen time?

God says ... YOU bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't do it alone! You have HIS household of faith, this multi-generational community of godly support and wisdom and prayer. That's why God is having us ALL tune in to this. So we can encourage, support and pray in a way that's aligned with these God-given basics.

The basics are these:

Kids, OBEY and HONOR your parents in the Lord.

Parents, DON'T EMBITTER your kids, but TRAIN them in the Lord.

The process of growing up and parenting isn't ultimately about us.

It's about our glorious God, who was gracious enough to save us.

He saved us so that we would grow godly, so we would spend our one life for Him, so others could grow godly and spend their lives for Him, from generation to generation till He returns.

Unless the LORD builds our house, we labor in vain who build it. (Ps 127:1)

So, when you feel like your efforts falter or are failing or have failed utterly, pray.

Pray. Ahead of the process. Pray. In the process. Pray. When the process is over.

I read an article some time ago, telling how ... after the iron curtain came down in Russia during the Gorbachev era and the doors flew open for the gospel for a short few years, evangelical mission groups couldn't find enough Russian language Bibles to keep up with the need in the harvest. Someone remembered that during Stalin's era, he couldn't get rid of Bibles fast enough. Burning and shredding them was too slow, so he chucked them into warehouses, locked the doors and tossed the keys. They located those warehouses and mountains of Bibles. They hired local homeless people to help dust the Bibles off and get them ready for distribution.

One day one of those helpers went missing. Did he grab Bibles to make some money for himself? They found him way in the back of the warehouse, with a Bible open in his lap, weeping. In the mountain of Bibles, he had found the one that belonged to his grandmother.

I know this is conjecture. But I can imagine, that when that Bible was ripped from that dear lady's hands years before, she knew there was one thing they couldn't take away.

She could still pray.