

Romantically Challenged Part 4 - Children and Parents 03.06.11

Ephesians 6:1-4 ESV

Video: "Kids" by Radiant First Productions

Introduction: We've been talking about being Romantically Challenged. We've looked at Wives and Husbands. Today we want to consider Children and Parents. I don't know if you've noticed or not, but Parenthood is one of the top - most watched topics - on television these days. NBC's newest drama, Parenthood, follows on the tracks of situational comedies, The Middle and Modern Family. It's pretty clear that families today are very different from the Andy Griffith Show or the Cosby Show of decades past. In Parenthood we have the story of four grown children - all of whom are now also parents, and all in different kinds of families. Let's face it. Families are still important to us today... even though they're often different than our traditional model of our past. Here's a news flash: Families are still important to God too!

Roman Parenthood: Before we take a look at what God has to teach us about being children and parents, it's worth taking another look at the issue of parenthood 2,000 years ago. Because God's Word has a unique point of view, not only in our day and age, but even when it was written. The Roman father held absolute, life and death power, over his children.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 BC - 7 BC), writing about the absolute legal power of the Roman father: "The law-giver of the Romans gave virtually full power to the father over his son, whether he thought proper to imprison him, to scourge him, to put him in chains, and keep him at work in the fields, or to put him to death; and this even though the son were already engaged in public affairs, though he were numbered among the highest magistrates, and though he were celebrated for his zeal for the commonwealth."

A Roman father's power over his children was even more absolute than was a master's over a slave. A master was only legally permitted to sell a slave once. If the slave purchased his freedom, he couldn't be sold again. But this wasn't true of a Roman father. If he sold his child into slavery, and the child became free, the Roman father could sell his child AGAIN!

It's within THIS FRAMEWORK that the Apostle Paul writes: "Fathers, do not provoke your children!" God's Word stands alone - not bounded by time or custom. So we owe it to ourselves to learn what God has to say to us about Children and Parenthood. Today we want to do three things. We'll talk about 1) Why Children Should Obey Parents; 2) Six ways we can honor our parents - a lifetime objective; and 3) Three quick hints for parents in raising children. So lets get to it!

I. Why Children Should Obey Parents

- A. Because it is part of our **CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP**.
"Children, obey your parents in the Lord..." Ephesians 6:1a

Obeying our parents is the Christian thing to do. It's one of the very first disciplines we learn - as important as being able to read the Bible or to pray. We will have a hard time understanding obedience to a heavenly Father if we don't obey our earthly one.

- B. Because it is the **RIGHT THING TO DO**.
“Children, obey your parents ... for this is right.” Ephesians 6:1b

Obeying our parents is the right thing to do. Early on children need an understanding of right and wrong. There’s no room for post-modernity when it comes to good parenting, no “right in the eye of the beholder.” The child obeys because it’s right to do so.

- C. Because it is one of the **TEN COMMANDMENTS**.
“Children, obey your parents... - this is the first commandment...”
Ephesians 6:1-2

Obeying our parents makes it into one of the big ten! In fact, it is so important that it is the first commandment dealing with our human relationships with one another. IOW, this is the foundation of a godly society... according to God!

- D. Because of the two-fold promise!

1. That life might be **BETTER**.
“This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you...” Ephesians. 6:2-3

God says that when we get this parent-child relationship right, when we obey our parents, that life is just better. You’ve heard the very old “Things go better with Coca-Cola...”? That’s really a rip-off from God. “Things go better when I obey my Daddy!”

2. That life might be **LONGER**.
“This is the first commandment with a promise,... that you may live long in the land.” Ephesians. 6:2-3

Not only do we live better, but we live longer! Better than diet and exercise. It just makes sense that obedience to parental rules results in the building of knowledge, character, and habits of avoiding recklessness, lawlessness, violence, wrong companionships, and rebellion against authority - all which often result in untimely or violent death at a young age.

Illustration - QualityHealth.com publishes “22 Ways to Predict Your Life Span.”¹ 17 of the 22 deal with things your mom tells you to do every day. “Study hard.” “Floss your teeth.” “Eat more vegetables.” “Don’t smoke or drink.” “Go outside and play!” “Put a hat on in the sun.” “Take care of your dog!” *All are now proven to add years to your life and life to your years!*

Typically we look at these reasons and think in terms of our children obeying us as the parents. And indeed, this is directed right at the children. But let me ask you parents a question. Do you love your kids enough to make them obey? Because making them obey can be a royal hassle! Ephesians 6:1-3 reminds us as parents that the end result for our kids is worth the hassle!

Eventually we become adults. We move out. We have children of our own. But we NEVER stop honoring our parents!

¹ <http://www.qualityhealth.com/health-lifestyle-articles/22-ways-predict-your-life-span>

II. Six Ways We Honor Our Parents:

These are lessons I've learned from the last 32 years of being best friends with my dad. We have a great relationship. We don't agree on everything. But we have an even better relationship as adults than we did when I was a child. How might we honor our older parents?

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE** what they've done. When we become parents ourselves, we especially begin to understand what our own parents went through with us as kids. Don't just think it to yourself. Communicate it. Tell them "thanks." Share the joy of parenthood yourself. We loved it when Jennifer called Mary Kay and said how much she appreciated her as a mom. Don't wait for special days.
2. **UNDERSTAND** their frame of reference. Over these past few years I've begun to really understand where my dad comes from - what HIS family life was like. It's easy to be critical of parents until you understand what their parents were like... and their parents before them. I've come to a GREAT appreciation for the changes that Dad made in our family lives, which I had no way of appreciating when I was a kid.
3. **LISTEN** - focused hearing values their worth. We all struggle with our listening skills. If possible, find a time and place to get away with your parent where you won't be distracted ...
4. **VISIT** - the gift of unhurried company. No agenda other than being together and listening. Swapping stories. What if you don't live near one another. Get into the 21st century! Get Skype or Google! Get your parent one too! Go overboard to make it possible to visit often. You don't know how long you have!
5. **ASK FOR ADVICE** - they need to give it; you need to hear it! Notice I didn't say you had to take the advice. But everyone needs to feel that they are still connected... that they still matter. Often I have found that my dad has a better perspective on my life than I do. Distance can help sometimes.
6. **HUG** - the physical touch of an "I love you!" This is one thing that Skype hasn't figured out yet. Hugs have been proven to have all kinds of health benefits. They reduce tension and stress, aid the immune system, help with sleep, and best of all has no negative side effects.

Before we leave today's talk, we need to do what the Bible does, and that is **REVERSE the ROLES**. When it comes to being romantically challenged, we consider not only one side of the equation... we consider the other side as well. When it came to marriage we looked at both husbands AND wives. Today we look not only at children's "romancing" his parents by obeying and honoring, but we also consider the parents' "romancing" of their children.

III. Fathers (and Mothers) Raise Your Children With:

A. **PATIENCE**

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,..." Ephesians 6:4a

Remember how remarkable this instruction was in the Roman world. Bill Cosby's joke, "I brought you into this world and I can take you out!" was no joke when Ephesians was written. Paul tells us not to **PROVOKE** our children. The Message version: "**Don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them.**"

According to *Good Men Sometimes Get Angry* by Bill Perkins, “32% of surveyed men said they occasionally express their anger with verbal abuse” (page 63). That’s one in three. And that’s only the ones who admit it! It’s a sad truth that A) when our children disobey us, it angers us and B) when we are angry we don’t do our best job as parents.

Paul put it straight. Don’t provoke your child to anger. We’ll talk in a moment about discipline and instruction, but it never comes easy or quickly. We will become frustrated. But we must never allow that frustration to lead to harmful words or actions. Parents... Fathers... you are the adult. Not the child. Act like it.

B. DISCIPLINE

“Fathers, ... bring them up in the discipline... of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4b

It’s easy to miss this, but the Bible (here) isn’t just talking about discipline, but it’s talking about the “discipline of the Lord.” There is discipline involved in our relationship with the Lord. Discipline means that we stick to it... we don’t have an on again off again kind of relationship with the Lord... we love the Lord and obey him, honor him, live for him BOTH when it is convenient to do so and when it isn’t. We model that for our children. We live that way and give them the chance to catch our enthusiasm and love for Christ. We don’t just tell them about Jesus... we live for Jesus... all the time. AND we expect our children to do the same thing. Parents, I think, are often confused about this. We don’t have a “my child can choose whatever faith he or she wants” kind of attitude. Our whole job, as parents, is to bring them up to become Christ-followers. So just like we teach them to eat right, we teach them to pray. Just like we teach them not to trust strangers, we teach them to trust Christ. Just like we teach them to respect us as parents, we teach them to love, cherish and worship Christ. **Which also...**

C. INSTRUCTION

“Fathers, ... bring them up in the... instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4c

It’s important that children not only know that WHAT of our relationship with Christ, they also need to know the WHY of it. And while we want to take all the opportunity of church education, ultimately teaching the WHY of our relationship with Christ begins with Mom and Dad. This takes both a formal and an informal approach. We should invest in materials, books, movies, resources - whatever it takes to communicate our faith to our children. However, there is also an informal, every day kind of discussion that frankly is the best kind of instruction. What do we do in the “rubber meets the road” kinds of situations we find ourselves in? What do we do? Why do we do it? We model and we explain.

Conclusion: As we wrap up today, I remind you of our first “Romantically Challenged” talk the day before Valentines Day. God’s plan for romance #1) always seeks the best for someone else, #2) always seeks God’s help and pleasure, and #3) requires intention and action on our part. This is just as necessary for parents and their children as it is for husbands and wives. Parents, you do the things you do as parents, not because they’re easy, but because you want the best for your kids. Don’t neglect God’s help and strength! **Let’s pray.**