

To Fathers

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[0 : 00] We took a little break from Ephesians in order to focus on Easter. And where we left off in Ephesians was Ephesians chapter 6. And we're talking about the family. And we're talking about the family is God's greenhouse for growing godliness.

And the last sermon I preached, it was directed at children. Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Jesus wants you children to obey your parents.

And this morning, we're going to be looking at Ephesians 6.4 in which God specifically addresses dads. He's calling us dads to raise our children in a way that honors Jesus.

Jesus is calling us to raise our children to fear Jesus. So let me read Ephesians chapter 6 verse 4. We read this.

Fathers, dads, do not provoke your children to anger. But bring them up.

[1 : 10] Nurture them. Raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Brothers, dads, here's what God is calling us to do this morning.

God is calling us to give our lives to raising our children to fear and live for Jesus.

That's what He's calling us to do today. That's what He wants us to have in our heads when we leave today, brothers. He's entrusted us with a responsibility to raise our children in a way that pleases God.

And so this morning, I want you to see three things. The first is this. The first is this. Fathers, you've been given a responsibility. The second thing is, dads, don't misuse your authority.

And third, fathers, be faithful. So let's look at that first point. Fathers, you've been given a responsibility.

[2 : 17] I mean, it's right there. That first word. Ephesians 6 verse 4. Fathers. Dads. Dads. I just want to remind you of who he's talking to. Who are these dads?

Remember that Paul wrote a letter to a church in this town called Ephesus in the first century. And he was apostle writing to Christians.

And so he singles out dads here in Ephesians 6 verse 4. And so first and foremost, what you need to understand are these dads, these fathers are Christian men.

These are men who've been radically changed. They were men who used to be dead in their sin. Living in darkness. Following after the prince of the power of the air. Also known as the devil.

And then Jesus broke into their lives. Our lives. He radically changed us. We went from being dead in our sin to being alive in Christ. We went from being in darkness to now being light of the Lord.

[3 : 23] We went from following the prince of the power of the air to now we are called to follow Jesus. To walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which he has called us. We're to walk in his way now.

We've got a new walk to walk. You see, when Christ changed us, he changed the way we do things. And so as Christian men who are fathers, Jesus changes the way that we parent.

The way that we care for our children. And you know what? He's also provided his spirit to dwell in us.

And to fill us. And to empower us. For this responsibility he's given us. So let me just remind you a little bit about what authority is.

I talked about a couple sermons ago about when I was addressing this passage about wives. Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. I tried to make a point that authority, at the heart of authority, is actually responsibility.

[4 : 28] That a husband is given the responsibility for the welfare of his wife. And so at the heart of authority is responsibility.

And we see that being played out here in Ephesians 6.4. God has given fathers a responsibility. He's given them a responsibility for the welfare of each of his children. Fathers, do not provoke your children. God has given us each of our children. And he is calling us to be responsible for their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

We have responsibility for the overall welfare of his children. And therefore, out of that responsibility, we can actually require things of our children.

That's where the right comes in. That's where the authority comes in. And this authority has been given to us by God himself. It's been entrusted to us. This whole section, starting with wives and husbands, now to children and parents, and soon we'll see slaves and masters, it all has to deal with how Jesus makes a difference in these relationships.

[5 : 47] How we are to live out our submissive roles and our authoritarian roles, both in marriage and in parenting and in the workplace.

And so we're right in the middle of looking at this, how these relationships work out in terms of the home. Children are to submit themselves to their parents, to obey them for Jesus.

And dads in particular, you're to exercise your responsibility, your authority for Jesus. Now, if you were a mom in the room, you might be wondering this.

All right, you know, what about me? You know? Do I have any responsibility here? Do I have any authority? Look at Ephesians 6.1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord.

Verse 2. Honor your father and your mother, for this is right. Paul is not saying moms have no parental authority, or somehow moms have some kind of token authority.

[6 : 53] That's not being said at all. In fact, just by referencing Exodus 20.16, he's saying moms have the right to require their children to do things as well.

So why is Paul singling out dads? Because dads are the heads of their homes. According to God's design of the family, a father is given the final authority over his children.

In other words, the buck stops with dad. And what he's also saying is that we as fathers must be particularly careful in how we exercise our authority because it can have devastating effects on our children.

The difference between a mom's authority and a dad's authority is one of degree that has to deal with accountability. Dads, God has entrusted to you the overall welfare for your children.

It doesn't exclude your wife. But brothers, you're going to want to bring your wife on that dance called marriage right down into parenting. You're going to want to lead her through that. You're going to want to be on the same page.

[8 : 06] But because God has entrusted the overall responsibility of a family's welfare to you, dad, you will be held to a greater degree of accountability than your wife.

And maybe the moms in the room are saying, Hallelujah, amen. And the dads in the room are saying, Gulp. Now, I just want to say a brief word to single moms.

Because I know that a sermon like this can make you very aware of your situation. And I just want to say from the outgo, we love you.

And we love that you are here with us. We are protective of you.

We are not interested in shaming you or shunning you. In fact, we think that a two-parent family is hard enough. Being a single parent would be very difficult.

[9 : 12] So we want to help you. We want you to know you're welcome here. But I also need to let you know this. If your children's father is not on the scene, the buck stops with you.

Someone must take on the overall responsibility of your children's welfare. And that's going to be you. And God has grace for you.

It might not be his intended design, but it is real responsibility. And not only does God want to help you, we as your church want to help you.

You know, don't think that when you are a single mom, if you're praying to God, He's like eyes closed, fingers in his ears, I'm not listening to you because you're not according to my design.

It's not it at all. God in heaven is your husband in heaven. He's your children's father in heaven.

[10 : 21] He is grace for you. All things are possible. I just want to remind you of one biblical example, and that's Timothy. In 2 Timothy chapter 1, Paul tells this young pastor, hey, remember the sincere faith that was in your grandmother Lois, and then in your mother Eunice, it's now in you.

You know what the idea behind that is? Timothy's mother Eunice built into him. She shared with him the sacred writings that made him wise for salvation.

Single moms, God will use you in your children's lives. God is able.

He has grace for you. Brothers, God has given you a responsibility. Dads, God has given you this backpack called fatherhood, and it is designed to fit you.

Don't resist it. Welcome it. Don't resist it. Welcome it. Which brings us to our second point. And don't misuse it.

[11 : 35] Don't misuse your authority. There's two mistakes that dads can make. We see the result in 6-4. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.

Do not provoke. There's two mistakes that a dad can make. Mistake number one. Captain Von Trapp dad. Do you know who Captain Von Trapp is?

Sound of music. Before Edelweiss. Before Edelweiss. Do you remember? Whistle. Militant. He liked things disciplined.

Ungracious. Insensitive. Very controlling. He's an example of an overbearing father. That's mistake number one.

Captain Von Trapp dad. Before Edelweiss. That mistake ends up emphasizing control over care.

[12 : 39] Control over care. Control over care. Control over care for your children. God wants you to love your children first.

For a Captain Von Trapp dad. His wife will often feel in between. In between her husband and her children.

It's a very awkward position for her to be in. That's mistake number one. Mistake number two is the other side. If abuse number one is overbearing, the second misuse is what I call ghost dad.

Ghost dad is there but not there. And the misuse is actually an abdication of authority. A vacating of authority.

He's there but he's not there. Where's your dad? Uh, somewhere in the house. There's someone behind the paper.

[13 : 44] There's someone watching TV. There's someone working on the engine of the car in the garage. There but not there. Constantly on the phone.

Constantly doing work. There but not there. Paranormal papa. Ghost dad. God. Tends to avoid conflict.

Oftentimes emotionally unavailable. He values personal comfort. Over caring for his children.

He values his own comfort. And his wife often feels like she is a functional single mom. So, two mistakes.

Captain Von Trapp dad. Ghost dad. Do you know, um, when you're driving your car, if you need your suspension worked on, or if the alignment's off, you know, if you take your hand off the wheel momentarily, you'll pull one way or the other.

[14 : 53] You know what I'm talking about? Brother, you're going to pull one way or the other.

You're going to either pull towards Captain Von Trapp, or you're going to pull towards ghost dad. Which way do you pull?

Which way do you pull? There are two mistakes that these have in common. Two mistakes here.

So when you abuse your authority in one of an overbearing way or an abdicative way, there are two things you need to be aware of.

First is this. It's selfishness. It's selfishness. It's putting yourself first.

It's putting yourself before your children. Whether that's in a controlling manner, or whether that is in some kind of seeking your comfort first, it's putting yourself first.

It actually indicates who you're trusting in, in the parenting of your children. Or who you're not. So the first mistake that comes out of this is selfishness.

[16 : 07] The second result of these things is this. Oftentimes, these kinds of mistakes of being a dad, they produce angry, discouraged children.

It's not difficult to imagine. That you're a child in a home whose father is overbearing, he overreacts, he's unpredictable, it's like walking on eggshells around him.

Over time, you feel like you're trapped and you have no recourse. Do you know what happens to people in that situation? They get angry. They don't feel like they have any way to escape.

They start looking to their 18-year-old birthday as ticket out. And so children can avoid a Captain Von Trapp dad because they're afraid of him.

But children can avoid ghost dad as well because he's irrelevant. He doesn't seem to care in them.

[17 : 18] And as they have watched their mother try to do the work of two people, they get angry too. Both mistakes can result in a state of anger in a child.

Exasperation. It's pretty serious stuff. It's sobering, isn't it? That the way that you parent your children can affect your children this way?

Jesus does not want us to embitter our children. He does not want us to be Captain Von Trapp or ghost dad.

You know, I've been thinking about this sermon all week long, and earlier in the week, I got the really cute idea, I thought, that I would put myself through a dad audit with my children.

So Tuesday, Wednesday morning, I forget which one. It all blurs together at this point. I sat my kids down. So typically in the Salvati home, it's like this.

[18 : 31] I wake up really early. I drink my coffee, read my Bible, and I'm just waiting for people to wake up. And everybody eventually wakes up.

We come down, eat breakfast together, get the Word together for a little bit, pray, and then we disperse for the day. Let's just say it was Wednesday. This past Wednesday, I thought, okay, Ephesians 6, 4, I'm going to have to preach this.

I better ask a hard question. So here's what I ask my children, my three older children. By the way, I've got permission to share the results of my audit. I ask them, what do I do that makes you angry?

What do I do that annoys you? What do I do that frustrates you? And to be honest with you, I thought it was going to take a little bit for them to kind of pull something, reach for something.

Not at all. It's like, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow. Okay, so here was the first response. My wake-up techniques.

[19 : 42] For some reason, they don't like being wakened up to flashing lights, me singing something like, oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day.

They don't like me jumping on their bed. They don't like me pulling off their covers. And then I started to think, you know, neither would I.

If I were them. You know, this is basic. Love your neighbor as yourself, Salvati. This morning, I woke up my boys very graciously, by the way.

The second response was very specific. How you eat your pizza really annoys me. I had no idea. You know what went through my mind first? Tonight, we're ordering a pizza. That's what went through my mind. You know what? I don't quite know what the solution to that is, but I'm eager to learn.

[20 : 45] And then things got more convicting. Dad, you don't stop when we ask you to. When we wrestle, I apply the noogie.

And sometimes that results in tears. I don't stop when they ask me to stop. It's a lack of self-control. There was a common refrain, and then you get mad at me, Dad.

Dad. They're pointing to impatience in me. Dad, when plans change for our family, unless it's your idea, you tend to flip out.

You tend to freak out. I realize I'm inflexible. I'm ungracious. I'm unwilling to roll with it if it's not my idea. Dad, you're irritable on Mondays.

You tend to overreact. Blow things out of proportion. Make mountains out of molehills. Dad, there are times when you ask us not to do something, but then just moments later, you do it yourself.

[21 : 57] Dad, you're being hypocritical. Dad, you're slow to follow through with your Word. Dad, it ends up feeling like a broken promise.

Dad, you go into lecture mode. In other words, I don't listen enough. I walked to the building that morning.

I often walked to the building, and I was pretty bummed out. Man, I wasn't expecting that. Then I realized, you know what?

I asked my kids, and they were honest with me. I got real data now. God, help me. God, help me be more self-controlled.

Help me be more loving with my wake-up techniques. Help me to be patient. Help me to eat my pizza in a way that blesses other people. Help me to be flexible with plans.

[23 : 02] Help me to be sober-minded, not blow things out of proportion. Help me not to be a hypocrite. Help me to follow through quickly with what I say.

Help me to listen well. I found peace in my heart. God is for me in my parenting of my children.

Brothers, your wife can help you out tremendously here as well. You do the dance with her called marriage, and she will whisper in your ear sometimes, you're being mean right now to the kids. Sometimes that feels like a swift kick, kick underneath a dinner table. It's a blessing. Brothers, can I encourage you to do the audit?

To ask your children if they can understand? Kids, how am I annoying you? Because I don't want to annoy you.

[24 : 05] I don't want to provoke you to anger. This morning, this is all fresh in me. And I found myself, I read a psalm every day, and I was in Psalm 102, and I'm like, oh, I need to get to Psalm 103.

Brothers, will you hear this? Because I'm guessing if you're like me, you have Captain Von Trapp tendencies and ghost dad tendencies, and when you're confronted with God's Word like this, you become very aware of something you're not.

Of how you fail. Listen to this. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever. He does not deal with dads according to their sins. Nor repay us according to our iniquities.

Those are promises in Jesus. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does it remove our transgressions from us.

[25 : 19] As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows dads our frame.

He knows we're dust. He knows our tendencies. So when we're confronted with our shortcomings, do you know what we must do, brothers, as dads?

Cry out to our Heavenly Father. Oh God, help me. I confess. These are all true. Change me. Make me more like Jesus.

Keep me from angering my children. Rather, help me to raise my children in a way that pleases you. Let's go to point three now. Fathers, be faithful.

Be faithful. Be a faithful dad. Back to Ephesians 6. We read this.

[26 : 20] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. Don't misuse your authority, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Raise them. Nurture them.

God is talking to us, brothers. That's command to us. We raise our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Brothers, sisters, I'm going to share with you four things right now of how to raise children.

They're principle-based, and so they're not nitty-gritty practical things, but I believe they're going to be helpful for you. And I'm going to ask you, brothers, to make sure you and your wife are on the same page with these things.

So four things in terms of how to raise your children. First, the goal. Second, the target. Third, the means. Fourth, the method.

You ready? Let's dive in. How to be a faithful father. The goal. Bring up your children. Nurture your children.

[27 : 30] Raise them. The question is, into what? That's where we need to be united on the goal. We are being called brothers and sisters to raise our children to become responsible and mature young adults who love Jesus.

That's what we're being called to do. And it's hard work. So let me try to spell this out a little bit. By the time our children leave our homes, we want them to know how to walk with God.

We want them to know how to read their Bibles. We want them to know how to pray. We want them to see the benefit of coming together as a church and be in our God's Word together. We want them to worship from their toes.

We want that relationship with God for them to be growing there. To know how for themselves to manage that. And we also want to help them understand themselves.

Their relationship with themselves. To see themselves as God sees them. To understand their sexuality. To know what their strengths and weaknesses are.

[28 : 41] To know their own aspirations. We want to help them understand themselves as God sees them. We want to help our children know how to relate with other people.

How to seek peace when experiencing conflict. How to be a faithful friend. How to follow through with commitments. And of course, we want to help our children be good stewards of what's entrusted to them.

So that's just a little profile of the goal here. We are being called to raise up mature followers of Jesus.

Our children. That leads us to the target. How do you go about doing that? The target of our parenting.

What we're aiming our parenting at are our children's hearts. Not their behavior so much.

[29 : 43] Their hearts. Here's why. The heart is the control center of your child's life. It's the control center of your life. The Hebrew minds of the time believed that the heart was the central place of one's reasoning, one's feeling, and one's will.

It would be the crank house of a human being. And so we behave out of our hearts. And so Proverbs 4.23 says, Guard your heart above all else, for from it flow the wellspring of life.

You live out of your heart. It's the source of desires. It's the source of cravings. You actually worship out of your heart. And so as parents, if we see a behavior that needs to change in our children, we just don't manage the behavior.

We actually go to the source of the behavior and we seek to address our children's hearts with God's Word. And so the goal, mature Christians, the target is the heart of our children.

And that brings us to the means. I can't change my children's heart. Only God can. And in order for God to change my child's heart, I pray and I pray and I pray and I bring God's Word to bear as best as I can.

[31 : 17] And so the means is God's Word. We as parents are called to bring God's Word to bear on the hearts of our children.

Why? Let me just remind you what God's Word does. Hebrews 4, verse 12. I'm sure many of you know this by heart.

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Do you want God to address your children? Get God's Word into your children's hearts. You know what this means? Christian parenting is actually ministry of the Word.

Parents, you are ministering the Word to your children, not in a slap-on band-aid kind of way, but through heart conversations with your children.

[32 : 25] You listen to your children and you know God's Word and you are the bridge that brings them together. We want to instruct our children.

See that word in Ephesians 6, 4? Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. God's Word instructs our children. It reveals who God is.

It reveals who they are. It helps them understand the workings of their hearts. It provides guidelines for them to live. We want to get God's Word in their hearts, but here's the deal, Mom and Dad. We are unable to get God's Word into our children's hearts if God's Word isn't on our hearts.

Would you turn your Bibles back to Deuteronomy 6? Deuteronomy 6, chapter 6, verse 4.

This is the Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord with everything you've got. And then in verse 16, he says, and these words that I command you today shall be on your hearts.

[33 : 41] God's Word on our hearts. Governing our lives. That's what he's getting at. And then look at verse 7. You shall teach them God's words diligently to your children.

You see, God wants to get His Word into your children through you. Which brings us now to the method. Training.

Bring up your children in the discipline also known as training and instruction of the Lord. It's the picture of repping things out. You know, a coach brings his team and he practices his team.

He just reps it out. He explains what's expected, shows them, models them how to do it, and then lets them try. And then he corrects them to make sure their techniques are right so that they learn to love the game.

Dads, we are coaching our children into Christ-likeness. That's what we're doing. And so, the key to the method here is this.

[34 : 49] Your life. The method we see modeled in Deuteronomy 6 is life on life. Let me read it for you.

Deuteronomy 6 verses 6 and 7. 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 with your children when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, between your eyes, on your doorposts, your gates. God's word shows up all over the place. What we're seeing here as the method of Christian parenting is getting God's word into our parents, our children's lives?

Ongoing conversations. We're constantly training. We're constantly talking about God's word. Further, further need to have God's word on your heart.

Just a word about discipline. God calls parents to discipline their children, to correct them, to teach them through their discipline. And whatever, whether you're going to spank your child or whether you're going to withhold a privilege, whatever you do, it must be done in love for their good.

[36 : 12] That's what we see modeled in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 8 through 11. Our Father in Heaven disciplines us for our good that we would share in a peaceful fruit of righteousness.

So what is this training? Essentially, it means time, together, proximity. You are close with your child. You're able to see their lives. They're able to see your life.

It requires intentionality because you're looking to have conversations on a heart level with them and it means consistency again and again and again.

Again and again and again. You know what this means for us dads? We might not be able to work out as much as we want to. We might get a little flabby in this season of our parenting. And you know what?

It's so worth it. Our children's godliness is worth it. We might have to say no to a promotion which would mean 10 to 20 hours of our work week.

[37 : 16] We say no because I need that time to be able to build into my children. Sorry. You might need to curb a hobby. It's taking too much time. I need that time to invest in my children.

They need me. So we've looked at the goal, Christlikeness. We've looked at the target, the heart. We've looked at the means, God's word.

We've looked at the method, life on life. Conversational discipleship with your children around God's word. None of us can change our child's heart, can we?

So a Christian parent is a praying person. All throughout this, we are trusting God and asking God to do a work in our children. This morning, we've looked at three things.

Dads, God has entrusted you with the responsibility for the overall welfare of your children. Second, dads, don't misuse that authority. Steer clear of Captain Von Trapp. Steer clear of Ghost Dad.

[38 : 21] Take the audit. Remember, you're forgiven much. And second, be faithful. Dance with your wife. Lead her into a shared goal.

Focusing on the heart. Bring God's word to bear through your life. Got a couple questions for you to close. Dads, are you and your wife, do you have a shared goal in parenting your children?

Are you on the same page? Dads, ask your wife. Lead there, brother. Second, dads, is God's word on your heart?

Are you meeting God in His word? Third, dads, are you and your wife, are you settling for behavioral modification or are you intentionally seeking to address your child's heart?

And fourth, dads, do you realize that there's no greater potential influence for godliness in your child's life than yours?

[39 : 42] God has placed you in your child's life for a purpose, for their good, and for God's glory. Let me pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father in heaven, from whom every family on earth gets their name, Father, help us fathers to be faithful to you to raise our children in a way that pleases you. God, would you fill us by your spirit so that we can be faithful to you. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[40 : 54] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.