

MODELING CHRIST AS A FAMILY

Eph. 6:1-4; Psalm 127:3-5; Deut. 6:1-9



If you've ever run in a relay race, you know how hard it is to pass a baton at full sprint and the amount of practice required to make that transition go smoothly. Back in my track running days, I was part of a 400-meter race with 3 other guys. Believe it or not, I was one of the fastest guys in my grade. We practiced the handoff standing still, then walking, then jogging, then running, then full speed. Over and over and over again at each speed, little by little faster and faster. Without practice and intentionality in that handoff, we knew we'd fumble the baton and lose the race, or at least chew up the time with a sloppy handoff.

Well, passing a baton gives us a good analogy for what it's like to pass on a Christlike legacy to our kids: it requires intentionality. It requires focus. It requires a goal. A target. That's sort of what we want to talk about today as we move forward in our series, studying how to **model Christ in the parent and child relationship**. We've looked at modeling Christ in all relationships – how to handle conflict & anger. How important the marriage relationship is – the deepest picture of modeling Christ. But not only that, it's the foundation for the parent-child relationship. And it's really something to talk about this one day after having my third child because I now have the responsibility to raise that child in the Lord. And there's hardly anything more I want to do than that. It's like my mentor said, *"You can be good at hunting and fishing and golf or whatever, but I want to be a good father and I want to be a good husband."* If we're going to be good parents and spouses and children, we've got to internalize and prioritize some realities here:

We are made for relationships.

We're made by God, a relational being for relationships. And that's what the home is all about – a place where relationships are forged and truths passed on. Ask most people what is most important to them and they will say this: *"my spouse and kids... then friends."* Some friends in Alliance the other day had a fire in their house and they commented on Facebook something like *"I always wondered what possessions would grab if I had a house fire... the answer: nothing! All I cared about was making sure everyone got out."* But the saddest stories in my life and in your life are probably the broken relationships within the family that aren't healed. And is there anything worse than a broken child-parent relationship? Not much. We want the family to be like a little pocket of flourishing in the world, living His design.

The most difficult place to model Christ: in the home.

It's where the rubber meets the road. It's the most difficult. A test of genuine spirituality. If you want to measure your spiritual growth most accurately, you measure it at home because it's who you really are. We need to acknowledge that if we're going to understand our need to work on it.

The home is also the most critical because it is a legacy factory.¹

God's plan from the beginning was for homes to be a legacy factory, the most powerful place where legacies are formed, central to God's design and plan for humanity.ⁱⁱ I would even say that marriage and widening that a little more to include the family, is the primary social institution that without which the world collapses and chaos and disorder and every evil practice ensue. It's within the family that we learn to obey our parents and thus, learn to obey God. Even the functions of the church are highly affected by what goes on in the home life. It shapes lives which means it shapes the church.



Parenting is discipleship.

Moms and dads, not the church, are to be the primary disciple makers of the next generation. God's plan for multigeneration faithfulness is the family – not the youth pastor. So there's possibly no greater thing we can do to pass on the baton of a spiritual inheritance than by modeling Christ in our home – balancing words with example.

That again, is one of the main things I'm desperately wanting to instill in us through this series: an awareness of this reality that, **consciously or unconsciously, we are passing on a legacy** to those we are around the most. When you spend time with people, they influence you and you influence them – it's like radiation, osmosis, or second-hand smoke. And the biblical idea is that since you are or are supposed to be spending most of your time with your kids, you are careful to be a teacher and doer of the Word to your kids. Walk the walk and talk the talk. Our kids are no different than atheist Fredrich Nietzsche said, *“Show me your redeemed, and I'll listen to you talk about your redeemer.”* It's needs to be felt, not just dealt.

And let me say this: there's no perfect family. Every Father's Day we say things like *“You're the best dad ever”*. We all know we're not. I'm not the best dad ever. There's only one Best Dad and it's our Heavenly Father. There's also no perfect children. But it doesn't mean we don't **set great expectations for ourselves that are balanced with grace. Words balanced with example; structure with freedom; discipline with approval; expectation with grace.**

But we do want to be **intentional**, like passing a baton – **not just reactive or impulsive, just crossing our fingers and “hoping” it goes well.** Being intentional. In fact, that's the context for our passage today. Ephesians 5:16, *“make the most of your time because the days are evil.”* Don't let your days with your kids fly by without **the spiritual component** because it's the most important thing you're called to do as a parent. We're going to talk about that. Obviously there's no guaranteed system to saying that if you raise your kids according to A, B, C, they'll turn out X, Y, Z. Each individual must respond to the Spirit of God and we can't control that. But our job is to realize what God has called us to do as parents and carry it out. And in many cases that will mean the difference between *flourishing or floundering now*, but also *regret or rejoicing later*. There's a lot of parents here with a lot of water under the bridge who wish they could go back and raise their kids differently. If that's you, don't let today create a bunch of regret. Just do what you can to move forward from here, trusting God is a God of redemption and set a good example for grandkids.

Let's read Ephesians 6:1-4 with all of this in mind.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may turn out well for you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Now, before we dive into the text, we need to remind ourselves of the greater context again because gives us the foundation for the application. You can basically divide this book into 2 halves.

1 st Half – Chapters 1-3	2 nd Half – Chapters 4-6
Indicatives – Spiritual Realities/Truths	Imperatives - Commands
Orthodoxy	Orthopraxy
Doctrine	Duty
Calling	Conduct
Who you are in Christ (1:3)	How you walk worthily in Christ (4:1)

At the end of each of the first three chapters, there are 3 major indicatives.ⁱⁱⁱ

- **Indicative #1 – Christ’s Headship over His Body, the Church. (Eph. 1:22)**
- **Indicative #2 – The unity of Christ’s Body. (Eph. 2:19-22)**
- **Indicative #3 – The glory the Body gives the Head. (Eph. 3:20)**

Eph. 3:20, Paul says, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church in Jesus Christ to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

If you take these indicatives into consideration as you come to chapter 5 and the worthy walk being commanded (4:1), we’ve all must admit that it’s really not about us but about something more glorious than us. Through our **Spirit-empowered obedience** as the Church Body to these commands, we will live in **unity** as God desires, and so **glorify** the Head that is Christ.

✓ **1st baton: Through biblical parenting, we model Christ’s redemption to the world.**

The world is chaotic. They don’t have the answers. It’s turning against the family because it doesn’t understand the family. But through biblical marriage and parenting, the harmony and unity of each family member living out these commands models the redemption of Christ to the whole world. **They see Christ!**

And these indicatives and imperatives are one of the most important things to teach our kids (imperative based on indicatives). In The Art of Parenting, one of the four major things to teach your kids is their identity in Christ because it’s only through the identity truths they are eventually empowered to live out the commands. From as early as possible, teach them that they must depend on God to carry out the commands because **imperative without indicatives is legalism, moralism and self-righteous works.**^{iv} Many children turn away from Christianity because the indicatives are left out and all they see is commands – do’s and don’ts. But **identity is where the power comes from. Indicatives enable and empower us to achieve the imperatives.**

But let’s start looking at the responsibilities of the child:

✓ **2nd baton: Children are to obey their parents in the Lord. (v. 1)**

And I like how simple Paul’s reasoning is: “*for this is right.*” I think all he means by that is that we all know it’s right. It’s in the human nature – natural law written upon the conscience that in this relationship between parents and children that the parents are in charge.^v No special revelation required. **Every social structure has authority & submission** as we looked at last week because when there isn’t, there’s chaos. But where there is, there’s order and blessing and productivity and all sorts of good fruits.

Clearly, authority isn’t to be abused. The parent is not to command what God forbids or forbid what God commands. To do that would go against bringing them up in the instruction of the Lord.

But here’s why this is important and it’s not just some isolated command: **because the child has to learn how to obey their parents before and in order to obey God.** Just like in marriage, there’s a bigger picture

here with a greater incentive, for **the child, learning to obey us, as an authority, is going to teach them to obey God, their ultimate authority.** John Stott said, “*obedience to parents is part of our relationship to God and... disobedience to parents is at heart a spiritual rebellion*” (Lev. 20:9). You can see why our nation is in trouble. We replaced authority with friendship and discipline with self-esteem. Now we’re even trying to throw out the police force so we can legalize lawlessness.

Teaching our children to obey us is teaching them to obey God. And **that goal should direct our discipline.** A lot of time we’re tempted to discipline out of embarrassment. We don’t want to look bad as parents so we center discipline on our identity before others. But really, we should discipline with the idea that to disobey is sin against God, who is their ultimate authority. It’s training them to obey Him.

I think this a good formula for obedience to authority is to teach them to **1. Do what they’re told, 2. When they’re told, 3. With a respectful attitude.**^{vi} That should be a goal. Both parents and children are involved in this baton. Parents are to see to it they obey. And the emphasis is needed on “*obeying when they’re told*” because **delayed obedience is disobedience.** When we count to 3, we’re training them to disobey through delay. Hebrews says, “While it is today, do not harden your heart.” Obey now. That’s good stuff.

Here’s another reason discipline is important: in order to instruct them, we need their attention. You can’t do much with a disobedient child. You can’t fill their mind with the instruction of the Lord if they don’t obey and respect authority. Think about that. There’s an order here: “*bring them up in the discipline [1st] and instruction [2nd] of the Lord.*” Discipline is instruction but also necessary for it. As you raise kids, they’re going to go through a phase where discipline is an emphasis, and then after that, instruction as they are able. They go hand in hand, but I can’t teach you if you won’t obey and give me your attention. You want their attention, then their mind, then their hand as you walk with them, modeling Christ.

As children, *who do you look to as an example of obedience?* Jesus, right? The **perfectly obedient Son of God who always submitted to the will of the Father**, even when it wasn’t fair and even when it was hard. He honored God through His obedience. If you are filled with the Spirit as a child, in the context (5:18-21), you will be thankful for them and obedient to them. That’s how you tell which children are Spirit-filled in the moment or not. Rolling our eyes and slamming doors and mumbling under our breath is not honoring your parents, which is the third baton I’ve got for us today:

✓ **3rd baton: Children are to honor their parents. (v. 2)**

“*Honor your father and mother*” it says. Notice how he calls it the first commandment because it’s the first commandment of the 2nd table of the Ten Commandments dealing with the horizontal relationships between man and man. The first four are God to man, but the rest involve man-to-man. And to obey in the man-to-man is to obey the God-man commands. To honor father and mother is obeying God.

And what’s neat is that this command comes with a promise! He harkens back to Deuteronomy 5:16 – “*that it may go well with you.*” God promises it will go well when you truly, from the heart, honor your parents. Isn’t that great? I know that’s true and know it experientially. **If you aren’t honoring your parents, it’s not going as well with you as it could.** It’s probably going *alright* because they’re gracious and kind and forgiving, but it would *really go well* with you and you would spiritually grow and be filled with the Spirit as a kid if you honored your parents by obeying them and acknowledging their hard work raising you.

But think about this too: there’s no expiration date for this command. As an adult, we too, should be honoring our parents. Why? Because they deserve it. They worked like God to you to provide for you and

care for you, feed you, change you... have you ever thanked them for that? I think the first diaper I changed on my own kid made me realize I took my mother for granted all these years. Parenting is probably the hardest thing you'll do in your life – especially with teenagers they say. Nothing is more exhausting or challenging. And the older you get the more you realize that **parents don't get the recognition they deserve**. And why else? Because **it's a key to unity in the family and the family in unity holds society together**. It's a **lifestyle**, honoring parents, not just 2 days out of the year on Father's Day or Mother's Day.

Christ was constantly honoring the Father throughout His life. One of the ways I'd challenge you to honor your father and mother today is to **write a tribute** to them and mail it to them if you can. I got that idea from Dennis Rainey. Maybe get his book called *"The Forgotten Commandment"* and learn how to do that. Just thank them for what they did well and right and is admirable. Contemplate ways to honor them because hey, it wasn't easy changing all your diapers. And tell them you love them. Don't be like the young man who heard his dad say to him every night, *"I love you."* And then one day regret not saying it back to him when his dad passed on in a sudden heart attack.

And now we get to verse 4 where Paul instructs the father in particular, why? He's the spiritual leader, the head in the family, right? We learned that last week.

 **4th baton: Fathers are to manage their household well. (v. 4; 1 Tim. 3:5)**

"Don't provoke or exasperate, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Negative and positive commands. Colossians 3:21 says, *"Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."* And all I want to do with this verse today is to focus on the goal, or the target. As I was sitting in the hospital yesterday holding my baby, I didn't have to wonder what the Lord required of me as a father who is to raise that child because God gave me this verse. It reveals my target.

 **The Parents' Target: Raising children in the discipline & instruction of the Lord.**

That's it. **To make sure they are developing the spiritual component of their lives which superintends everything else they will do and be in life.** If you do that, God says well done. You don't do that, and you failed, because you didn't do the one thing God said to do.

But what's usually the first thing to go in our parenting? The spiritual component we're supposed to be actively cultivating. Why? Because for most of the day, they're in schools learning some things but anything but spiritual truth, and then they go to sports practice, and then maybe work if they're old enough and dinner and by the end of the day, what's left? And I think this is why we've lost the generations. Because you're so busy and you think you're raising your kids but we end up neglecting the one main thing God asks us to do. Listen to how Psalm 127 describes children – they're like arrows and arrows need a target

Psalm 127:3-5

*"Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.*

*How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies at the gate."*

I love that verse. Children are a gift. A heritage. An inheritance. Not something to be despised or to be thought of as a burden, but a gift.

 **Children are a gift from the Lord.**

If there is a target to aim at, this truth is the foundation (indicative) the target is sitting on. **You want to honor God's gift by raising them to know Him because you're going to give them back to Him.**

But they're **like arrow** that will be launched into society and can bless the man. I like that idea of children as arrows because it means they are designed to be launched, but again, at what?

 **Children are like arrows.**

I asked myself this question yesterday holding a 1 day old baby in my arms: *20 years from now, what do I want this child to grow up to be? What's my bullseye? What am I launching my children out towards?*

If you ask most people, they would tell you they want their kid to be happy and successful or to have it better than they had it. If the kids can be happy in marriage and their job, then they can be happy and feel like they did well. And those are all good things, we would admit, but **if we don't bring them up according to Ephesians 6:1-4, then we've totally missed the target altogether.** I can raise them to be happy and have a good job and they can even get into an ivy league school with college expenses paid, and quit smoking and drinking with the hope of them not doing those things, but if the **spiritual component** is missing, the main component in their lives (knowing how to live God's way according to God's Word), then we've totally missed the mark.

Arrows need a target and if you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time. You can't pull back, cross your fingers, and expect to hit the bullseye. You have got to be intentional, thinking about where they're going, thinking legacy – thinking long term – thinking the next generation. You've got to **begin them with the end in mind. Begin with a bullseye** – raising them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, passing on a spiritual inheritance.

And just as we wrap this up I want to look at what that may require and where Paul's original audience's mind would've went: I'm guessing that their mind went to **Deuteronomy 5-7. Especially 6:4-9**, which gave an outline of what was expected of parents in Israel. *"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

And I'm not going to go into depth on interpreting this passage. But I want us to see that **they understood that God's plan for multigeneration faithfulness is through day to day, moment by moment, intentional and opportunely interactions with their godly parents in every day life.** Not only that, they understood the importance of parents and their responsibility because this was their **confession of faith** and it was something they repeated morning and evening.

 **God's basic plan for passing on a spiritual heritage is through the continual interaction with their parents in everyday life.**

They understood the responsibility of passing on the spiritual heritage belonged to the parents. And there's nothing better you can give them than that. Remember what the psalmist David said, *"The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me,"* he wasn't talking about his physical inheritance. He was speaking of the spiritual inheritance passed down to him in the Lord. Not money or possessions.

I liked what John Morris, president emeritus of the ICR and son of Henry Morris, said about this portion of Scripture. *“Christians need to discover the truth of this passage. We must not merely assume to godly teaching of our children but also actively cultivate it [He’s talking about being intentional, isn’t he?]. At stake is not only the personal walk of our children but also the eternal message of God.”*^{vii}

This morning, as a parent, as a child, even as a grandparent, take up the Suzerain Treaty challenge of Joshua who asked: *Who will your family serve? Remember what Joshua said?* It’s on the wall of the men’s bathroom at our church. *“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,”* **Set up the target.**

To help you hit that target, I’ve called a few people and put together a small list of resources on parenting and there’s some resources on a table in the foyer for you to look at that might be useful tools for you to sight in your bow – books that will help you teach kids doctrine, to small devotionals that you can use at the breakfast table or lunch table, to books for mom and dad to understand biblical discipline. One of the best things I ever did was go through Proverbs and write CR “child raising” beside every proverb about child raising. But one of the other things I’d recommend is just learning from someone older.

 **Find some models to learn from.**

Those who seem to have raised their children in the Lord well or who are at least on the other side of child raising and are looking back. Take them out for lunch and ask them what they did. They won’t turn down a free lunch!

Suggested Resources on Parenting

“Helping you hit the target!”

-  **Biblical Parenting** by Chuck Swindoll (sermon series available online)
-  **Parenting: From Surviving to Thriving** by Chuck Swindoll (book for parents)
-  **The Art of Parenting** by Dennis Rainey/Family Life Today (Bible study)
-  **Raising Worldly-Wise But Innocent Kids** by Dave Wyrzten (book for parents)
-  **Tuned Up Parenting** by Karen Dockery (book for parents)
-  **The One Year Devotions for Preschoolers** by Tyndale Publishers (devotional for young children)
-  **The One Year Book of Family Devotions** by Tyndale Publishers (devotional for older children)
-  **Devotions for the Children’s Hour** by Kenneth Taylor (basic doctrine for children)
-  **Read with Me Bible** by Zondervan (children’s Bible)
-  **The Jesus Storybook Bible** by Zonderkidz (children’s Bible)
-  **Family Life Today** programs with Bob Lepine & Dennis Rainey talks (podcast & radio)
-  **Parenting** by Tedd Tripp
-  **Shepherding a Child’s Heart** by Paul Tripp
-  **Heaven Help the Home!** By Howard Hendricks (any family-related material by Hendricks)

ⁱ Family Life Today, *Dennis Rainey’s Legacy*, 26 May 2021.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Voddie Baucham, Family Life Today, *The Value of Submission*, June 18, 2012.

^{iv} Voddie Baucham, *Ephesians 6:1-4*, July 27, 2019, www.fbclindale.com

^v James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books).

^{vi} Voddie, *Ephesians 6:1-4*.

^{vii} Ibid.