

## Father's Day Message    Fathers Who Lead    Ephesians 6:1-4

Well, happy Father's Day! God bless each of you who are doing the hard work of fathering. And thank all of you for joining us for this Father's Day message. Would you turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6 and we are going to read the first four verses in a few moments.

Family is a wonderful word to God. One of the ways we often approach Him in prayer is with the words "heavenly Father" or "Father God." You may use those words when you pray to Him. He invites everyone to be a part of His family through faith in Jesus Christ. Does that mean everyone is automatically in God's family? The sad answer is no! Though we are all His creation, we do not have a family relationship with Him until there is a desire and a request for such a position. The apostle Paul confirms this in Galatians 3:26 when he penned these words: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." From God's perspective, faith and family are intertwined.

It is no wonder that Paul had a lot of things to say in Ephesians about the elements of a healthy family structure. In the last verses of chapter five he addresses the husband/wife relationship and how important it is for the husband to sacrificially love his wife and the wife see that she respects her husband.

Chapter 6 follows by giving instruction to the parent/child relationship. All of us have experience with this in some form. It might have been when you were younger as a child. It may be that right now as a teenager. It may be that this passage gives you spiritual and relational instruction as a parent.

This passage on the family ends with an emphasis on the father and the leadership skills that are most helpful if his family is to be a place of love and an environment that helps a child develop into a healthy, spiritual person.

What do you think about when the word "family" is said? Is it filled with strong, positive emotional memories? Or does it bring flashbacks with a lot of pain and discomfort? Many people find a mixture of these as they think about their family relationships. I remember reading about what a father did to get his children to respond to his call for a family meeting. He said it was very effective. He simply turned off the WI-FI. Amazingly everyone seemed to gravitate to him – but perhaps for the wrong reason. Sometimes our family memories are indeed mixed.

But the great thing about being a follower of Christ is that with His help, we can make our current family structure one that is reflective of God's love and care. Today we want to look at the importance of parental leadership and especially how valuable it is to be a father who emulates the heavenly Father.

So, let's read the passage: Ephesians 6:1-4. Here is what it 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."

Here is the overarching thought from our message today that I would like for you to absorb. Fathers are great fathers when they are most like the heavenly Father. If you are a father, would you say those words out loud with me? Fathers are great fathers when they are most like the heavenly Father. Please remember this Dads, God never asks you as a father to do what He is not already doing.

Since parts of this passage refer to both the father and the mother, we could amend this to say,

Parents are great parents when they are most like the heavenly Father. Whether you are a father or a mother, looking to God for inspiration and direction will be fruitful and helpful.

Now some of you might be tempted to check out from this message. You might be saying "I'm not a Dad so this message is not for me." Or you might be saying, "I don't have any children in my home anymore so I don't need this message." Could I give you three reasons to listen even though you may not be a father with children in your home?

First, you might be one in the future so now is the time to become prepared.

Second, you can learn about the heart of God as the heavenly Father and be encouraged as a child of God. Whether you are a man, woman, teen or child we need to know God better. How well do you know the heavenly Father?

Third, you can know how to pray for your husband or other fathers who need these parenting characteristics given in these verses.

This passage is so interesting in that it starts by addressing the children. Now I don't know how many children had access to the Greek manuscripts to read these words when they were written, but it was the duty of the mothers and especially the fathers to help the children to know that God seeks to speak to them.

Today it is common for a child to have his or her own Bible. When a child begins to read, it is a great privilege to be able to process the very Word of God. But this is most effective when Dads and Moms are actively helping their children to understand and assimilate God's Word. Many of us remember reading from its pages as a youngster. God wants every child to know that there are two things that they are commanded to do that will bring great benefit to them. And they are given in this passage.

## Two Commandments for Children

### 1. Obey your parents.

The word “obey” comes from two words meaning “to hear under.” It is encouraging every child to listen and because you are under the authority and protection of your parents, to do what you are asked. Habitual, constant obedience is the issue, but it starts with listening. Learning to listen is a lifelong skill that will help you in every part of your life.

By the way, mothers and fathers, if you want your child to listen, make sure you have their eyes when you are talking to them. They generally listen better when they are looking at you and their attention is on you. So often we exasperate our children and ourselves when we don't do this. This principle is also true when husbands and wives are talking with each other.

Paul says to obey your parents “in the Lord.” He is reminding us that there is a spiritual component to your obedience. It is often said that it is easier for an adult to obey the Lord, if as a child, there was an emphasis on obedience to parents. As children of God we need to understand that obedience is embedded in the realm of the spiritual. God has declared it so.

Paul now tells why a child should obey Dad and Mom - because it is “right.”

**Obey because it is right the right thing to do.**

It is right in the ethical and moral sense; God says it as the ultimate parent and authority. It is right in the sense that it is the best course to follow in society. It's simply the right thing for structure in the family. Paul says in Colossians 3:20, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” A child who is intent on obedience should know that this greatly pleases the Lord. I hope that this is important to you, whether you are a child or an adult. We were meant to have a great relationship with God and our obedience, in part, makes that happen. Is God pleased with your obedience right now?

The second commandment is to

### 2. Honor your parents.

The text says to “honor your father and mother.” The word honor means “to fix value to.” In other words, let them be important to you. Give them their rightful place of being an adult to you and recognize they have great value in their experiences and wisdom. Treat them with respect, kindness, and courtesy. Honor them. This injunction originally came from the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20:12 and it's the fifth commandment. It is not a suggestion, but rather a very important command that goes to the very heart of family life.

How do these two words “obey” and “honor” work together? Someone has said it this way, ‘Obedience is the duty; honor is the disposition of which the obedience is born.’ Put in simpler words, obedience is the action, honor is the attitude.

Now these two commands for children, to obey and honor your father and mother, are not always easy are they. Those of us who have gone through childhood know all too well how difficult it is sometimes to obey and honor our parents. Sometimes it is hard to obey and honor simply because we have a nature that is self-centered. We want our way and we don’t like being told what to do. Sometimes we as parents make it difficult for children because of unfair expectations. Sometimes adults battle attitude problems and they even find it hard to be cooperative with others.

God tells us that there is a very good reason to make great effort to obey and honor your parents even though they are not perfect. It is given in the next phrase, “this is the first commandment with a promise.”

**Honoring your parents is beneficial.**

Paul is reminding us that the action of obedience has a blessing or reward to those who keep it. Exodus 20:12 says: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” We are being reminded that when we are obedient to God’s commands there are blessings. Stability, longevity, and ultimately a lifestyle of self-discipline are valuable results for a person who seeks to live an obedient life. So then back in Ephesians Paul says it this way: “That it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Here is the principle: children, when you obey your parents, things go so much better. When you disobey, this creates conflict and life is harder. Each of us can find examples of people whose life reflects rebellion rather than obedience. That life is riddled with conflict, bad decisions, pain and often limited opportunity for prosperity – whether physical, emotional or spiritual.

Let me give an example from my farm background. When I was a child my father bought an Alaskan Malamute that had been raised by someone else. This was a big beautiful dog, but it had a horrible disposition. It had to be attached to a chain because it had not been taught to obey. When it would see another animal on the farm it would bark at it and lunge at it. The chain that kept the animal under control was attached to the dog collar and though we would urge the dog to stop its behavior, it would often lunge so hard that the collar would cause the breathing of the dog to be affected. If the dog would have learned to obey, the collar would not have been uncomfortable and the dog would have had more freedom and a more comfortable life. Sadly, attempts to train the dog were not successful.

Now I know that people are not dogs, but the principle is applicable. Undesirable things happen when we disobey and go after things we are not meant to have. The vast majority of parents want their children to obey so that they can be protected and ultimately blessed. So it is also with God.

So let me ask you a question. Have you dedicated your life to one of obedience to the Lord - no matter what? If you have not done so, please make that valuable commitment today. It will greatly diminish needless pain and frustration in your life.

Now Paul addresses the fathers because he knows how important the leadership of a father can be. He gives **Three Commandments for Fathers**

- 1. Don't provoke your children to anger.** The word "provoke" means to arouse to anger, to exasperate. The first admonition to the father in this passage is not what to do, but rather what not to do. Don't needlessly, endlessly frustrate or irritate your children by unfair expectations, severity, petty rules, unjust accusations, and harshness. Humiliation, oppression, and abuse should never be a part of fatherhood.

These behaviors from a father cause damage to a child and severely hamper their development. They will first become very discouraged. Then they will become angry and your relationship will suffer. And even worse, it will often tempt a child to have a distorted view of God because we often see the heavenly Father through the lens of our earthly father.

The wise father will try to make obedience positive, desirable and achievable through loving and gentle interactions. This takes resolve and patience but will elevate your influence with your children.

If your parenting is not dealt with in this way, your child will be angry with you just as you are angry with others when they treat you in a harsh way. So rather than being able to obey you and honor you, they must fight the overwhelming emotion of anger that always competes with submission and positive regard.

Rather than provoking a child, Paul says to "but bring them up." This means "to nourish up to maturity." It is a nurturing concept that includes the body, soul and spirit. Fathers, you are one of the main ingredients for development in your child's life. Without you there is a deficit. You are needed in your child's life. You are extremely important. Every nourishing minute you give to your children will help them develop in ways that are hard to replace from any other source. The fabric of society is greatly damaged when the father is absent or negligent.

## **2. Train them.**

Paul now gives two positive areas where the Father should give emphasis. The first is "in the discipline of the Lord." This word has the idea of training that relates to the mind, morals and behavior. It includes reproof and correction. It includes training by actions and words. It

means you give loving direction. It shows and demonstrates how to do things the best way but also holds them accountable when there is a need for correction. But it is also a nurturing word as it realizes that every child must learn how to do what is right and needs constant loving help in this endeavor.

Every child, and ironically every adult, needs this. We all have a carnal nature that is bent towards self-centeredness and sin. Have you ever noticed that you do not have to tell a child what to do that is wrong? They instinctively do these types of behavior. This ungodly nature seeks to be a substitute for God and His ways. It gets us into deep trouble due to selfishness and this inherent nature must be counteracted through Christ and through parental leadership and help – especially from the father.

### 3. Instruct them.

The next positive focus is on “the instruction of the Lord.” This concept has the idea of training by word. It includes exhortations or seeking to motivate your child verbally to learn and develop. It includes pointing out to a child what is wrong and what is right. It includes warnings and corrections. It is helping the child to form wholesome thinking structures and an understanding of God’s ways. It means using words in an encouraging way. It means admonishing your child in a loving, consistent way.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 gives the footprint for this instruction. It says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

Basically these verses are instructing parents to make teachable moments out of normal, everyday, spare thought times. These times can help the child to recognize the God component to everything and create a thinking process that is open to what God is doing in the child’s life. This takes intentionality and effort, but it is worth its weight in gold as the child develops through the years. Discipling your children is one of the most productive things you can do because of the eternal ramifications that are involved.

Fathers, you may be wondering why God addressed you and nothing was directed to the mother? There could be many reasons but they are not given in this passage. But would you allow me, as a father of four children, to give you some possible answers to why we were singled out in verse four?

### Neglect

1. Sometimes we get so busy making a living that we neglect helping our child learn how to live. Father’s, when you stand before God I don’t think He will be asking how high you climbed the corporate ladder or how much money you made. I do not think the things

we buy or the pleasure pursuits we accomplish will be meaningful to Him. I think he will ask us how we did in admonishing and instructing our children in the ways of the Lord. And it is never too late to start!

### Impatience

2. Perhaps it's because Fathers can be impatient. We have an agenda, goals and plans. Sometimes it is easy to be frustrated because there is always a family need or someone needing more of our time. That frustration can leak out on our children or cause us to be absent. But listen Dad, someone is going to influence your children – it might as well be you! God has called you to this task.

### Inadequacies

3. Sometimes as the designated leader in the home we can feel inadequate and so we shrink from our duty and responsibilities. We don't like to admit this but sometimes we sense it without talking about it. If this is you, then take the initiative to learn and grow. There is no better time than now. There are so many great materials available that can help and there are men who would be willing to come alongside you for encouragement. We just need to let go of our pride and become committed.

### Anger

4. One of the most destructive reasons might be that we have allowed anger to become a part of our personality and the atmosphere of our homes. We have become harsh and insensitive. We might have learned it from our parents or it's a result of being wounded so many times it has become our reaction to stress. Many temptations to sin come with anger. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:26 tells us to "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." You can learn how to righteously deal with your anger. You can grow in allowing the Holy Spirit to control your life rather than your emotions dictating your decisions.

### Ignorance

5. One last reason might be that you have been living in ignorance. You might be new to Christianity or just don't know much about what the Bible has to say. Or you may not have had a good role model in your own Father. Maybe you didn't even have a father growing up. Whatever the reason, you can take steps today and become obedient to the Lord as you expect your children to be obedient to you.

Regardless of what kind of father you had, let your heavenly Father lead you into greater parenting. Can we take a peek at what that looks like on this Father's Day?

What is the heavenly Father like as a parent?

1. God took the initiative to lead the development of His creation and His children. **Philippians 1:6** reminds us that **"He (God) who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."** From helping you to see the need for repentance to the day you take up residence in heaven, God is committed to you as your heavenly Father. He loved you enough to send his son Jesus to you for your souls help. If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as Savior you are on the outside looking in. Place your faith in what Christ has done for you in dying for your sins and accept Him through a prayer of faith.

And Fathers, I beg of you to take the initiative to lead your family spiritually. If you do not know how to do this, seek the mentorship of a man you respect who is spiritual. Get a free RightNow Media account at [edgewoodbaptist.net](http://edgewoodbaptist.net) or through the Edgewood app and seek instructional videos on being a man who leads his family. Lead by making spiritual activities a priority rather than a convenience. Become a reader of the Bible and other helpful books. Be proactive, take initiative – you only have so many opportunities to be a godly influence.

2. God delights in blessing those who seek to follow and obey Him. Jesus reminded us of this principle in **Luke 11:28**. He said, **"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."** Parents who praise their children and bless them for obedience are being like our loving, heavenly Father. This creates a nurturing atmosphere where a child can blossom into maturity.
3. God does not seek to exasperate His children. **Lamentations 3:32-33** tells us that **"God is careful to be kind and thoughtful in his expectations toward His children."** It is often our misinterpretations of events that cause frustration and anguish. We must remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. As parents we must constantly challenge our children's interpretations in the light of God's character and Word. He loves us dearly.
4. God cares about His children enough to train and discipline them. **Proverbs 3:12** says: **"For the Lord reproveth him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."** God loves us enough to confront us and help us. To be like our heavenly Father, we must not shrink from training and at times lovingly and consistently correcting our children. They need to learn we value them enough to do this.
5. God seeks to development and protect His children through instruction. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** declares: **"All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."** God does not leave our spiritual growth to chance and neither should we as parents leave the development of our children to chance.

So do you remember our big idea today:

Fathers are great fathers when they are most like the heavenly Father.

Here is what the heavenly Father has modeled for us:

1. Take initiative to lead and be a great father.
2. Bless your children when they obey.
3. Be thoughtful and compassionate in your expectations.
4. Take time to train and understand training as a process.
5. Take time to instruct your children so they are prepared for life.

Fathers are great fathers when they are most like the heavenly Father.

Parents are great parents when they are most like the heavenly Father.

God bless you this week as you seek to lead like him!