

“Daddy’s Job”
Ephesians 6:1-4
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My daughter, Kimberly, son-in-law Mike, and their three preschool children were in Indonesia a couple of months ago.

One afternoon, in Mike’s absence, the children were each having their own personal crisis. The infant Annie was crying, the two-year-old Jack was getting into something not his, and four-year-old Kate was sitting on the bed repeatedly asking for juice in a demanding voice.

Kimberly was trying to address the crises in order of importance and said rather impatiently to Kate, the oldest, who was whining for juice, “Katherine, it is not my job to get you whatever you want whenever you want it!”

Kate stopped whining, looked up at her mother, and with new enlightenment asked, “Oh, is that Daddy’s job?”

Several years ago Penelope Stokes wrote a verse, which she titled, “Daddy’s Job”

“Full half your sixty years were spent in fathering:

Watching down long dark nights in hospital halls;

Waiting for fish to bite;

Teaching that value lies in people not things.

You could have fished alone,

Worked overtime,

Bought loyalty with toys,

And make amends with money

For the times we were alone –

Some fathers do.

Instead, you lived the truth

That money can’t buy happiness –

Declined promotions,

Turned down jobs

That only offered status, or more pay,

And proved, with all you life,

That a father’s true occupation

Is his love. by Penelope Stokes in Family Life Today

Oh, if only that were true of every father!

Lucille Ball, the queen of American comedy until her death, was once asked in seriousness, “What’s wrong with our country? Why are our families falling apart? What’s missing?”

Lucy’s startling yet matter-of-fact reply came quickly, “Papa’s missing,” she said, “Things are falling apart because Papa’s gone.” (Hardenbrook in Piper/Grudem, 378)

Family life changed drastically over the 150 years from the mid-1700s to the early 1900s.

Lawrence Fuch’s wrote that with the advance of the industrial revolution, “The groundwork for the 20th-century **fatherless** home was set... For the first time it was socially and morally acceptable for men **not** to be involved with their families.”

(Lawrence Fuchs in Hardenbrook in Piper/Grudem, 379)

In the book of Ephesians that we have been studying for several weeks, the Apostle Paul is describing God’s new community.

In the first three chapters of the letter, Paul describes the relationship with God that is now ours by God’s grace.

In the last three chapters he describes the new way of living that results from this new relationship with God.

God’s people become a new community.

And in that new community they relate to God, to the world around them and to each other in a wholly new way.

Specifically at the end of chapter 5 and now in chapter 6 Paul has been describing how Christians – new community people - treat each other at home and work.

After describing the husband/wife relationship, which we looked at for a couple of weeks, Paul turns his attention, ever so briefly, to the parent/child relationship.

Listen to his instruction:

Ephesians 6:1-4

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

In the parent/child relationship Paul addresses three issues:

The child's **obedience**

The father's **disposition** toward his children.

And his **responsibility** toward his children.

First of all Paul's instruction is for children.

All of us **are** children, so is his instruction for **all** of us?

- It is true that the word "children" refers to relationship not age.
- And it is true that even adult children have responsibility to their parents as long as their parents are alive
- And there are implications in this passage for children of all ages, particularly about "honoring" our parents.

But this passage is not directly addressing **adult** children.

When Paul addresses fathers and speaks of "bringing (the children) up" it seems quite clear that the children in focus here are not adult children but those still growing, still dependent on their parents.

Before describing what the children are to do, it is worth noting that Paul addresses the children directly – "You Children obey **YOUR** parents".

Children were expected to hear this instruction even in the church.

Children were part of the worshipping community.

- In the OT we find children standing with the adults listening to the Scripture being read.
- We find children with their parents listening to the Bible being explained.
- In the NT we find children with their parents at the times of Jesus' teaching the crowds.

Some suggest that since worship services aren't geared for children, that it is unnecessary for them to be present or worse yet, they suggest, sitting through a worship service they don't understand will sour them on worship in the future.

I respectfully differ – What children are learning in a worship service is less from what is being said from this platform than what they are observing from you and others around them.

How often do your children see you singing in praise, kneeling in reverence, giving generously, reading the Scripture, taking communion, reciting the creeds, and engaging God, his people and his Word?

Where and when do they see that worship with God's people is important to you?

And in this text what are the children commanded to do?

“Obey” your parents.

Wives were told to “submit.”

That is a different word than the word “obey.”

To “obey” is not simply to have “a disposition to yield or an inclination to follow” as with wives submitting to their husbands.

The word translated “obey” means literally to “listen under”.

To **listen** is essential – How often do we hear ourselves saying, “Listen to me!”

And oh what you children will do to avoid listening.

Stick your fingers in your ears and sing loudly so you can't hear us.

As several parents have lamented: they should get a tax credit for raising deaf children.

To obey begins with listening.

But the word means more than “listen,” it means to “listen **under.**”

It is to listen with the intent to do what you hear and to do it with a willing attitude.

Parents can force compliance but we are seeking so much more, we are seeking a “listening under,” an obedient **attitude** as well as conduct.

This word “obey” – “to listen under” – also implies rank and order and carries with it a sense of full authority.

Obedience can and should be **voluntary** but if not volunteered, it can and should be required.

Parents are responsible to make their children obey.

God disciplines **us** and parents are responsible to discipline their **children**, as we will see shortly.

Even very young children ask, “Why?” when we tell them to do something.

I’m all in favor of giving reasons for what we tell our children to do.

But reasoning with a two-year-old is an exercise in futility.

I’m not saying we don’t attempt to explain and it is good to give reasons to teach the “why” of what we ask **and to make us think about the real reason** we are asking them to do something – is it truly for their good or is it just selfish on our part.

But sometimes “just because I said” is reason enough.

That may **sound** arbitrary but it is doesn’t need to be.

Much of obeying God is doing so when, to us, good results appear unlikely.

We learn to trust him whether we can see the good outcome or not and often we cannot see the good for years or until eternity.

I want to give my children reasons but often my reasons are beyond their maturity level.

And just as often my reasons are beyond their selfish wills.

But they must still learn to obey.

But Paul doesn’t just say, “Children, obey your parents” he says obey them **“in the Lord...”**

This phrase, “in the Lord” explains the command in two ways:

First of all it means that **obedience to parents is obedience to God.**

- When in verse 21, Paul told Christians to submit to each other he said to do it “out of reverence for Christ”
- When he told wives to submit to their husbands, he said to do it “as to the Lord.
- Here we find the same idea – obedience to parents is in fact obedience to God and disobedience to parents is disobedience to God.

To the Colossians 3:20 Paul said it this way, “Children obey your parents in everything, **for this pleases the Lord.**

Disobedience was treated very seriously in the OT because it was in violation not just of the parents’ will but of the **Lord’s** will.

In fact it was so serious that if disobedience and disrespect were not corrected, if such disobedience and disrespect continued right into the time when the older child would not respond to correction, the OT law commanded that such a person be put to death.

- Exodus 21:15 “Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death.
- Exodus 21:17 “Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.
- Deuteronomy 21:21 “You must purge the evil from among you.”

When I was a kid my concern was not that my father might believe in corporeal punishment, but that he might believe in capital punishment.

I am not even hinting at capital punishment for disobedience but I am demonstrating how strongly God feels about disobedience.

Just as obedience is “as to the Lord” so too disobedience is “as to the Lord”.

The **second** way the phrase “in the Lord” explains obedience is the **extent** of the obedience.

Even when Colossians 3:20 says, “Children, obey your parents **in everything**...” it does not mean without exception.

If for example, non-Christian parents were to demand that their son or daughter no longer worship Christ in their hearts, the child would be required to **disobey**.

But Paul is not dealing here with the exceptions, he is dealing with the general attitude and actions of the child – they are to obey “in the Lord” – consistent with the Lord’s will..

Children are also to obey because **“for this is right.”**

When Paul adds this, it may be an appeal to nature and reason.

John Stott wrote, “Virtually all civilizations have regarded the recognition of parental authority as indispensable to a stable society.” (Stott, 239)

It is fundamental to an ordered society.

Immaturity must have the advantage of mature guidance.

“For this is right” may also be an introduction of the next phrase – obedience of children is right because that is what the law of God demands: “Honor your father and mother...”

The 10 commandments are often divided into two **unequal** parts with the first four giving instruction about our relationship with God and the last six about our relationships with each other.

But the Jews divided them into two equal halves with the 5th commandment being part of the first half having to do with our relationship with God.

The significance of this arrangement is that it indicated that obedience to parents was actually obedience to God.

Honor, reverence, respect, obedience to their parents’ God-given authority was an integral part of the child’s reverence for God.

I don't expect children to be able to necessarily understand or articulate that concept but I do expect us parents to understand it and teach our children how to respect God by leading our children to respect us.

And as we will see shortly, whether they grow to truly respect God or just feel embittered toward him will be determined largely by how they are treated by us.

And then Paul adds another reason for obedience.

This is the one given in the OT - **“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”**

Applying the same principle from the OT era to the present day, Paul is saying that it is generally true that children who obey their parents, who heed their parents' instruction, enjoy a fuller life.

There are things your parents teach you that if you didn't learn would probably mean a shorter life.

- As much as you may want to be Superman, you can't fly.
- I caught my two-year-old grandson on last Sunday night in the back of the Worship Center with a box of matches open and trying to light one.

I didn't **ask** him if he wanted to put them away.

It is common sense that a better life results from the lessons of discipline, patience, and perseverance, learned in childhood.

In fact we feel sorry for the older child whose parents didn't give him or her that upbringing.

Bosses and the police are less compassionate teachers of those same lessons.

It's a truism: Learning obedience and respect of parents does make life better.

Having taught the submission of children to their parents, Paul then addresses the reciprocal responsibility of the parents.

But it is worth noting that Paul changes the word he uses.

He said that children should obey their “parents”, but when he talks about parental responsibility he changes the word to “fathers”.

Mothers certainly aren’t excluded from the instruction that follows but in both the Graeco-Roman culture and Jewish culture of Paul’s day it was the father who was responsible for the education of his children. (O’Brien, Ephesians, 445, footnote 25)

That responsibility has been too often abdicated in our culture.

As I quoted at the beginning of this sermon, “Things are falling apart because Papa’s gone.”

Consistent with the biblical text, I will address the balance of my remarks mainly to men and fathers.

Isn’t it interesting that Paul begins his instruction of fathers not with a reminder of their authority but with a prohibition of their harshness?

William Barclay wrote, “A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish them as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.” (Barclay, 208)

Both that cultural setting and the sinfulness of the human heart meant that fathers were more likely to be harsh than to be tender and merciful.

And it is unfortunately true today that when Papa **does** show up he is too likely to abuse his authority rather than to use it in love.

And so Paul says, **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children...”**

The English word “exasperate” means “to incite anger, to enrage.”

I think the KJV translates it as “do not provoke your children to anger”.

How do fathers exasperate or provoke their children?

- By controlling them rather than guiding them.
 Never letting them build their own competence in judgment and actions - making all of their decisions.
 We say we want our children to eventually become independent of us in a healthy way.
 - It is essential then that they learn that independence in the safety of love.
 - They must learn the limits of their liberty and to do so they must test those limits.
 - How we respond to their testing shows the quality of our love, which they must also learn.

- We exasperate by showing favoritism – Rebecca’s favoritism of Jacob led, in part, to Esau’s hostility (Genesis 27);
- Humiliation, sarcasm, ridicule – laughing at them.
 I seen children physically wilt under the assault of ridicule.
- We exasperate them by capricious, arbitrary, and inconsistent demands.
- Faultfinding. Discouragement, never complementing, always telling how they missed it, etc.
- Inconsistent in our love – A public service television ad shows a little boy waiting for someone to pick him up at the park, baseball glove in hand. Obviously much time passes, finally into dusk with no one coming. Obviously an adult failed to keep a commitment.
- We exasperate them by making demands inconsistent with their maturity.
- Using love as a tool of reward and punishment.
- Physical and verbal abuse.

(MacArthur, 317-318 and others)

Paul tells children to obey their parents.

He tells fathers not to exasperate their children.

And thirdly he gives fathers this positive command:

“Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

“Bring the up” is from the word Paul used in chapter 5, verse 29, when he spoke of how a man “feeds”, that is “nourishes” his own body.

The word conveys the idea of attentiveness and great care.

Eliot Daley wrote, “What have I done in my whole life that was more significant than fathering three human beings?”

He wasn’t talking about siring them, he was talking about being nourishing them. (from *Father Feelings*, 1977, William

Morrow

Calvin paraphrased this instruction as “let them be fondly cherished...deal gently with them.” (Calvin, *Sermon on Ephesians*, 622)

It doesn’t preclude toughness but neither does toughness preclude tenderness.

The point is not just to keep them alive long enough to get them out the door but to supply what is necessary to bring them to maturity.

But it will be clear soon that this is not just physical maturity or even intellectual maturity but that and much more.

This “bringing them up”/“nourishing” is conducted **through “training and instruction.”**

Here are two words quite close in meaning.

The word **“Training”** is sometimes translated “discipline” but not just punishment. It carries the idea of education. Education that includes chastisement when necessary.

The word **“Instruction”** is sometimes translated “admonition” and connotes verbal instruction or correction. (O’Brien, 446)

Together you have the picture of a father who is involved in the instruction of his children which sometimes includes correction.

Many fathers exercise discipline quite readily.

But they haven’t learned the difference between right discipline and wrong discipline.

Too often discipline is thought of only as punishment.

Every era seems to swing to one extreme or the other - from a Victorian over-strictness, even harshness, to our generation's laissez-faire permissiveness.

But the opposite of wrong discipline is not no discipline but correct discipline.

How often do we discipline out of frustration and anger rather than out of a desire for what is best for the child?

Yes fathering includes discipline but D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "When we are disciplining a child, we should have first controlled ourselves... What right have we to say to our child that he needs discipline (self-control) when we obviously need it ourselves? Self-control, the control of temper, is an essential prerequisite in the control of others." (Lloyd-Jones, 279)

Some fathers have not learned the difference between **authoritative** and **authoritarian** and between **neglectful** and **permissive**.

A number of years ago I saw a diagram that helped me a great deal. Imagine two axes (axis) creating four quadrants.

The vertical axis measures control from high to low.

The horizontal axis measures affection from high to low.

1. A father who exercises high control but low affection is simply **authoritarian** – he forces compliance but probably provokes his children to internalized anger.
2. A father who exercises low control and low affection is just **neglectful** – he's absent in any meaningful way.
3. The father who exercises low control but high affection is **permissive** – his kids may love him for a season but in adulthood they will pay the price for not having been taught discipline.
4. But the father who exercises high control and high affection is **authoritative** – he's there and he's engaged.

One young man said of his father:

"My father is the greatest person in the world. I know no other person who is so versatile, so authoritative, so secure, so sensible and so much at home with himself as my father... My father was principle of a high school (during hard economic times). At the same time he was

working for his master's degree. He earned very little and so he also worked a small farm. In addition to that he was the part-time pastor of a church 40 miles from our home. In spite of the preaching, planting, plowing, paper-grading, committees, and all else, we had a great time. Dad always found time to shoot baskets with us boys. Most of all he found time for family worship. I've seen my dad keep men waiting when it might easily have interrupted our family devotions. Those men were always invited in to eat with us and I'm ashamed to say that more than once I laughed to myself at a plumber or salesman who stuttered through a prayer when Dad would ask them to lead. I want to say a fellow never forgets such things. I have always depended on God for strength and security and have always tried to do his will. I attribute that to my childhood home." (Paraphrased from Anna B. Mow, *Your Child*, 27)

That's an authoritative father.

Fathers, are your children being trained?

What are they learning about

- God's kind of unconditional, persevering love,
- about the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5),
- about giving as an attitude and lifestyle, etc.

When they leave your home, father,

- will they know Jesus,
- will they know the Bible,
- will they be growing disciples, following Jesus,
- will they be praying men and women,
- and will they know the fundamentals of the faith and be able to defend them against the onslaught of false ideas?

Fathers, where do you expect them to get this training?

Sunday School?

The late Dr. C.C. Ellis wondered why the devout Christian leaders of the last century objected to Sunday school.

Why did they object to the church conducting children's religion classes?

He went to the archives of several of the churches in Eastern Pennsylvania to find out what reasons they gave.

To his surprise their major objection was that if the church begins teaching the Bible and Christian living to children, the homes will let it go and leave the responsibility to the church.

That is exactly what has happened!

(In Anna B. Mow's Your Child)

I'm certainly not opposed to Sunday School.

But Sunday school is not responsible for our children, we are.

We can take advantage of Sunday school in carrying out our responsibility.

But do you know **what** they are teaching our children?

Do you know **who** is teaching our children?

Do you know that 3 times as many women as men are teaching our children? Whose job is it?

Furthermore if we are rightly using Sunday school as a tool to partly fulfill our responsibility to bring our children up in the training and instruction of the Lord, do we have our children **here** enough to learn?

Attendance for many is so sporadic.

Are competitive sports more important than the spiritual instruction of our children?

Are we selling their souls for a chance at scholarships or worse yet so we can say how well our kid is doing in some sport?

We don't have time to read our kid a story or take him to a nursing home to learn about giving but we have time for three to six hours of television football or skiing, or whatever, each weekend?

Do you put them in a Christian school and expect the school to do it?

The Christian school is not responsible for the training and instruction of our children, we are.

"Father's do not exasperate your children, instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

What will you change, Dad?

God has given us an awesome privilege - will we take it?

One man wrote, "My family's all grown and the kids are all gone. But if I had it to do all over again, this is what I would do. I would love my wife more in front of my children. I would laugh with my children more – at our mistakes and our joys. I would listen more, even to the littlest child. I would be more honest about my own weaknesses, never pretending perfection. I would pray differently for my family; instead of focusing on them, I'd focus on me. I would do more things together with my children. I would encourage them more and bestow more praise. I would pay more attention to little things, like deeds and words of thoughtfulness. And then finally, if I had it to all over again, I would share God more intimately with my family; every ordinary thing that happened in every ordinary day I would use to direct them to God." (In MacArthur, 319)