

Gospel Shaped Children

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Preacher: Rob Patterson

[0 : 00] If you keep your Bibles open to Ephesians chapter 6 in particular, that's where we'll be spending most of our time. If you're visiting today, then you've joined us in the midst of a series on gospel-shaped family.

We've looked at relationships and how we're called to actually live with a gospel shape to our relationships in general. Then we've gone and looked at fathers, or sorry, not fathers, husbands, and then wives, and now children, and that relationship between children and parents.

I want to say that it's an interesting thing to talk about relationships in this way because when you split them up, I think in part, one of the things that we want to do is we kind of want to think about the commands that actually benefit us.

I don't know if you find this, but husbands, I found, were particularly attentive to the talk about wives, and wives about husbands. Surprise, surprise. Now, children, I'm sure, are very keen to hear what parents should be doing, and parents are very keen that their kids today, of all days, will not be colouring in or doing anything else but listening completely to what we're saying.

Hey, Chelsea, yeah? Watching you. Yeah. Man, it's the way we are, isn't it? We do kind of focus on things in that way. We look for the benefit in ourselves.

[1 : 32] Friends, I want to share with you a story, and hopefully it helps us start to open up what we should be doing. You see, all of these commands benefit all of us, and they're all commands that we should all be embracing for the goodness of them because they're God's commands to us.

Do you remember when I was a child and thinking through my relationship with my father? I remember as a child, I may have told some of you guys this story before, but I had an older brother who was really, really good at cricket, and he was so good at cricket that I couldn't lift.

I was quite small for my age, so I couldn't wield his bat. I couldn't move it quick enough for the way he would bowl, so I'd have to use a skinny little bat that made me even more at a disadvantage.

We'd play backyard cricket, and he'd bowl these balls, and I could barely see them. They were like a blur to me as a little kid. And as I'd play cricket, I'd just be not wanting to be hit by the ball, hoping that at some point the ball actually hit the bat, and that I would last at least an over or so.

I couldn't get out first ball. That was my one saving thing. We had a rule. You can't get out first ball. But there was one time of the day when I actually enjoyed those cricket games, and that was when my father got home.

[2 : 49] You see, my father knew that there was an imbalance. He could see what was going on. And so what he would do is he'd actually come along. He'd play with us for a little while, and when it was my turn to bat, he'd come and help me.

And what he would do is, me as a little titchy little kid, he'd lean over me and place his hands over my hands on the cricket bat. And then, suddenly, what I had was the capacity of an adult to actually engage in the game.

My father would anticipate my brother's bowling and respond to it quicker than I could, and with way more power than I could. Sometimes, as he would see the ball coming, he would just swing the bat so quickly and so hard that he would lift me off my feet.

And as he pounded the ground, as you do when you're waiting for the ball to come, I could feel the vibration through my feet. So much strength involved. Now, friends, when that was happening, when my father was leaning over me, holding my hands and helping me to bat, when I was scoring all of those runs, who was it?

Who was it that was scoring those runs? Who was it that was successfully batting? Was it God?

[4 : 22] Thinking in terms of our lives, was it my father? Or was it me? I want to tell you, yes. And when we apply this to God, and when we think about our relationship with our parents, I want you to

think the same thing.

That as we approach this issue of parenting, and as we think about who we are as God's precious children, what we're seeing here is a picture of that dynamic unfolding in our lives, in our relationships.

Father to child. Lending the strength. Lending the strength. Providing what we lack as children. And enabling us to perform and to act in a way that we never could on our own.

So with that in mind, with that image in mind, let's actually sort of immerse ourselves in the passage here and actually see how that unfolds. See, Paul opens with a command to children.

He says, Children, obey your parents. Children, that is your immediate offspring. It's not age or gender specific, this particular word.

[5 : 25] And the implication in verse 4, at least, is that they're still being shaped by the instruction of their parents. Some of your parents will be saying, well, when does that end? John, you know.

You're still having to guide your children, don't you? Yeah. You're nodding. They're nodding, by the way. Yeah. Good stuff. Yeah. Children, obey your parents.

Obey. And this word obey means to pay attention to with the intent of following their instruction. It means to so value what your parents say.

To so value it that you seek their opinion. You even ask for it. And that when you do, you treat it as vital information. And even as he speaks about this obeying your parents, Paul kind of explodes out into the concept of, or into the command of honouring your parents.

You see, Paul sees this concept of obedience as just one application of the larger concept of honouring our parents. Where honour means to respect, to hold in high regard.

[6 : 36] In the original Hebrew, this word had the sense of weight, heaviness. No fat jokes about your parents, kids. Right? But it's weight in the sense of worth.

This command to obey our parents is a command to our hearts to see them as worthy of our honour. Our parents are to be precious to us.

Their words are to carry weight in our youth, but to listen to them. In their old age, where to care for them. Maybe some of you are thinking, do you, does he know how much my parents lecture me already?

And he's telling me to ask them to do it? Friends, I'm saying a lot more than that. I'm saying, ask your parents. I'm saying, listen to their every word. And I'm saying, love it.

Treat it like it's the best thing you've heard all day. As they begin to speak to you, be thinking, you know, I was going to play some Xbox, but this is way better. Or, oh, look, on your phone, you get your phone, oh, look, my best friend, my BFF has just messaged me.

[7 : 47] Well, they can wait, because this is way too important. This is what's going on here. This is what Paul is trying to say to the children of the church in Ephesus. Now, honouring your parents, which involves obeying them, is an important command.

It's so important that Paul makes this, lets us know how important it is in two ways. First, he says it's an act of worship. And then he points out how central it is to God's design. So firstly, in verse 1, Paul says this, Obey your parents in the Lord.

In the Lord, for this is right. In the Lord? Well, the act of obeying your parents, this tells us, is primarily an act of obedience to God.

It's an act of righteousness. It's primarily an act of worship. It gives the glory to God. Obeying parents is right, not because of first century social norms or the desires of your parents sitting next to you, but because of our relationship to God through Christ.

This command is a theological issue. Now, some of you will be thinking, does this mean we have to do everything they say? No. But be careful here that you're not just looking for an excuse to rebel.

[9 : 17] Take what your parents say. Weigh it up. See the value in it. Apply their wisdom to your life. And as you get older, you'll become more independent in this process. You'll learn to take the wisdom of their advice and use it or set it aside, given the circumstances.

But even when you set it aside, see that you do it in a way that honours them, that lifts them up and shows how much you value them.

Friends, hearts tuned to worshipping God will seek to obey their parents. So first, it's an act of worship. The second, it's central to God's design.

As I've already said, Paul ties his command to obey to the Ten Commandments. And he does that in verse 2. And he says this, honour your father and mother, which is the first command with a

promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Now, the Ten Commandments were important in Israel's history. They represented the commands that Israel was to live by as they entered into the Promised Lands. Commands that the rest of the world would see. And as they saw them, they would know that the God of this people was a good God.

[10:31] But it was more than that. It was commands that taught God's people what they had forgotten, which was how to be truly human as God had originally designed us to be. So the fact that if this is what the Ten Commandments do and that this command is actually in the top ten, that's a big deal.

And then within these Ten Commandments, it's the first horizontal commandments. The first four are vertical, and you can look them up in Exodus 20.

The first four relate to how we relate to God. And then this command to honour your parents. The first command that guides us to understanding what it means to be truly human, and it relates to children and parents.

Why is this important? Well, first because it restores the family unit to what it was intended to be. And then, as it restores the family, the family begins to show us something of God again. To reveal God's relationship to his beloved children.

[11:46] To reveal God's glory. There's no stronger image than family in the Bible in terms of relationship between God and his people. And so as family is restored, so is our understanding of who God is.

That's why this command has a promise attached to us. Friends, our parents are to be precious to us. They're words that carry weight. In our youth, we are to listen to them.

And in their old age, we're to care for them. Friends, Paul doesn't finish there. He goes on to address the way parents care for their children.

And if children are to obey their parents, parents are to actually say something worth obeying.

They're to lead their children in the Lord. In verse 4, Paul explains it.

He says this, I've said it out on their PowerPoint, if you can see it.

[12:53] It's a not-but argument. Not provoking to anger on the one hand, but training in the Lord on the other. As we go into this verse, and it begins with fathers, and the word there is fathers in Greek, but it's likely to mean parents.

In verses 1 to 3, we've already seen, actually refer to parents. The commands and the words are actually all related to parents. The fifth commandment refers to parents. And in Greek, fathers can actually be used as a collective for parents.

So it makes sense to take the word this way. So parents, don't provoke to anger. We're provoking to anger, or some of your passages, versions might have a different word.

Is there a different word in yours? Anyone got the N-A-V? Yep. Exasperate. There we go. Thanks, Harry. Exasperate. Yeah. Anger. Enrage. Is what it means.

Now, anger's not always bad, but this idea of provoking someone to anger, that is bad. In chapter 4, verse 26, Paul acknowledges anger, but promotes control and the speedy resolution of it.

[14:11] He says, don't let the sun go down on your anger. And in chapter 4, verse 31, Paul condemns unresolved anger. He says, get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice, where bitterness is anger that's left to ferment.

Rage is anger out of control. Brawling and slander are anger that seeks to harm. And malice is a heart. It's set on harming another. Parents, provoking your children to anger is winding them up and setting them in the direction of harming others.

This kind of anger breaks down relationships, community. So, in this, in those verses, so in chapter 4, verse 31, this kind of anger, this kind of uncontrolled anger, is placed in contrast, on the other hand, to grace and kindness.

In our passage, it's contrasted with discipline and instruction. Now, there's an important point to be made here.

To borrow a phrase that I learned from Andrew, Andrew Wilco, this week. Parents, you have your hand on the thermostat.

[15:42] You control the temperature. Parents, you have the authority, but how are you using it? You have the mature brain. You have the maturity, the stability, the capacity to control yourself.

You are there to provide this stability for your children as they grow. Children can be rebellious beyond reason at times. They're going through a lot of changes as they mature. It's not easy to exist in their bodies.

Their brains don't reach maturity until the age of 25. Did you know that? Their bodies are coursing with hormones that aren't familiar to them.

Desires and impulses that they haven't yet learned to control. I'm sure, well, I remember the experience. I'm sure you do too. And yet parents so often say, look, we're doing the best we can, but it's my child that's the problem.

He or she is so immature. Parents, that's exactly why we are there. So, given that truth, what is your disposition?

[16:56] What is your attitude? What is your action when they lose control? Do you seek to guide them through it? That's our job. Not engaging with them in fights and battles, guiding them through it.

not provoking to anger, but promoting the instruction of the Lord. Remember, this is a not, but argument.

Again, I'll remind you, he says it like this, fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline of the Lord, instruction of the Lord. Not provoking to anger, but promoting godliness.

Bring them up, raised to maturity. It includes providing all the nourishment and care a person needs to grow. It's a word with a warm, nurturing tone to it.

But remember this, it's in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Not into your hopes and dreams for your child, but God's. Do I need to say this? If it's not in the Bible, it's not as important as you think it is.

[18:11] You know, we have a tendency to impose our values and expectations on our children. We want them to achieve at school. We'll introduce them to our sports, our hobbies, our interests. We want our kids to be attractive, successful, admired.

We want our children to bring us a reputation. But as much as you value these things and as much as you seek to promote them, if it's not about godliness, if it's not about the discipline and instruction of the Lord, then it doesn't make God's list of importance.

Frankly, it just isn't that important. in raising a child to maturity. What is important? The discipline and instruction of the Lord. Discipline, to train in the proper rules of behaviour.

Instruction, to impart understanding, wisdom, knowledge. In terms of explaining these, think, for example, think boundaries. You know how your child struggles to know what is right.

So teach them. Explain what's appropriate, what's inappropriate. Help them to understand. Think boundaries. Think self-discipline.

[19:36] You know your child, well, they struggle with their emotions. You've seen that. You see what happens when they fall over and the wellspring of emotions that bursts out. you probably have already noticed that your reaction to them in that time either feeds that or calms it down.

So teach your children to express emotions appropriately. Explain what their emotions are for. Show them how to express emotion in a way that reflects God's character. Model how to control impulses.

man, how can we do that as parents if we're just so ill-disciplined ourselves that we're just responding to every impulse and thought and emotion that comes into our minds.

Think self-discipline and think knowledge. Parents, your lives are lived with the benefit of mature brains.

So help your children where they lack. Share your knowledge with them. Think knowledge. But above all, think gospel.

[20:44] Above all these things, show them the gospel. Ground them in God's love for them. That love far surpasses your love for your children, no matter how much you think you love your children.

So teach them how to apply this gospel to their lives. Loving, forgiving, seeking forgiveness, delighting in their Lord. In all of this, parents, it's a time-consuming and challenging task.

Because we actually need to know our children so well that we know exactly what to speak into their lives. So well that we know when a soft word is needed, when a boundary needs to be enforced.

when you just need to stop and put your arm around them and when you need to speak words of grace into their lives, always modeled on your heavenly father's love for you.

This kind of relationship with our children takes time to develop. But friends, there's nothing more important that you can be doing with your time. You say I'm time poor, work demands, when I get home I'm tired.

[22 : 06] Friends, if that's a problem, parents, fathers, if that's a problem, change jobs. Get a job with less time involvement. Get a job that leaves you with the reserves that you need to bring your A game to your family, not what's left at the end of each day.

Parents, raise your children so that when you introduce your children to their heavenly father it's perceived as a good thing. Not, oh no, another parent, but wow, God's my father too?

And you say, no, no child, he's your true father. He's the one I've been representing all along.

he's the one I've wanted to introduce you to all your life. Children, obey your parents.

Parents, lead your children in the Lord. Let me pray. Amen. Father God, even as I say these words, I know there are so many ways that I fail at this.

[23 : 31] I'm a poor reflection of your character. And I think as parents here, we know the truth of that ourselves. As children here, we know that our parents too have failed us in so many different ways.

Some of us here, our parents have failed us so badly that we just cringe from the thought and the analogy of you being like our Father, our Heavenly Father.

But Lord, I pray that we as a group of people who have come to know and love you as our Lord and Saviour would see the goodness of this command. Primarily because we see the overwhelming goodness of you.

and that as parents we'd be inspired afresh to reflect your goodness in the lives of our families. And as children, Lord, we'd be inspired to entrust ourselves to your care as we seek to honour our parents.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.