

Ephesians 6:1-4

Some time back I heard a story about a man who received his PhD in psychology with highest honors. In his doctoral dissertation, he had reduced all child rearing to three simple principles. Ten years later, however, he had three children and no principles.

Don't you wish parenting was easy? Don't you wish we COULD reduce all we need to know as parents into a simple set of foolproof guidelines?

But whose advice do you listen to? Which parenting book do you buy? Perhaps the expert from whom we should seek counsel is the ONE WHO INVENTED THE IDEA OF MAN AND WOMAN, HUSBAND AND WIFE, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE FIRST PLACE. I would like to suggest that we spend less time with Dr. Phil, and more time with the Word of God.

Beginning in the 19th chapter of Exodus, we have recorded for us the great event when God gave His law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Chapter 20 tells us in detail what those Ten Commandments are. And part of God's word and guidance to us as parents is contained in those commandments. As you read the Ten Commandments, the first FOUR commandments have to do with love for and relationship with God, and the next SIX have to do with love for and relationship with others. THE FIRST FOUR ESTABLISH THE AUTHORITY OF GOD. But beginning with the fifth commandment, God shares His authority and transfers some responsibility from Himself to the earthly father and mother. The fifth commandment states, "*Honor your father and mother.*" In the FIRST FOUR commandments, God is saying, "*Honor me.*" The NEXT SIX, God is saying, "*Honor your father and mother,*"

and here are some of the ways you do that. If we do the things that God has forbidden, it will dishonor God, but it also dishonors the name of our father and mother.

This transfer of authority seems tremendously significant to me because it makes the HOME the most important institution on the face of the earth. It elevates the roles of father and mother, husband and wife, above every other position in society.

It probably won't come as a surprise to learn that studies have shown that a destabilized home inevitably leads to the destabilization of every other institution in society. GOD CREATED THE FAMILY TO BE THE ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCK OF ALL THE REST OF SOCIETY. It seems to me, then, the job we do as fathers and mothers and husbands and wives is the most important work we do on this earth.

As I think about the implications of that fact, it is pretty frightening. I had no training, no real preparation for the responsibilities of fatherhood. Did you? It was pretty much "*fly by the seat of your pants*", wasn't it?

Even today, very little preparation is offered to those venturing into marriage and parenthood. We spend four years or more in college preparing for a career. But at best, we offer a few hours of mostly inadequate counseling for the most important work that persons are ever going to do, the work of being a spouse and a parent.

DR. JAMES DOBSON said that it occurred to him, as he drove into his driveway one afternoon, that he was about to begin the most important work of his entire day – his handling of his relationships with his wife and children.

Since this is Father's Day, let's look at some of the responsibilities of the father in the home. In the New Testament is found a most helpful passage in Ephesians 5:21 through 6:24. Let me briefly summarize those verses: This passage tells us that the husband is to

teach his children to honor their mother BY HONORING HER HIMSELF in his own relationship with her. He is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and died for it. By the way he thinks, speaks and acts; he is to lead his wife and family into a life of holiness and righteousness. He is to love his wife, as he loves his own body. He is to cherish and protect his wife and to assume responsibility for providing both for her needs and the needs of their children. And men, that means more than simply providing for the physical needs of food, clothing and shelter. Husbands, God is requiring us to protect our wives spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically as well.

At the beginning of Ephesians 6, our children are reminded of that fifth commandment, *"Honor your father and mother."* But then another very important responsibility of the father is spelled out in these words: *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger," (or as the NIV text translates,) "do not exasperate your children," "but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*

We live in a society where, I believe, many men have abandoned their spiritual and educational responsibilities in the home. This word from God is especially important for us to hear today. It is the father whom God makes primarily responsible for the spiritual, educational, emotional, and psychological well being of his family. This is not to say that the wife is not to share in this staggering responsibility. This is a partnership. Obviously, various circumstances have created many single parent households. I think being a single Mom or single Dad is the toughest job in the world, because when it comes to parenting, we need all the help we can get!

Colossians 3:21 similarly cautions fathers not to embitter their children or they will become discouraged. Part of the way to avoid these problems is to make sure that we give

as many affirmations and encouragements and compliments to our children as we give criticisms and corrections.

But perhaps most important of all, remember that THERE IS NOTHING A FATHER CAN SUBSTITUTE FOR TIME SPENT WITH HIS CHILDREN. A recent study indicated that fathers spend about 45 minutes a week in contact and conversation with their children. I don't mean just being in the same room with them, but holding direct contact and conversation with them. All of us, myself included, are too busy succeeding at things of lesser importance than this job of parenting that God has given to us.

Those of you who are of my generation will probably remember a song from about 1974 that was sung by Harry Chapin. The song was entitled "*The Cat's in the Cradle.*" Let me share a few lines with you:

My child arrived just the other day;
He came to the world in the usual way.
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay;
He learned to walk while I was away;
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it.
And as he grew he'd say,
"I'm gonna be like you, Dad,
You know I'm gonna be like you"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon;
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you comin' home Dad?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then, son;
You know we'll have a good time then."

My son turned ten just the other day;
He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play.
Can you teach me to throw?"
I said, "Not today, I got a lot to do."
He said, "That's okay."
And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed,
It said, "I'm gonna be like him.
Yeah, you know I'm gonna be like him."

Well he came home from college just the other day;
So much like a man I just had to say.
"Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for awhile?"
He shook his head and he said with a smile,
"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys;
See you later, can I have them please?"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you comin' home, Son?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then, Dad;
You know we'll have a good time then."

I've long since retired, my son's moved away;
I called him up just the other day.
I said, "I'd like to see you, if you don't mind."
He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time.
You see, my new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu,
But it's sure nice talkin' to you."

And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me,
He'd grown up just like me;
My boy was just like me.

I've heard that song many times, but with my own children already grown, it puts a lump in my throat and a pang of regret in my heart that I did not spend more time, real quality and quantity time, with them. How quickly they grew up.

When you think about the responsibility we have as Fathers, it is almost enough to make you throw up your hands and say, *"But God, you don't understand my situation. What you are asking is impossible!"*

Humanly speaking, it may be impossible. BUT WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. If we will truly turn our lives over to God, God will help us set our priorities so we can be a good parent and a good spouse and a good provider for our family. It is only the Spirit of God that can enable us to accomplish this awesome task of parenting. AND THAT

IS PRECISELY WHAT THE PROMISE OF GOD IS TO THOSE WHO PUT THEIR FAITH AND TRUST IN CHRIST JESUS. God promises that His Spirit will come and live in us to strengthen us in body, mind, heart and will, that we may fulfill His Word on earth.

And if we are going to know the power of God's indwelling Spirit, we must first know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We must be His disciple. And we must commit ourselves to a discipline of DAILY STUDY IN GOD'S WORD so that we will know and understand what God expects of us and the power that is available to us. And we must PRAY. There is no substitute for daily conversation with our Heavenly Father, if we are ever to reflect, even dimly, to our wives and children the perfect attributes of fatherhood.

In John's third little letter in the Bible, he says to those to whom he is writing, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."* (3 John 1:4) And wouldn't that be the joy of every parent's heart? I have not been a perfect parent. I've certainly fallen far short of the standard I have spelled out this morning. But it is my prayer that my children will always walk in the way of truth as it is outlined in God's Word. How much I thank God this morning for my children and their mother.

Does what I have outlined this morning GUARANTEE that our children will always turn out right? NO. They live in a world of freedom. And sometimes they, and we, make wrong choices and decisions. But isn't Fatherhood worth your best shot? Do the best you can, and rely on God to guide you.

AFTER SERMON STORY:

One day a certain father went to visit his son's preschool. It was a day when dads could come to visit. But when he got there, he was shocked to discover that only two other fathers had come to be with their children.

Later on that morning, all the children were sitting on the floor in a circle. The teacher asked the children to tell the group something about their fathers, something that was special. One little boy said, *“Well, my daddy is a lawyer. He makes a lot of money and we live in a big house.”* Another child said, *“My father is very smart. He teaches at the college and a lot of important people know him.”* Finally it was time for this father’s son to say something special about his dad. The little boy looked up at his father, then he looked around the circle of his friends, and then he just smiled and proudly said, *“My dad ... my dad is here!”*