

The Call of a Father
Ephesians 6:1-3
Englewood Baptist Church
June 20, 2010 (Father's Day)

Please open your Bibles to Ephesians 6 this morning.

I love to be called "Pastor." I just love that title because I love the ministry. This past week I attended the Southern Baptist Convention and I felt like I was part of the coolest fraternity on the planet. I just can't believe that everybody doesn't want to be a pastor. I am shocked that there are churches all over the place searching for a preacher. I would think that search committees would be overwhelmed by the amount of applicants. Paul said to Timothy, "If anyone sets his heart on becoming a pastor, he desires a noble thing."

But I must confess to you today, that as much as I love to be called "Pastor," that designation pales in comparison to the joy of being called "Daddy." Now that's cool. This past week, while I was away from my wife and away from my daughter, and away from my three sons, I had moments of depression when I would wonder what they were doing without me. But I had done a genius thing. Before I left, I had my little girl, Ava, sing a song into my phone so that I could hear her voice whenever I wanted. She was reluctant, and gave me that, "Dad, don't make sing" look. But I want you to hear what I got to listen to all week:

[play the song]

Now that's cool. Being a father and a husband is the most rewarding work on the face of the Earth and that is why I look forward to Mother's Day and Father's Day every year. I get to preach on subject of family and the Bible is chocked full of material on this topic.

The title of my message today is "The Call of a Father," but I am going to speaking to mothers, sons, and daughters as well. The passage of Scripture that I have chosen today is essentially the recipe for a healthy family and a peace-filled home. Isn't that what we all want, Dads? I don't know about you, but I want my house to be a place of rest, and tranquility, and fun...not a hotbed for anger, and outbursts, and slamming doors, and drama. Happy homes make happy people.

Read with me what Paul says to the people who live inside the home. He speaks to mommies, to daddies, and to sons and daughters. Hear the word of God.

Read Ephesians 6:1-3.

Let me begin this lesson for children and parents today extending grace to both parties. Being a teenager, or a child, is no simple thing. It's hard. I can specifically remember as a boy some of the moments when I was so furious with my parents for withholding some privilege from me. I couldn't, for the life of me, understand why I had to be home by midnight on Homecoming night when all my classmates were extended a little bit later

curfew. I couldn't understand why I was not allowed to spend the night at a friend's house on Saturday night, because there was church on Sunday. I could not comprehend why in the world, I was not granted permission to go camping near the river with my friends and why my mother was so afraid of that. Growing up under the authority of other people is frustrating at times. I get that. I felt that way. You feel that way. We all felt that way. So be encouraged, young people, you are not alone in your angst.

But, let me also say this. Being a parent is no bed of roses either. Being the boss is not all it's cracked up to be. I hate to see my children cry, but I accept that sometimes my decision breaks their heart. I hate to pull my child away from Chuck E Cheese and punish him by taking away his ski ball tickets and his game tokens. That's not fun! I do not enjoy forcing a bowl of oatmeal in front of the face of my son and watching big alligator tears flow down his cheeks like the Nile River. Parenting is not always a trip to Disney World. It's hard, frustrating work sometimes.

So these words that Paul writes to children and to parents are like a jagged pill, hard to swallow. These are challenging, convicting words. It's hard to be a kid and it's hard to be a mom or a dad, but this Word of God is written to equip us and to help us live according to God's plan. So let's dig in here and see what Paul has to say to all the children in the family.

V. 1...

Two reasons are given for why children should listen to their parents.

Why Children Should Do What Their Parents Ask

1. It is right.

Morally, it is the right thing to do, to obey our parents even when we disagree with their decision. Paul begins his argument by appealing to the human sense of what is right and what is wrong. You don't have to read the Bible to know that knocking an elderly woman on her back in the parking lot of Wal-Mart and driving away in her car is sinful, or that borrowing your neighbor's answers off his homework assignment is wrong, or that making fun of the awkward boy in your P.E. class is evil. We know, from birth that abuse, lying, cheating, and stealing are not right. It's not right!

I was praying with one of our deacons recently, Mr. Sam Burns. Sam lost his daddy when he was a boy, but he remembers two things his daddy said to him. He said, "Son, remember these two things. "Don't lie to people, and don't ever steal a thing." And then he said this, "If you'll do one, you'll do the other." Now that's wisdom. If you will lie to someone's face, you steal from them too. It's not right to steal and to lie. We know these things are wrong.

But also, nobody argues with the fact that a young boy is wrong when deliberately takes his father's pickup truck out for a spin, without permission. Willful, intentional

disobedience is wrong. Children should do what their parents ask. We know this. That's why, as children, when we were sneaking out the window of our rooms and running off to be with friends, we woke up the next morning with a guilty conscience. In our hearts, we know that disobeying authority is wrong.

Now, let me say this. This is NOT an exaggeration. Every society rises or falls on the order of the family. Where children grow up without rules or with resentment to mom and dad, there is a steady increase in crime, in poverty, and in murder. The relationship between fathers and their children, between mothers and their children is the backbone of society.

So Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right?" So kids, sometimes it just helps us to see it with our eyes. This question on the screen. Read these three questions and answer them in your heart:

Three Questions for Young People

Am I doing the right thing?

Am I obeying my parents at home?

Am I doing so willingly?

If your answer is not "Yes," "yes," and "yes" to those questions, then you need to say you're sorry to God and you need to offer an apology to your parents, and make it right. And God will swing open doors for you. Trust me on this. When you do the right thing, you will get the reward from God.

Number two, Paul says that children should obey parents because...

2. It is written in the Bible.

Look at v. 2...

Paying attention to your parents is number 5 on the top 10 Commandments in Old Testament Scripture. You are called to honor your father and your mother.

[Show figures] Now, let me share this insight with you that I found interesting. Most Christians, when they teach the 10 Commandments, divide them into two parts. On the left tablet are the first four commandments. On the right side, are the last 6 commandments. The first four, are thought to refer to our relationship with God. The last 6 are thought to refer to our relationship with others. I can understand why people have divided up the Law like this.

However, the Jews never saw it this way. The Jews have always arranged the two tablets equally, five and five. The first five being those commands before the Lord. The second five being those commands before men.

Now that seems like we're splitting hairs, and making a big deal out of nothing, but Paul seems to side with the Jewish understanding here. When we put 5 on the left, and 5 on the right, this arrangement brings the honoring of our parents under our duty to God. That is, when young people choose to listen to Dad, they actually choose to listen to the Lord. Father and mother are the undershepherds, and they are on assignment from God. It is written in the Bible so that we will not forget.

If you are here this morning and you are in high school, or middle school, or elementary school, I want you to hear me. It's not your job to decide if Mom and Dad are right about everything. They have to answer to God for that. But it is your homework from heaven, to accept their decisions and to go along willingly and without complaining and without holding a grudge.

It's right here in the instructions manual: "Honor your father and mother."

Now, there is one more reason Paul gives for children listening to their parents. This is the best one of all. You're gonna like this! Don't turn me off yet.

3. It will come back to bless you a million times over.

Look what it says! Listen to your Dad, "so that it may go well with you." It doesn't matter if Dad's decision is the right one or the wrong one, when you choose to comply, God notices what is done in secret and He loves to reward those who earnestly seek Him. When you choose to have a good attitude toward discipline, God will plow a path of joy for you!

Have you ever tried out for a sports team? Basketball, or tennis, or swimming? What does the coach do to determine who makes the team? Let me tell you what the coach does. He puts all his players through a long list of silly exercises. He makes them dribble a ball back and forth. He makes them run. He makes them listen to an offensive plan and then tells them to do it? Why does he do this? What is he looking for? He's looking for talent, yes. Natural gifting. But also, he is looking closely to see which players are coachable and teachable and open to suggestions. He's looking for players who will hear his voice, "Get back on defense!" and they immediately sprint to the other end of the court.

And to that player, who listens to the coach, and does what he asks even when it's confusing, to that player, the coach assigns much more playing time. Things go well for the player who does what the coach says.

Paul says, "Every boy, every girl is born on a team. And God has assigned the coaches. And when children will let their daddies and their mommies coach them, guess what happens in the lives of those children? That's right. Things go well for them. Those kids live in peace, and they get a lot of priveleges, and the Lord grants them opportunities that other kids never get. God plows a path of goodness for the child who listens to his Dad and to his Mom. It will go well with him.

Young people, are you willingly and joyfully honoring your parents? Are you making their life easy or are you making their life miserable. You have that power. What will you do with it?

Now, it's time to flip the coin and see what Paul says to Fathers. This admonition is written specifically to dads, but the commentators agree that it applies just as well to mothers, to all parents.

Let me read v. 3 to you...

Now parents, let me explain what Paul was facing in the Roman Empire. Parenting changes with every generation and with every culture. In Paul's time, in his day, Dads were domineering, sovereign kings over their families. The children were viewed as their servants, their lackeys. Roman fathers could even sell off their sons to slavery, or punish them by death if they were rebellious. I tell you this because I want you to understand why Paul says essentially to the dads of his day, "Chill out a little bit."

He clearly puts a restraint on the discipline of the dads. He says, "Don't be rough, abrasive, rugged, domineering. Don't be a know-it-all, a tyrant, and don't rule with an iron fist." Lead like Jesus led. That's essentially what he is saying to Dads.

Instructions To Dads

1. Lead like Jesus led his followers.

If all these words describe the dads of Paul's day:

Angry
Abrasive
Loud
Demanding
Strong-willed
Opinionated
Quick tempered

Then Paul encourages the Dads to be counter-cultural, to lead like Jesus led:

Servant
Self-controlled
Patient
Gentle
Nurturing
Understanding
Sacrificial

Those are the words that best describe true leadership in the home.

Let me tell you the most important moments in our lives are when we make big mistakes. When your children blow it, your first reaction will be to blow your top and to come down hard on them. And believe me, I'm not telling you to let your children off the hook when they make poor choices. There must consequences for sin.

However, I would say this: those moments of shame, and sorrow, and regret are the moments you must seize as a coach of your kids. God never wastes a hurt, and we shouldn't either. When children are hurting from the pain of a poor choice, this is a moment to come alongside them and not stand over them. We must lead with grace and lead with encouragement.

You think about the way that Jesus responded to Peter. Peter was like a teenage boy, prone to outbursts, desperately seeking approval and acceptance, he wanted so bad to be number one on the team. He was cocky, he was a loud-mouth, and he was unpredictable. He constantly made poor choices that disappointed Jesus. When those soldiers came to arrest his friend, Peter took out his sword and he acted in violence. He almost killed a man. And what did Jesus do? "Peter, put your sword away."

And when Peter turned his back on Christ three times in the same night, what did Jesus do? He appeared to Peter later with grace and said, "Peter, feed me sheep. Be a pastor. Be brave." He never let Peter write off or lost his temper with the slow-growing follower. He poured courage into Peter by focusing on the future and not on the past.

Dads, your children want more than anything, to please you. They want to be #1 on your team, first in your eyes. They may not always act like it, but they do. Children are born with a desire to be close to their dads. And the surest way to drive your kids out of your life is to make them feel like they will never measure up, like they are inferior, like they are clumsy kids who do nothing but disappoint you.

If you focus on the faults of your children, you will exasperate them. You will wear them out. You will discourage them. You will drain every ounce of courage and hope from their hearts. In essence, they will never fully develop into all that God created them to be.

What kind of leader are you in the home? Do you lead with heaps of encouragement or do you make fun of your kids? Do you keep a record of wrongs, always bringing their failures, or do you search for ways to say, "Good job." Because I can tell you this, when I blow it, when I make a big clumsy mistake, the surest way to drive me to depression is to jump all over me. The most effective way of helping me, is to come alongside me, and to love me, and to believe in me. That's what your kids need. Walk beside them, and give them hope, not another lecture. Jesus didn't do a whole lot of lecturing.

A second principle for dads is this:

2. Take charge of teaching.

Paul says, “train them up.” Going back to the coaching analogy. What coach goes into the gym and says, “Guys, here’s the basketballs. We’ve got a game next week. Now go play.” Any coach that shows this much passivity does not take his responsibility seriously. A good coach organizes the practice and he wears gym shorts and tennis shoes so that he can be close to the action. He is not a chaperone; he is a hands-on teacher and instructor. And when that boy fails to box out his man, he blows his whistle, and he gets in their, and he shows him how to do it.

That’s what fathering is supposed to be. Dads are supposed to be so attentive to the lives of their sons and daughters that they can get into the action and instruct them on how to live. Fathers must be teachers, and the best teachers are the ones who lead by example.

I have a reaaaally hard time going out to eat with my kids and with church members. I do that sometimes, but it’s not easy for me. And this is why. My children are still learning how to sit in a chair, and how to be quiet when adults are speaking, and how to resist the temptation to interrupt and how eat everything on their plate before eating dessert. They are still learning the basics of respect and godly interaction. They are in training. And when we are in those environments, and we need to be, I am like a hawk with my kids. I’m trying to listen to that kind person across from the table, but this feels like practice, and I have a lot of coaching to do.

I’m not the most alert parent in the world. My wife is more aware than I. I’m working on it, but what my children need is my training, my instruction, and my coaching. They need me to show them how to do it.

And Dads, what your children need, is for you to talk to them about what it means to follow Jesus. But they need more than information, they need a demonstration. Bring them up, raise them up, by showing them how. Are you actively involved in the discipleship and spiritual growth of your kids? Are you showing them how to pray? How to worship? How to serve? How to forgive? How to give honor where honor is due? How to walk humbly with their God?

May the Lord help us, Dads, to lead our kids closer to Jesus.