

Part 11: Submitting to Jesus in Parenting

Tyler Velin | Ephesians 6:1-4

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We have been in a book of the Bible called Ephesians, which is a letter from the Apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus. We have two weeks left, and we have entered the portion of the book where Paul is speaking about our relationships and how the gospel of Jesus Christ changes all of them.

We have had a number of interruptions in our series the past few weeks, but it is important to remember that Paul sees this all as one unity of thought. Back in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul urges us as the church to make the best use of our time here on earth, and then in verse 18 he says how we need to do that: we must be filled with the Spirit. We need to let the Holy Spirit, which God has given us in our salvation, influence the way in which we live our day to day lives.

And for Paul there is nothing more practical to this Spirit-filled walk than our relationships. Because he concludes his description of Spirit-filled living by saying this: **Ephesians 5:21**. Paul is using this principle as a gospel-pipe cleaner, pulling it all the way through the whole network of our relationships that they might work as God designed them to. The gospel makes our relationships distinct.

What does this Spirit-filled life affect, what areas of our life should look different due to mutual submission and reverence towards Jesus? It affects wives and husbands (last time), it affects (as we will see next time) bond-servants and masters, and it affects children and parents (as we will see today).

Now in this room there are college students who are out of the home, single and married couples without kids, parents of adult kids, and individuals whose parents have passed away. If that's you, you still have a wonderful treat today. Because God's word is always for our good, there are three reasons why you should not tune out a message on parenting.

First, each of us have been profoundly impacted by our parents either positively or negatively. In fact psychological and economic research shows that your childhood either forms your adult life as a prison or a palace. It's profoundly shaping. But despite your experience with your parents, your relationship with God as Father has the ability to redeem and reorder that experience. There is a greater power in this world than the power your parents had over you.

Second, if you are a parent, you have profoundly shaped the life of your children. If your influence has been mainly good, you might boast, and if your influence has been less, you might be prone to guilt and regret. But despite the affect your parenting had on your children, the gospel has greater power in your child's life. So there is humility and hope for you in this passage today.

Lastly, it takes a church to parent well. Paul opens this text by speaking specifically to children. This was a letter written to churches, and here Paul assumes and affirms that children are present and of equal importance in the body of Christ. Parents need supporters and encouragers and children need gospel-role models. They need unrelated individuals to become aunts and uncles in the gospel who care for them, pray for them and participate in the costly call to disciple them.

God has blessed our church with a large number of college students and young adults. To you young men and women, these children watch you. Our Jr. Highers watch how you interact on Sunday morning, our High Schoolers see your priorities in college. Be mindful and ever vigilant of what it is you are showing them.

The children in this church might not be your children, but at one point we were not God's children, and he still cared for us.

With that being said here is what we are going to see today in Ephesians 6:1-4. Three things: **The fruit of obedience is joy, The goal of parenting is to make disciples, and The gospel is the fullest experience of parenting.**

So let's dive into our text today: **Ephesians 6:1-4**

Our first point today is addressed to children and it is this: **The fruit of obedience is joy.**

As Paul did with wives and husbands, and as he will do with bondservants and masters, Paul begins by addressing the person under authority before turning to the one in authority. And Paul's commands to children is two-fold: obey and honor.

Obey your parents and honor your father and your mother. Now as a quick aside, who is Paul talking to here? Is he talking to young children or adult children? Well, yes and no. The truth was in Roman society children never outgrew the authority of their parents. It was only when their parents died that they were legally freed from that responsibility.

This is different in our culture: 18 is legally considered the point where children become adults and can make their own decisions. Because God knew his word was going to be applied across all cultures he didn't provide a minimum age here. But there is in here an important principle either way and that is that while your culture might dictate when a child is independent from their parent, children, regardless of age are still called to honor their parents.

So to those in here who are outside of their parent's authority, I want to ask you, what is the posture of your heart towards your parents? You might have had the worst relationship with them, they might have been the most despicable people in your life, but God here is calling you to honor them. Why? Because God gave you to them, and gave them to you. You didn't choose your parents, but God did. And in this structure there is responsibilities that both parties hold, even if the other party fails to live up to theirs.

This doesn't mean that you need to be best friends with them, it doesn't mean that you need to appreciate all the wrongs they may have done, but it does mean that you need not harbor in your heart a vindictive and disrespectful attitude. I imagine that there are some people in here who need to go to God with the anger they have towards one or both of their parents and they need to ask God to help them with it.

But now, I want to speak to you students and kids in here who are still in the home. Paul is calling you to obey for two reasons. The first is that it is right. To obey your parent is the right thing to do. God made the parent/child relationship. He knit you together in your mother's belly, and he gave you to your parents desiring that you would obey them.

Look at what Paul says in **Colossians 3:20**. You might find it hard to please your parents because sometimes you don't want to please your parents. But the heart of your obedience is actually about your heart towards God. Your obedience pleases God and there is nothing more important in our lives than that. This is why Paul tells you to obey "in the Lord."

If you love Jesus, if he is doing a wonderful work in your heart, then the Holy Spirit in your heart will help you here. Jesus helps us do what's right even when it's hard, and what's right in this case is to obey your parents. God gave you your parents and has called them to care for you.

But it gets even better. Not only should you obey because that's the way God designed it, but woven into God's great design is that obedience always comes with the promise of God. Look again **Ephesians 6:1-3**.

You seek to obey because that's the way God designed it, but we should also want to obey because we want to reap the reward of God's promises. Paul here quotes from the 10 Commandments and points out that for kids, there is no greater commandment when it comes to obeying than this one. It comes with a promise!

In a few weeks we are going to start a series in the book of Deuteronomy, where we will look at this passage in more detail. But all through the book of Deuteronomy Moses is preparing God's people for life in the Promised Land, life in the place they've always dreamed of. And his reminder is this: if you obey God, things will go really well and your life in the promise land will go beautifully. But if you disobey God, it's going to be hard. In other words, inside the circle of obedience is joy and protection, but outside of that circle is frustration and a lack of protection.

And the people of Israel failed to realize this, just as Adam and Eve failed to do this. And they remind us of the great lie that Satan wants us to believe as children and as Christians. Satan's great lie is that disobedience gets us what we want: disobedience gets us the safety and satisfaction we want. But that's never true. Disobedience is easy to do but hurts beyond measure. Obedience is often costly to do but brings only joy.

Kids, part of your sinful nature will be to think that you know more than your parents and that you know what's better for you than your parents. But God has given you parents to seek your good, to prepare you for a life where you can enjoy even more than you can imagine. This might not mean that obedience is always easy, or that you always have the nicest toys or most comfortable life. But it does mean that as you obey your parents, you are pleasing God and the pleasure of God is our greatest joy.

Parents, one quick aside here, do you model this joyful obedience in your home? Do your children see the way you obey your heavenly father trusting that he knows what is best for you? Is your obedience a visible expression of the joy you have in the gospel?

God wants us to obey, God wants children to obey, because God is after your joy. If you want real, enduring, and lasting joy, trust the commands of God to obey. This starts at home.

And now Paul turns the corner and begins to address parents by specifically addressing the Fathers: **Ephesians 6:4**. What we see in this text is that **The goal of parenting is to raise disciples**.

Now Paul does speak to fathers here but this doesn't mean he is not also speaking to mothers. Many times in the Greek, masculine plural nouns like "brothers" and "fathers" include also the idea of "sisters" and "mothers." So moms it will do well for you to heed this passage as well.

But just as Paul told us earlier that the husband is the head of the wife, so too does the father have a unique role in the leadership and spiritual care of the family. This reminder is needed so firmly inside of every generation, and this is true in our own generation today.

Paul gives two commands to fathers here one in the negative and one in the positive: do not provoke your child to anger, and raise up your child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. A quick survey of culture would show that generally the opposites are true. Sit-coms show the reality of the dad being the primary source of anger in the home as he bumbles his way through life. And sadly experience shows that it is often the wife who leads in bringing her children to church, praying for them and caring for their spiritual well-being.

That's not to say that mothers can't anger their kids and that they shouldn't lead their children, but it is to say that dads have an inescapable role due to the position God has placed them in.

So that's for you fathers, don't avoid Paul's specific address here. But let's together look at his two commands: Don't provoke your child to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now we need to hold these two commands in tension don't we? Because if the only command to parents was to not make your children angry, then life would seem easier wouldn't it? We just remove ourselves from the equation.

We give them what they want, when they want it. When we see the devious eyes of our toddler or teenager light up, we call an impromptu date night and leave the house blissfully unaware of the damage of actions which otherwise might need correction.

The problem of this is two-fold. First, we know in reality that this would never work. We've seen Willy Wonka we know that if all parents do is cave to the demands of their children they actually become angrier and more demanding. They become monsters.

I remember a distinct trend that was popular on the internet for a while. It's what I call the "never-no parenting model." The idea was that parents should never say no to their kids, and instead let them learn from natural consequences. This week as I was doing research I noticed that there was a distinct lack of such articles recently. My only conclusion is that these parents have died. The chaos overtook them. You can't remove a child's anger simply by removing yourself from the equation. It doesn't work in practice. God's word is so full of texts showing the wonderful blessing of instruction and discipline. Refusing to train or discipline your child seems loving, but it's actually the furthest thing from it. It shirks the responsibility God gave you.

It doesn't work in any family, and it certainly won't work in God's family. Because the goal of parenting isn't just to not anger your children, but it is also to raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

That is to say the goal of parenting is to raise disciples. And when we start talking about discipline and instruction we understand that there will be times when our kids are angry. There are very few times when I'm disciplining or instructing my children when they begin to weep out of gratitude.

God is the only perfect and sinless father. Yet as we saw last week in Jonah, God made Jonah angry. In 1 Chronicles 13, King David is angered by God. Even a sinless God can cause sinners to be angry. It is therefore our job as parents to consider the call to raise up our children in the Lord while minimizing the times when our sin provokes or stirs them up to anger in unnecessary ways.

There can be times in our parenting where we see our kids responding angrily to our commands and we say with a sort of arrogance, "Deal with it, I'm the parent." If all we had was verses 1-3 that might be a sufficient answer, but doesn't this verse at least cause us to stop and consider why our child might be responding like that?

Could it be that we are being impatient with them? Could it be that we are being unreasonable with them, expecting a five year old to function like a 15 year old, or treating a 17 year old like a seven year old? Could it be that in our discipline of them that we are the ones without discipline? Disciplining when we are angry and when we lack self-control?

Because we are not God, we cannot control the emotions of our kids. But because we are not God, and we are sinners, anger in our children should lead us to prayerfully reflect on our own actions and how they may have sinfully contributed to a provocation of anger.

Paul says you must also seek to "raise them up" in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The word Paul uses here translated as "raise them up" is the same word he used in 5:29 when he says that a husband must nourish his wife as his own body.

What are you nourishing your children with? What is their diet as it relates to hearing, seeing and learning about the gospel? We have a wonderful church and a wonderful kids ministry and youth Bible study, and we want you to use all of those things. But, we want you to realize that these are strategic partners with you and not sole-providers for this kind of instruction. The church helps parents, but the parents need to lead in this.

Is your home life distinct because of the gospel? Did you ever have a friend's house growing up where they always ate different food? Maybe they were ethnic, maybe they were health nuts, but you knew when you went there things were different. Is the nourishment in your home distinct like that? If not, I encourage you to start small.

When I think back on my childhood I remember distinctly prayers at dinner and prayers at bed time. It wasn't elaborate, it wasn't perfect, but I knew two things from it: my parents cared about me, and God wanted to hear and help me.

We have experimented with all sorts of family worship at my house, but with the age and stage of my kids, we have found something simple that we do every time we sit down to eat. Whenever we gather for dinner, regardless of who is over, I read a Psalm or a portion of a Psalm, and we pray for dinner. That's it, and my kids have come to expect it, and it's wonderfully imperfect, and often times it's disrupted by a hotdog being thrown across the table, but it's pleasing to God and influential to my kids.

But I want to say this before I get to our last point today. I do say, and God here commands that parent's model their homes so as to make Christian disciples; men and women who grow up to follow Jesus with their whole hearts. But our parenting is never good enough to save our kids, only grace can do that. Our parenting is also never bad enough to ruin our kids because grace is stronger than that.

Ultimately God isn't asking us to trust our parenting, he's asking us to trust him.

I remember when Sarah and I left the hospital with Owen, our first born, there was this distinct moment where we were like: "What are we doing? And why are they letting us have this child?"

Our culture is filled with parenting manuals, best-practices, and guides when it comes to parenting. As helpful as these are, we can easily neglect the greatest help and greatest distinction in parenting: the gospel.

Life really doesn't prepare you for parenting. But the gospel does. Why? Because your parents are broken at best and wicked at worst. But if you are a believer, you have had an encounter with the true Father. You have been parented by a perfect parent. And when you learn to see how God cared for you as his child, that becomes the principle which shapes all of your parenting.

This is our final point this morning: **The Gospel is the Full Experience of Parenting.**

I was listening to a preacher once talk about God, and his understanding of God as Father was shaped by the way the preacher parented his kids. But this is so backwards. God has always and forever been the perfect Father. Reading our parenting into our understanding of God is a backwards system. Instead, it is God's fatherly work which when understood properly shapes our understanding of parenting. There is nothing more practical in all of life than understanding how God saved you through Jesus.

This has been Paul's point all throughout the book. Remember how he started: **Ephesians 1:3-5**. God adopted us. God made us his children when we were not his children. In fact this is so central to our understanding of God that the primary title Paul uses for God in Ephesians is Father. Eight times in this book he calls God our Father. To know God as Father means you've experienced God as Father through the adopting power of Jesus.

Do you understand how God fathered you? Because if you do, on a Christian level, it should lead you to great obedience and worship. And if you do on a parenting level, you will realize you have everything you need to raise up your child as Paul is asking you to do. The principle for Christian parenting is that we try to parent our kids like God fathered us.

God disciplines us when we sin in fact Hebrews says that the discipline of God reminds us that God loves us. Look at **Hebrews 12:5-8**. God as a loving father disciplines us. But God also gives grace, he is long-suffering and patient. God's love was costly, giving up his own Son. We rarely get up off the couch to parent, but Jesus came from heaven to earth so that we might be adopted.

I want to give an example of how this shapes my parenting in closing.

The other week we were on vacation with some family at a cabin in Idaho. My four year old was sleeping in the back room with her grandparents and the rest of my family was in a bunk bed room. Sarah and I were on the bottom, Ellie was asleep in a pac-n-play and Owen was sleeping on the top bunk.

That night it was one thousand degrees in the room and I had wrestled to sleep. And just as I fell asleep my son climbed down from the top bunk sobbing and terrified. I comforted him, and said, "there, there my son, cast your anxiety on God, lay here with me and we will make it till the morning."

No. I didn't. I told him to go back up to bed. He began to get more emotional, and I began to get more heated as I worried he would wake up Ellie. He told me that there was a snake in his bed, which was completely outrageous. I knew it was just a dream and I kept telling him that, and the more I protested, the more emotional he got. At this point he was trying to climb into bed with me and I was physically not allowing him to do so.

It was at this point that the smell got to me. Here was my six year old boy, who had been swimming in the lake, doing other things presumably in the lake as well, playing in the forest, and sweating profusely in his bed. He smelled absolutely terrible. So the more he tried to get into bed, the more he stunk.

I finally was so frustrated with him that I grabbed him by the arm and pulled him out of the room into the bathroom across the hall, flipped on the bright light, and started to clean him up in frustration. And then I saw him.

I saw my son. Standing there, blinking and exposed in the light, woken up in the middle of the night, terrified of some imaginary snake coming to his father only to be turned away, shamed and exposed because he was inconvenient and unclean.

And I realized that the worst smell in the room was not my son. It was my heart. In all my sin I was far more offensive, far more unrealistic, and far more frustrating than my son, but when I go to God he doesn't treat me like this.

When I go to my heavenly Father in my sin, he takes me, and he points me to Jesus and he says, "He'll take all of that for you."

My parenting in that moment told my son that when fear and filth take over, deal with it on your own. That's never how God treats us. If that is you today, see what Jesus did to adopt you. He took your sin, he took your filth so that you can go to God and fear no rejection from the Father. Jesus is the only way to this Father, run to him. Whatever the cost, it's worth it.

So Sarah ended up taking Owen that night, and I wrestled in bed with this wonderfully painful encounter with God the Father. Realizing my filth, my sin, and his firm but cleansing grace.

That morning I pulled my son aside and I asked for his forgiveness. I told him dad messed up. The way dad treated him is not how God treats dad, and that it was wrong.

The irony of parenting is that the best parenting is often done in moments of repentance. Because it's when sinful parents repent that our kids see the distinction of Christian parenting. We aren't the perfect parent, but our imperfections can point to the God who is. And that's the greatest gift we can give our kids.

Our parenting is meant to be a placeholder. That's what it means to raise disciples. We prepare our children to be parented by God, and in him they will find a better parent, a safer parent and a lovelier one.

In Jesus, God is raising us for eternity, let us raise our kids for such an end as well.