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Raising Kids Who Hope In God

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Ephesians 6:1-4



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Well, it is great to see you, Providence family. For all of the parts of the family that I cannot see because you're in other venues, welcome. We're glad you're here too. And all of our guests who are here, you are new here to Providence, welcome. We're thrilled that you have joined us. I just want to say just a few words to those who call Providence their home. I just want to thank you and commend you as our building nears completion. You can hold this with an open hand, but we should be in some time in May. That's certainly our hope.

Each week and every month that sort of passes, it just creates more gratitude in my heart for you and what the Lord has done in your life and how you have been so sacrificial. For those who are here right now, who walk down here Sunday by Sunday, I'm so grateful for your sacrifice. As a whole church family, to watch the services on the screens isn't our normal mode around here, and yet we have a lot of people in the various venues. I'm so grateful for your willingness, for your sacrifice, and so grateful for your generosity in a million different ways at Providence.

I'm also so grateful for your perspective, because you believe, just as I, and that is that that building is going to be useful, but it will never be our mission. God has not called us to build bricks. What he's called us to do is to glorify him by introducing all peoples to Jesus Christ and then to grow them up to love and worship him. What we're about as a church family is the glory of God and God being glorified, as people are being changed, as they look to Jesus Christ and as he helps them to unravel the tangle of their life and of their heart.

That's why we love the Bible around here, and that's what we're going to do right now. While we study the Bible, just when we gather, but wherever we gather, however we gather, however we're scattered, is because the Bible says that it's God word to us, that it is his revelation of who he is, who we are, and how we're supposed to live in his world. If you have one with you, if you have one in your hand, if you want to head to Ephesians, chapter 6. If not, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you, and you can take that home, if you don't have one at home, as a gift.

Over the next four weeks, what we're going to do is finish our study of this amazing little book. I love Ephesians; it's so practical. He moves to the end, and we have four weeks left. Then, in May and June, what we'll do is look at the foundations of the family, just look at eight different weeks, eight very, very important building blocks of what the family is and what God really created, how he made it for us.

For now, we get a little glimpse of that in the first four verses of chapter six of Ephesians because it's about children, and it's about parenting. I know that many of us, we have very different ideas about what family is and we have very different experiences about what family has been. Some of us were very happy about it. Some of us are brokenhearted about it, so what I want to do is pray for all of us. If you would, let's bow. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we come to you, and when we open up this book, it says that family is important to you. We know that when you look into our heart, you know that family is important to us. We confess to you, God, in every one of our families there's a measure of brokenness. There's a measure of futility. We're striving so much at times, striving in the wrong direction. We hurt one another. I pray that you would renew our hope this morning with your word. Help us to believe what it says, help us to apply it to our life, help us to see the supremacy of Jesus, that life really isn't about family. It really is about Jesus and family. It's intended to point to him, and so would you give us clarity. Just as you wrote through Paul to a real church in Ephesus so many years ago, would you speak those lessons, those truths to us here at Providence this morning. I pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, there's a lot of us in this room, and yet there's some things that are very, very similar about all of us. In fact, if you think about all of our differences, what binds us together, what we share in common is much more significant than how we're different. Every single one of us hopes that we're still alive by the end of the day. We share that in common. As image-bearers of God, we all have in common basic things like talking and listening and touching and feeling and looking and singing. It's an unusual thing. Not everything in this world can do those things.

We also long for peace. We long for joy, we long for happiness. We long for our children to be safe. This is true about every one of us, and yet, isn't it interesting how many things in the world ... A lot of us who are so similar, we look and we can have very divergent emotions about them. It proves that the world is tangled, that only in a tangled world can people with so much similarity have such deep and dividing emotions over various things.

Let me show you what I mean. Here's our president. Most of us look at this picture and it causes something to happen in us. Maybe for some in the room it causes a measure of happiness, and maybe for some in the room it causes a measure of heartache, diverging emotions. Let me show you another one. You're going to like this one, good basketball. You have a coach that is ... I guess he's polarizing in some ways because he wins so much, and then you have a player that is very polarizing for a lot of different reasons. The fact is that some of us look at this picture and we want to smile, and some of us want to spit on the ground. It's just the reality. We have diverging emotions over something that's very, very similar.

I'm going to show you one last picture, and this picture represents the family. It represents all of our families. We all come from one. We all have parents. Some of us have siblings. We have these kinds of people in our life, or at least at one time we did. When you look at these pictures and you think about the family, some of us in the room, the vault of our childhood memories, our family memories, is so bright and cheery because our home was a place of love and joy and happiness. We love to think about those things. We love those people. It causes us a measure of pleasure when we think about our family.

Yet, it's also very true that in this very room, right now, that the vault of childhood memory for some is so dim and so dark, is so harsh, is so bitter that they would just as soon never open that door again, never think about it, never talk about it, never look at it, just to end those relationships that [inaudible 00:06:56]. In fact, many of you maybe have. "I won't ever talk to my dad again," some might say. The reason we feel so strongly one way or the other is because God has literally woven the importance of family upon our heart. If it wasn't important to us, we wouldn't feel so strongly about it.

What we find here at the end of Ephesians is that recognition that God has placed the importance of family not only over our life, but over all lives on the earth. We know that because at the end of the book, what he does is he highlights several very important sort of areas of life in order to show us how the gospel can heal those areas of life. It shouldn't surprise us that among the three that he chooses to highlight, the second one, our text, is about family.

This is what it says in Ephesians, chapter six, verses one through four. He says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. 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. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

What I want to show you in these four verses is three different ways that God calls us as believers to do or something to become. Now sometimes when we use the word call, you may not ... This all may be new to you, but you've heard someone and they say, they sent a letter or something like, "God's called me to go on a mission trip," and we think, what is that calling? Do you hear him? Does he speak to some people in the closet and it's like, "Hey, I'm calling you. I was called by God to go and do something."

All three of these sermon points, what you're going to see is the word call, and the word call, what it really means is this. It's a little deeper or it's a little bit more motivational than just instruct, meaning someone who doesn't care anything about the Bible can see that the writer of the Bible is instructing something, he's saying something. Call goes a step further, and it says that there's a motivation, there's a pull in our heart that we see what's at the end of the road and so our heart must walk this road. God has opened up our eyes to see what is there, and so we must travel down this road and if we don't, we feel like we would be disobedient. For those of us who are in Christ, you look at this scripture, you look at this book. I want to show you three things that he's called us to.

The first is this. He's called us to admire and imitate his Son. His Son is Jesus Christ. God has called us to admire and to imitate his Son. Now most of us have a place in this world, maybe your own home or your bedroom, which would be a real gift, maybe a closet or a couch or a living room, or it might be your parents' house, to where you go and there's just something about that place that allows you to exhale. You get there, and all of a sudden, you're like ... It's a place of peace. It's not perfect. It's not unending peace, but typically when you go there, you're like, "This is my happy place."

I want to show you mine, or at least one of mine. This may be the strongest one. This is where we were at last week. This is a farm down in Georgia. There's a big, beautiful pond. It's serene, it's quiet. It's a place that I go, and it's just very, very peaceful. We make a lot of noise with all our boys, but it's really, really peaceful. What I want you to imagine by looking at this is I want you to imagine a pond that has unending and perfect peace.

Around this pond, there's a bunch of fishermen, and all of their lines, they never cross. Their reels, they never tangle. God himself is on the shore giving lessons on how to fish. It's a perfect place. Everything has order, everything has precision. You can imagine that this place of peace is very similar to how the story of the Bible, how it begins, where there in the garden there was perfect peace. Everything had a purpose. Everything had an order.

Then tragically, what happens, it says in the Bible, is that mankind, we sinned against God. We broke fellowship with him and what happens is all those lines, they got tangled and they got crossed. Now if you've ever been fishing, you know what happens. If someone is next to you, and they cast over you and your line gets tangled, the first thing you do is you blame, "What are you doing? You got a whole pond. You got a whole lake. Why in the world would you cast your line over my line? Now, they're tangled. Now look. Now we've got to both bring them in. We got to go through and figure it out."

This is exactly what happened in the garden. The lines got tangled, and the people started saying, "It's your fault," and then they looked up to God and says, "This place was great until you put this person here with me." Well, the next thing that happens when our line gets stuck is we start yanking and pulling on the line, don't we? We're like, we just get angry and angry and pulling, just trying to get if off in the log. Then what happens? Eventually, what happens is your line breaks. This is what happened in the world. Half the fishermen all around, they're looking down and like, "Now what do I do? My fishing pole doesn't even work." This happens in all areas of life.

Then what happens is that you keep yanking and it just won't move. You get angry. You get angry, you get angry, and you want to throw it down and you get angry. This is exactly where we start fuming and fussing. This is what happened in the garden. In the very first family, they had two sons and they got so angry at each other because they're blaming each other and pulling and yanking and just getting angrier and angrier, that the first son kills the second son. You keep reading through the pages of the story in the Bible and what you find is that every single family is just as broken. How it's manifested is a little bit different. Not every family had a murder involved in it between the siblings. Yet, every one of them, they're broken. They're just like my family and just like your family.

Well, God looks down upon this mess. Everything's tangled and everything's crossed, and he looks at everything and he says, "All these people, they're separated from me instead of just doing what maybe I would have done and said let me just cut the line and start over again." God Almighty promised to send his Son, and then he made good on his promise and he sent Jesus to this earth in order to untie all those knots.

1 Peter, chapter three, verse 18 describes what Jesus did. He says, "Christ also suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." Jesus Christ, he submitted. He was one with the Father. He was equal with God the Father, and yet he came to the earth and he submitted his will to the Father in order to bring life to each one of us.

Now I tell you about all of that, and you think, "I thought this thing was about family." I'm almost there, I promise. The three chapters, the first three chapters of Ephesians, what Paul does is he describes the good news of Jesus coming down in order to untie all these knots, to unscramble all of these lines. Then what he does in chapter four is he says, "Now for those of you ..." He's speaking to the church in Ephesus. He says, "For those of us who believe this gospel," he says, "let's walk in a manner worthy of it. Let's show other people that following Jesus is a trade up and that Jesus can actually come and untangle and unscramble all of our lives and all of these lines." He gets to chapter five, and he says, "Now be still with the Holy Spirit."

Then what he does is he wants to highlight three different areas where we think a lot and where we spend a lot of our time, marriage, family, and in the workplace. You can see these. Look at chapter five, verse 22. He addresses the wives. Chapter five, verse 25, he addresses husbands. Chapter six, verse one, he addresses children. Verse four, he addresses fathers. Verse five, he says, "Servants," or employees. Chapter nine, "Masters," or employers.

He takes the three different areas where we spend so much of our time, where so much of our energy and our affection is wrapped up in these areas, and he says, "This is how Jesus can unscramble everything. This is how he can untangle everything." But notice the one command that sits within scripture immediately before the very first one of these. It's chapter five, verse 21. What does he say? "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." What is he saying? He's saying that only when our heart is full of admiration or reverence for Jesus Christ can family work according to plan.

Why is that? The reason is because in every single one of these venues, you're going to find unworthy people that God calls you to do something to. Some of us, we're the biggest person in the house, and so what we do is we parent or we husband or we work, I'm the boss. I'm the husband. I'm the dad. What we do is we leverage our size or our strength, and that is the mode. But he says this. He says, "Submit to one another."

The word submit means yield. You know how to yield. You're driving you're going down, your foot's on the gas. At very least, we at least move the foot off the gas pedal and at least we hover it over the brake, if we don't push it down just a little bit. Why? Even if you're driving the biggest car, you recognize that there's value in the other people around you. They may not even be worthy. You recognize that there's value, so what do you do? You submit. You yield to other people.

This is what he's saying. If you and I do not have our eyes set on Jesus Christ, if we're not admiring and imitating him, then what'll happen is this, is that you will make determinations on the basis of, should I respect my husband? What if he's not being respectable? Jesus comes in and he says, "But I'm being respectable. Do this for me." What if you're a kid here and your mom or dad, they're just not being nice today? God says, "Obey your parents and honor your parents." What if they're not being nice? Well, Jesus is being nice today.

What is he saying? In all these cases, what he does is he takes the motivation off of the merit of the person that we would be submitting to and he places it on Jesus, who is worthy of all of our attention and all of our affection. Let's be relentless in our pursuit to see Jesus. I know many of us, we care deeply about our families. We think, okay, Jesus is over here, but let's talk about family. What he's saying here is this. It all starts with Jesus Christ. Your family cannot get unraveled until everyone's heart, until your heart the very least, is set on admiring who Jesus is, what he's done.

Consider his life, consider his love, his wisdom. Consider his claims, that he says, "I'm the way of the truth and the light." Consider his accomplishments, when he died on the cross and rose from the dead. See, if we do not see Jesus' worth, we will struggle to submit to others who aren't quite as worthy. In every one of these situations, what we have is Jesus standing behind whoever we're supposed to submit to, and he's saying, "But I'm worthy. Do it for me. I see it, and I promise that if you'll put forth an effort and you obey what I give you, I'll bring good to you. I'll bring good to those around you."

Well, let's move into the second one. What else does he call us to do? He calls us to obey and honor our parents, to obey and honor our parents. In other words, honoring is how we submit to our parents out of reverence for Christ. He starts with little kids. We know that because of the word that he chooses. It's a word in Greek, it's called [Greek 00:19:25]. There's words that he oftentimes uses, Paul does, to refer to son, but here what he refers to is child.

The idea here is this. I have three boys. They're sons, but they're also children. When I want to talk to you in a way about them that raises your esteem of them, that speaks of their authority, that they have the authority to speak on Dad's behalf because they share my values, I say, "These are my sons." It's a word of pride, of security. But if I want to talk to you about how much I love them, how tender they are to me in my heart, I say, "These are my children."

Typically, when you get older, you have ... Let's just say that you're 80 and you have a son who's 60. You don't call him children anymore. This is my son or my daughter. I respect them. By the use of his word, he says, "Little children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." This isn't a Christian ethic. This is a universal ethic. Every culture through every century, even in every religion, recognizes the rightness of children obeying their parents.

You know this. Let's just say that you go to Target. I don't know why it always happens at Target, but it always happens at Target. You're shopping. Maybe you got your own family with you, and then all of a sudden, you hear this great big noise, and Johnny ... It's not your Johnny. It's another mom's Johnny, and you look, and like, "Wow. Look at him." He is absolutely fuming. He is disrespecting his mom. He's so angry because he wants something. She said, "No," but he's already pulling stuff off of the aisles and just flailing on the ground. He's doing snow angels, and he's mad, he just, he's angry.

What's our typical response? Well, for each one of us, all depending on where we've been, we all respond just a little bit differently, but yet, all very much the same way. Watch. If you're a parent of a child, the first thing you do is empathize. Oh, poor mom. Let me give her a coffee. Let me go up to her and just say, "I love you. You're doing okay. This too shall pass. It's going to be okay." Instinctively, we know that what we're saying is, "This isn't right. I know this isn't right. You know it's not right, but this is going to pass. Hold on."

You have people who have never had children before, and they look at it and say, "When I'm a parent, that'll never happen to me." That's what they say, right? The fact is they know, even in a lack of understanding of how hard it actually is, that, frankly, it's going to happen to you too. Happens to everybody. Even though you know that I don't want that to happen, instinctively we all know this isn't the right thing.

That's what we're insinuating by saying, "This won't happen to me. This shouldn't happen to me." Even other children, your children can look back at Johnny and say, "Man, Johnny's going to get it when he gets home. I know that." They know this isn't right either. What nobody says or thinks at that very moment is, "Keep it up, Johnny. You're about to break her. You almost have her in tears. Keep going, keep going." Nobody does that, because instinctively we know what's happening is not right. It's wrong.

What Paul does is he takes what's written on our heart and he adds Jesus to that equation when he says, "Obey your parents in the Lord." If you're a little kid, you can look at Jesus as a model because Jesus, who is the Son of God, obeyed his earthly mom and dad. Luke 2:51 says that Jesus went down and was submissive to them. The them there is Mary and Joseph. See, Jesus loves, kids, when you obey your parents.

Then what Paul does is he zooms off of the little kids and he talks to all of us, and he says, “You know what, all of us have parents.” Your parents may even be with the Lord right now, and yet, there’s ways that you can honor them by how you talk about them. So he zooms out to capture all of it, and he says this, “Honor your father and your mother.” Honor. See, there’s an age at which we set aside obedience, and there should be an age where our parents set aside instructions that require obedience, but we never set aside honor.

To honor one’s parents is to show respect, esteem, affirmation in what we say about them and to them and how we treat them. Admittedly, some parents make this much harder than others, which is why God warms the heart with a promise. He says, “Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Now we have to understand this is a general principle, and that is that obedience to God’s word typically goes better than not obedience. He’s not promising you will get 90 years on this earth if you obey your mom and dad and if you honor your mom and dad. What is he saying? He’s saying that “If you come over and watch me and listen me teach you how to fish on the side, there’s a good chance that your fishing experience is going to be a whole lot better than if you don’t.”

Obedience to God is a blessing. It’s not a burden. Here God comes to us and he says, “I see you.” That’s what he means when he warms our heart with a promise. He could just say, “Just do it. I don’t care what you think.” He says, “I see what you’re doing. Your mom and dad may not even see it. They may not appreciate it. They may criticize your efforts, how you’re trying to care for them. They may not be respectable. They may be dishonorable, but I see that you’re honoring them because you’re admiring my son. I see it.” Let’s keep one eye on Jesus as we honor our parents.

I want to talk about three different groups in this one application, kids, young adults, and other adults. I didn’t know what to call it, so we’ll just call it other adults. Kids, what’s interesting is there’s no age within scripture where it’s like, okay, you obey your parents up until 18. There’s no age at which it happens. What we really hope happens is that in that process of helping them, to raise them up, both agree now it’s time for you to determine your own bedtime. Now it’s time for you to determine how many Oreos you really should eat. Now it’s time for you to do this or this or this. You make these decisions.

Let me talk just about how do we honor our parents at each stage. The primary way, if you’re a child still under the roof of your parents, is to obey them. That’s how you honor them. When you obey them, you show respect and trust, not only to them but to God. Now there are rare situations in this broken world where your parents may tell you, instruct you to do something that is sinful. So what do you do then? If you could obey God, or I can obey my parents, but if I obey my parents, then I’m going to disobey God, then what should I do? Well, what the Bible says is we must obey God rather than man, Acts chapter five.

What that means is this. In the rare situation ... And we don't know it's rare. For most of us, our parents never asked us to rob a bank. They asked us to go to bed at 9:30. Normally, when we say, "I'm going to disobey my parents. I now have a right to disobey," normally, in most cases, parents are not saying, "Obey this, and it's sinful." But in those times when it does, you do not obey your parents, but you can still honor them, and this is how you do it.

You could say something like, "Dad, I want to obey you. I respect you. I love you, but I can't do that, because if I do that, then I'm going to break this command that God gave me in the Bible, so I'm going to take the consequence that you give. I'm going to respect you. I love you, but I just can't do that." Typically, though, for most of us, what it simply means is this, is that we pay attention to our parents, what they ask us to do, and we honor them by obeying them.

Well, then you get into the next stage, and it's just above childhood. It's young adulthood. In this stage, hopefully, the parents know that they're not supposed to be giving you instructions that require obedience, and you know that practical obedience in terms of when to go to bed and what to eat, things like this, is that now I'm not obligated to obey them, their wishes. Yet, your parents may still, likely ... In fact, they will, most will, want to be involved in your life. How do you honor your mom and dad when you're a young adult.

How you do it is you invite them into your life. You invite them into your plans. You invite them into your schedule. You invite them into what you're praying about, into your decisions. You may ask them for advice. If they say, "You must do this," you don't necessarily have to obey it, but by inviting them into the process, you're honoring them. You're esteeming them among other people in the world, saying, "I am paying attention to you. You're special to me on this earth."

Well, then you get into the last stage, and it's other adults. Not young adults. It's other adults. This is the stage typically where the same applies, where we want to invite them into our lives, but when they age, how we primarily honor our mom and dad when our parents are aging is we care for them. We protect them. We provide for them. We make sure if they can't eat themselves, that we feed them or that somebody else is feeding them. We're caring for them. 1 Timothy, chapter five actually says that when we return the favor and we love and care for our aging parents either how they cared for us or how we wish they would have cared for us. It says that this is a precious thing in the sight of God.

For each one of us, we admire Christ and what it does in our life when we look at our parents is if we're young, we obey. If we're a younger adult, we invite. If we're an older adult, caring for them, what we're doing is we're caring for them, and in doing so, we're honoring our parents by having reverence for Jesus Christ.

Well, the third and last thing I want you to see is that God calls us to discipline and instruct our children. Verse four, he starts and he only gives the word fathers. Isn't that ironic, isn't that odd. I love Ephesians. First time I've ever thought about this, but I got here. Ephesians is one of the most practical books of the entire New Testament. He gives us one verse on parenting, and he doesn't include moms. Paul, what are you thinking? I think why he does this, I think, is because most often, it's the men who need to be invited to this party called parenting.

See, the very few women who read this and who resist this are, "What? You mean the men have to be involved in this too? Can't we have our own thing?" No. No, the women that I know, they cherish when Dad is involved in the kids' life and they pray for him when he's not. So he calls us, his men, to say, "Get involved." Clearly, the principle applies to both moms and dads, and the principle begins with a negative, and then he moves it to a positive.

The negative he says is, "Do not provoke your children to anger." Now you have to understand, parents, he's not telling you don't do anything or decide anything that might make them angry, because that would be absolutely impossible to parenting. Absolutely impossible. If you love your child, you will protect your child. If you protect your child, they will eventually get angry in some way.

I have three sons, and I've had probably all three sons ... I know of one that actually got angry with me when I said, "Only five Oreos. Okay? Only five." "What? I'm hungry. I need more than five." Clearly, that's not what he's saying. What Paul is warning us against is parenting in such a way that it creates an abiding anger, a disposition of resentment. Almost like it's a field that we plant seeds of anger that are harvest throughout the rest of their life.

Now this is kind of scary because what he's saying is this. It is possible to parent in a way that you do create an abiding, residing anger in their heart. The natural instinct for all of us is to say, "Well, how do I avoid that? I don't want to do that." Well, fortunately, even the word structure of the sentence answers the very question, how do we avoid that? He says, "Instead, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Discipline, what is discipline? It's when we say to our child, "I am so for you, and this is why I am pushing you to do something until you get enough self-discipline to push yourself. I need you to read 15 to 20 minutes every single day." "I don't want to do it." "You must do it. You cannot have screen time until you read." Then what happens? Over time, we hope, they develop some like towards reading because it's healthy for them, and eventually that they develop enough self-discipline that they do so without you having to tell them.

There's also a negative to this as well, and this is where we restrict things from them long enough that they develop enough self-discipline so that they restrict it from themselves. "You cannot play video games six hours today." "Why?" Well, eventually, they'll learn, but until they do, he says, "Go ahead and restrict." This is discipline. We're saying, "This is why I'm for you." Instruction, on the other hand, says, "I am so for you that I'm going to spend the time to touch your hand, to put my arm around your shoulder, to talk to you, to instruct you, to reason, to explain, to listen to you and talk, and we're going to have a conversation."

Now here's the point. In order to avoid settled anger, there has to be a healthy balance between the two. You must have both, and if you get unbalanced, you'll create anger. You see, if we over-discipline, what that means is it's all rules, all accountability, no love, no listening, no reasoning, no explaining, then what happens is our kids grow up assuming that they're a burden, that they're our burden, and it creates anger, "I'm a problem to him. I'm not a blessing to him. I'm a burden to him." So it creates anger.

If, on the other hand, we over-reason, which means that we just talk, rarely or sporadically we actually provide a consequence to any behavior. Then our kids grow up thinking that they must understand before they obey, and they get very, very confused at the unpredictability of our response when we do discipline them. They're like, "Wait a minute. Why am I getting in trouble this time? I did this last week and there was no consequence whatsoever, and now all of a sudden, you want to give a consequence?" When there's unpredictability of what's going to take place, it creates within a child a settled anger.

Not only do we need to have a healthy balance between discipline and instruction. We also have to have a healthy balance in pace, and this comes from the three words, bring them up. Think about the word up. It's talking about a goal, a target, and the target in parenting for every single one of us is to get our children to live for the glory of God when you're not there, that they would be an adult, that they would live for the glory of God, that they would one day be a dad or a mom, that they would one day be a healthy citizen, a productive citizen, a friendly person on their own without us being around at all.

We want to bring them up, and yet the word raise speaks of a progress. It's not just get them there, just put them up there. This is what happens. You see, if we force our kids into adulthood too soon, when they're saying, "I'm not ready. I'm eight. I'm eight years old. I'm not 25. I'm eight," we say, "But you have to act like this right now," it creates a settled anger within their heart. In the same way, if you keep young adults in childhood where they're saying, "I'm so ready to get out of here. I cannot wait until I go to college," then they rebel against you because "I'm so angry with you." This is exactly what takes place. It creates a settled anger when we do not provide our children an opportunity to grow at a healthy progress.

Now, I'm going to tell you why we don't allow them to grow at a healthy progress. What I would simply want you to see right now is this, is that it has to be a balance between discipline and instruction, and it has to be a balance between the goal and the progress to the goal.

Every single sermon, I always run out of time before I run out of sermon, which is I'm really excited about May and June, because we're going to come back to a lot of these very same ideas and expand upon them in a more practical way, but I need to give you one application here. It's threefold. It's simply this. Parents, let's keep one eye on the gospel as we parent our children. To me, this has been probably the most important thing that I have done or needed to do in parenting our three sons, to keep one eye on the gospel and one eye on each of these boys.

You see, the most concentrated example of the discipline and instruction of the Lord is the gospel. In the gospel, we find every single doctrine to teach our children. We find the Trinity. We find Jesus, the Father, the Son. We find sin, salvation, heaven. We find the cross. We find the resurrection. All of these things are things that must be taught. It's the instruction of the Lord.

In the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, what we also find is every act of love that we want to emulate ourselves and we hope that they will emulate, welcoming, praying and caring, forgiving, loving. The last thing we find in the gospel is every single promise that we need to tell them. You can tell your son, your daughter, "You know what? No matter what happens, God'll never leave you or forsake you, and the reason we know that is because look at the cross. He's the one true God. He will forgive you. He promises to forgive. He promises eternal life. When I go to heaven, you'll see me one day again if you trust in Christ."

These promises our children need to know. The discipline and instruction of the Lord, they're met perfectly in one place, and that place is the gospel. In my life, when I think of the gospel, it's done just a few things in my own life. The first is this. The gospel reminds us to worship. You see, we're so prone to idolatry. Idolatry is simply when we worship the wrong thing. In parenting, there's such a capacity for us to do this. Hear this really carefully, and particularly those who are wondering how is it that I discipline and reason with a healthy balance.

When we make an idol out of ourselves, we tend to over-discipline. The reason is because we exert authority in order to maintain our own reputation or our comfort, our reputation. They have to take AP classes. They have to be amazing in everything. They have to be involved in 10 sports, and the reason is because people are going to make some assessment about me through my children.

What happens is we become harsh and hard with our kids, “You have to keep going. You have to run. You have to go. You have to go.” “Why?” “Because people are going to think something about me.” What happens is that when we make ourself the idol, when we’re worshipping ourself, we want other people to worship us through our children, how well they’re doing. We also want comfort. We’re god. We want to sit on the couch when we get home from work, watch our favorite show uninterrupted.

Little children just don’t care about your favorite show and if it’s interrupted. They wake up, “I’m thirsty,” the third time. “My third toe hurts.” “How do you feel your third toe?” “I don’t know. It just hurts.” What happens when we’re interrupted? That’s why we come in, we’re like, “I don’t want, not another word.” “Why?” “Because in this house, I’m god, and god wants to sit on the couch right now and be comforted with the show, and you’re interrupting this.” You see. What happens is that when we make ourself an idol, we tend to over-discipline our children.

The flip side, though, is that when we make an idol out of our children, we tend to under-discipline because we need them to like us. We need them to approve of us. We need them to be near us, and so we don’t want to do anything that would cause them to want to take a step away from us. So we just keep instructing, we keep coddling, and all of this can create anger.

The second thing the gospel does is it reminds us of sin and grace. You see, parents who only discipline, they tend to emphasize sin and paint a picture that God only accepts us if we keep his rules. But parents who only instruct, they emphasize grace, “Awe, let’s just forgive him again. I know you did it again. Let me just go ahead and let’s talk about it again.” What we do in that case is we paint a picture that sin has no consequence whatsoever. Our children need to see that both matters to God, that our homes, they all point to the gospel, and the gospel says that sin is punished and grace is free. This is why discipline and instruction are both needed. They both point to the gospel, and only the gospel reminds us to maintain a healthy balance in both.

The last thing is the gospel reminds us of hope. This is really important for all of us, because we’ve all failed as a parent. I want to tell you a story of failure in my own life and how the gospel gave hope. One night when the boys were little, they all shared a room at the time, three beds, one room. Bedtime was normally eventful, was a lot of stuff happening all at the same time. One night, I wanted to just be the king of the house and sit down. I didn’t want to be interrupted, and they kept waking up.

I came in and yelled at them, and I intimidated them by the way that I looked at them. I walked out and I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I gave my kids the impression that Dad thinks I’m a burden and not a blessing. I just felt so heavy over it, so much so I shut the door. I sat down on the step right next to the door, and I just put my hands over my face and I said, “I’m so bad at this. I’m such a failure right now at this.” At that very moment, the Lord just was so gracious, and he reminded me of the gospel, that there’s forgiveness that’s found at the cross not only for me, for my kids.

I walked back in the door and I said, “Kids, come here.” They hopped out of bed and they came over, and I gave them a hug and I said, “I’m so sorry. Dad sinned. I gave the impression that you’re a burden, and you know you’re such a blessing in my life. I was wrong.” I shared the gospel with them, and it’s amazing what happened. It was just like a flood of hope just swept over all four of us. Things were right again.

What I want you to know is no matter how broken your hope is, that God can unscramble all those lines and he does so only through the gospel. He does so because Jesus can forgive us of our sin. Our kids need to know, and they need to see not only that we are sinners, but that God can forgive their sin. Church family, hold tight to the gospel. If you have kids, hold tight to the gospel. If you have parents, hold tight to the gospel. Keep looking at Jesus. He has the capacity, he has the power to cause a fresh wave of hope to literally fall upon our family.

Let’s pray together. Father, we love you and thank you that you love us. As we, Lord, think about these things, as we consider how needy we really are, how impatient we can be, how insensitive we can be, how dishonoring we can be, we’re asking you would forgive us, that you would cleanse us. I pray, God, that you would give hope right now to those that feel hopeless. I pray that you would give forgiveness to those who have sinned. I pray, Father, that you would cleanse us and purify us. Your word says that you are our cornerstone, and as we sing about that, Lord, would you help us to just remind ourself now that we can build our life on Jesus Christ and have a sure and firm foundation for our families. We look to you now. We sing to you and we pray this in Christ’s name. Amen.



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