

**Family Matters:
Hearts on the Home Front
A Child's Honor
Ephesians 6:1-4 5-4-08**

The story is told of a young single preacher who took his first part-time church while he was going to seminary. He preached a message one Sunday entitled, *"10 Facts On How To Raise Perfect Children."* A few years later, he got married and they had their first child. He pulled out the old sermon to preach it again, but this time decided to re-title it, *"10 Suggestions on How to Raise Healthy Children."* After the second child came along a few years later, he felt it was time to preach it again, this time under the title of *"10 Possibilities for Parenting Children."* When he and his wife were well into raising their 3rd child, he revised the whole thing once more and called it *"10 Prayers for Parents."* And at the pinnacle of his repeated parenting preaching career, when his children had all become teen-agers, he burned the original message and wrote a new one simply titled, *"Help Me Jesus."*

All of that reminds me of the three stages of speech development for children:

- 1 – Goo goo, gah gah**
- 2 – Moma, Dada**
- 3 – "You're not the boss of me!"**

Today, we're focusing in on the challenge of raising children who will practice the biblical vision of honor and obedience with their parents even into their adult years. It should go without saying that the way parents role model this relationship, both with God and their own earthly parents, will establish a strong precedent and example for their own children to follow. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians and spoke of the importance of family, he shared the mutual commands and commitments that are required for both children and parents with these admonishments: (***Ephesians 6:1-4 TNIV***). The truth is, a Spirit-filled, relationship-building, God-honoring home requires two things: submissive children and submissive parents who are all living under God's order and design for their lives and for their family. Paul makes it very clear, as did Moses, that there is a very special spiritual blessing that comes from a well-ordered home. And it all starts with honor and obedience, that is, our attitudes and our actions.

To **obey** (*hupokouo*) literally means **"to hear under."** We do that by listening with attentiveness and then responding positively with appropriate action. "Jason, will you please set the table?" "Sure mom, what are we putting out tonight?" and off he goes to the drawers and cupboards to gather the place-settings.

To **honor** (*timao*) is **"to greatly value"** and hold in the highest regard, respecting their worth and authority. To esteem our parents in this way is to choose a relationship dynamic that is both affectionate and affirming. "Dad, would you be a chaperone for our class field trip and be the driver for me and all of my friends?" "Sure son, I'd love to!"

To **exasperate** (*parorgizete*) is **to make angry**, resentful in a deep seated way – is what parents are NOT supposed to do! Parents are to take the lead in helping their children to navigate the choppy waters of teen years and come away having every cause and reason for obedience and honor because of the character and constancy of their parenting. It's not an easy journey. In his

book, Laws of the Heart, Bill Hybels says, *“What relationships challenge us more than those we maintain over the course of an entire lifetime? And what relationship has more potential for both love and hate – and joy and sorrow – than the parent-child relationship?”* Honestly, it’s an enormous challenge!

This family teaching represents the pathway to life for children, teens and adults. Paul is not talking about a “do-what-you’re-told” life of compliance, or being pressed into conformity by “police-minded-pernicious” parents. It is a vision statement and declaration of what family life should be like and can be like. It’s a sacred reminder and a wake up call that if you want things to go well for you and have long life, the attitudes and actions you choose and embrace for yourself will have an enormous impact on your life and relationship outcomes.

Now some might find grounds to critique and protest this teaching as unrealistic pie-in-the-sky! And indeed, we should be clear that children are abused and many compliant and obedient children don’t see long life or good days. And that many adult children have abused, neglected, robbed or abandoned their parents in their older, vulnerable years. God’s vision for healthy family has been violated in so many horrific ways. We were all stunned and saddened by the recent news of a father, Josef Fritzl, who kept his daughter prisoner in his basement and sired seven children through her 24 year captivity. We were equally stunned not long ago by our own local Benton City news of teenagers killing a mother and daughter. Violations and hurt occur from both sides.

God grieves these violations of His created order and vision. He says, **“Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29 TNIV).** The promise “that it might go well” must be understood as an invitation to position our lives for the greatest level of personal wellness and wholeness no matter what circumstances we face. To live with a heart and mindset of honor and obedience can only happen when our hearts are first *“inclined to fear God.”* That life orientation will carry us into spiritual wellness and wholeness as opposed to bitterness, anger and resentment which are toxic and to our souls and spirit. Only forgiveness helps here. It doesn’t mean the other person is right, what it does mean is that you choose freedom from the oppressive power of painful memories that may have been generated from your childhood.

God’s call to honor and obedience needs to be understood in the context of a Christian commitment to the biblical family vision where mutuality, love and respect reign. There is no injunction here for children to obey a parental command that violates God’s heart and law for ethical and legal behavior. Both Children and parents in this teaching are “in the Lord” and are called to relate to one another under the...

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VENTURE of God = Direction of faith
VISION of God = Intention of faith

VALUES of God (which is the content of faith), the VENTURE of God (which is the direction and journey of faith) and the VISION of God (which is the intention and outcome of faith).

I believe that healthy family relationships are some of the hardest to achieve in life. There are so many pressures, challenges, strains and competing

interests that undermine this primary relationship between parents and their children. (***Picture of Teens***). UNICEF recently surveyed 21 of the most developed nations in the world and measured how kids related to other kids, spent time with parents, used alcohol and/or drugs, and perceived their own happiness. The U.S. came in next to last. William Faulk of *The Week* magazine (3-02-07) says, "From an early age, they are taught that life is a pitiless pursuit of individual gratification and success, requiring above-average brains and above-average looks. There is no sense of context, or community, or higher purpose. It's hardly surprising that so many of them are taking anti-depressants, ADHD meds, or other pills. Many more hide their sadness in eating disorders, drugs, or meaningless hookups. In our rush to give our children everything, I'm afraid, we have forgotten to help them answer a question that won't be ignored: What is this all for?"

Children and childhood need to be rediscovered. That's one of the things that will help honoring and obedience to flourish. That was one of the challenges and correctives Paul was offering to the Ephesians. During his day, the Roman view of parenting was summarized in two words "Patria Potestas" (The Father's Power). Parenthood in Paul's day was nothing more than male ownership. Dad was king, there was no queen and any child could basically be sold, imprisoned, beaten and even killed. Dad's were police, judge and jury all rolled into one. This rule of law extended over the duration of the child's lifetime, as long as the father lived. It was the father who determined whether or not his newborn child would be welcomed into their home. The infant was laid at his feet and if he bent down and picked the child up, the child was kept. If he turned and walked away, the child was discarded—often abandoned at the forums or marketplaces for whoever wanted them. At night, slave traders and brothel owners would come to collect their future exploitive gains. The practice was known as "Child Exposure." In addition to that, sickly and deformed infants were drowned. That's the cultural back drop that Paul was writing to (and against) with an entirely different vision of life.

The Bible says, "**Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them**" (Psalm 127:3-5a TNIV). It also says, "**Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children**" (Proverbs 17:6 NIV). Both parents and children are precious and a gift of God's favor in our lives. That doesn't lessen the pain, drama and frustration of parenting and being parented! In fact, we experience many of the hurts in raising our children as God does in raising us. Parenthood, if anything, should cause us to reflect on how maybe our struggles are not too unlike God's struggles with us. How is our journey of obedience and honoring going with God? Our children need to see those faith expressions role-modeled if we expect them to live it out themselves.

The life of honoring and obeying our parents doesn't stop when we graduate from High School. This attitude and ethic is supposed to deepen and expand throughout our faith journey and stay with us through our whole life. Both adults and children are commanded to honor and obey their parents. This puts us all on more equal ground – and reminds us that we can only achieve this life orientation with the help of God and the work of His forgiveness and grace.

Truth is, the success of the family relationship depends on everyone doing what God told us to do to be the family God wants us to be. That means both parents and children have a responsibility to the family's health and well being. It only takes one to sabotage that relationship, but it takes everyone to build it up in love and ground it in graceful living.

On occasion, I've had the opportunity to help parents and teens "negotiate" a way forward for their lives – even though I still consider myself an "enrolled student" who hasn't graduated just yet from parenting school. I'm still learning this parenting thing. But I do have this much insight: the more I honor and obey God and my own earthly parents, the better positioned I will be to influence my own children in that same direction. It's intended to be a multi-generational blessing. That's one of the reasons a promise is attached to this command. The Bible has very clear expectations and roles for parents and children to play in fulfillment of the biblical Christian vision of family.

God's Mission Statement for Parents

TRAIN Proverbs 22:6
Train up a child in the way he should go...

LOVE Titus 2:4-5
...to love their children...

DISCIPLINE Proverbs 13:24
...care enough to discipline them

CALM Colossians 3:21
...do not exasperate your children...

MENTOR Deuteronomy 6:6-9
Impress them on your children

PROVIDE 2 Corinthians 12:14
For children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

God's Mission Statement for Children

HONOR Exodus 20:12
Honor your father and your mother...

OBEY Ephesians 6:1
Children, obey your parents in the Lord...

LISTEN Proverbs 23:22
Listen to your father who begot you...

HEED Proverbs 6:20-23
keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching

Author Lori Palatnik, in her book Remember My Soul talks about how teaching our children to honor and obey us as parents is not, and should not, be about our need for power, authority, control or esteem. She says, "It's not for us -- but for them. It is the only way that they can develop that important relationship with their Creator, a bond that will carry them through all that life will bring." So "honor your father and mother, that it might go well with you! Amen!