

How the Lord Raises Children
Ephesians 6:1-4
Tim Becker – August 14, 2016

1. Introduction

Let me tell you a true story. Once there was a man, named Eli, who married and had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli was a priest of the Lord. His job was to help people worship the Lord. In time his sons grew up and joined Eli as priests themselves. While Eli seemed to work well at his job, his sons were wicked in their work. They abused those who came to worship the Lord. They stole the offerings the people brought for the Lord and even had sexual relations with the women who came to serve at the tent of the Lord. Eli confronted Hophni and Phinehas with their sins and warned them to fear God and stop. But the sons did not stop. In time, the Lord came to judge the situation. The Lord judged the sons, with both of them dying on the same day. But the Lord also rebuked Eli saying that because Eli did not stop his sons, that he showed that he honored his sons above the Lord.

Our children, like Eli's sons, grow up. What will they become? Will they be the kind of adults for whom things go well, who live responsible God-honoring lives? Or will they be self-centered, demanding, abusing other people, and even scorning God?

Kids and teens, what kind of a person do you think you will be as a grown up? God honoring or God scorning? Loving others or abusing them because you only love yourself? Do you imagine yourself to be like Hophni or Phinehas when you are an adult on your own? I'll bet none of you do. You can't imagine that you will be a terrible person as an adult. But some will be. So why not you? You won't turn out good just because you hope you will.

Parents, I'll bet you sometimes worry how your kids will be when grown. What will lead them onto the right path? You care ... lots! Right? None of you parents would raise your hand to say you want to be just like Eli. But how can you avoid that? What can you do to lead your children well, to give them the good start they need, to point them in the right direction?

The Bible gives specific help to kids and teens to keep them from following the path of Hophni and Phinehas. And it gives specific help to parents to keep them from being like Eli. If you want to see that help for yourself, please turn in your Bibles to Eph 6:1-4. If you have brought your Bible with you this morning, and I hope you have, please turn in your Bible to Eph 6:1-4. If you don't have a Bible with you, please open the Bible in the pew or chair close to you. The passage is on p. 979 in the pew Bible.

Read Eph 6:1-4.

* Big Idea

Here is the big idea of the passage: The Lord raises children through the cooperation of fathers and children, by fathers bringing up their children in the Lord's training and by children obeying and honoring their parents. *Repeat.*

Please pray with me and then we'll see where that big idea comes from and apply it to our lives.

* Pray

God, come speak to us this morning. Give us ears to hear you. Remove our stiff necks and hard hearts. Make us teachable. All of us, parents and children, need your help. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

2. Exposition: Children

The previous passage in Ephesians, which we did not read, addresses wives and husbands. Wives and husbands come together to make a marriage. In that passage, God tells wives how to treat their husbands and he tells husbands how to treat their wives. The goal is a good marriage, one that honors God and shows how husbands and wives live together when they have the Spirit of God in them.

The passage we read this morning addresses children and fathers. Just as God's message to wives and husbands was for the good of their marriage, so God's message to children and fathers is for the good of their family and especially for the good of the children. God actually has one message for children and another for fathers. We're going to talk about both of these messages this morning. Let's start with the message to children.

Notice with me that the writer is talking directly to you children. What age do you suppose he means by "children?" It is for children who are old enough to understand. Kids, if you are old enough to hear these words and understand them, then this passage is for you. Teens, you might be thinking, well I'm not a child anymore, so maybe this isn't for me. Look down at v. 4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." This passage is referring to all who are still being brought up as children. If your parents are still raising you, still providing your food and shelter, this passage is for you. In our culture, this includes high school students and often little beyond.

* Obey

So what is the big idea of these verses to children? Obey and honor, right? Who are kids and teens to obey? They are to obey their own parents, mom and dad. When the verse says, "obey your parents in the Lord," the phrase "in the Lord" modifies the word obey,

not the word parents. “In the Lord” tells the manner in which children are to obey their parents. “In the Lord” does not mean that you are to obey your parents only if they are Christian. Instead it means that you are to obey them because God is your Lord, because you are a Christian. Kids and teens, God’s word says that if you are a follower of Christ, then because you follow Christ, you will want to obey your parents. Obeying your mom and dad is a key part of what being a Christian child looks like. Obeying your parents as you would obey the Lord is right in the Lord’s eyes and in the eyes of all who worship him.

* Honor

So the first command to children is to obey their parents. Look with me at v. 2 to see the second command, “Honor your father and mother.” How is giving your father and mother honor different than obeying them? Honor is an attitude. Honor is the right attitude behind obedience. If you honor your parents, you will obey them. Honor on the inside of a child or teen looks like obedience on the outside.

Look at this \$20 bill. If I invited one of you teens up here and gave you this bill, what would you do with it as you walked back to your seat? You’d hang on to it. You’d do what you can to not lose it. Why? Because you see it as valuable. If instead of an actual \$20 bill, I gave you a piece of paper with a crayon drawing of a \$20 bill, you might take it to be polite, but you would probably leave on it your seat in the pew when you leave. Why? Because it doesn’t have any worth in your eyes.

So, kids and teens, to honor your father and mother means that they have worth in your eyes. Just like you wouldn’t leave the \$20 bill in the pew when you leave today, so you won’t ignore your parents when they talk with you and try to help you. Honoring your parents means you value what they say, you value their perspective, and you overlook their faults and sins. Yes, I know that your parents, like you, have faults and sins. But if you honor them, you focus on the good in their character and on the good they do for you. Your parents deserve your honor not because they are faultless, but because you honor God and you trust that the parents God has given you are just right for you.

Sometimes it’s hard to honor your parents. Does the Bible help motivate you to do that? Look back to v. 2. The verse gives us 2 motivations. The first is that it is a commandment from God. One of the Ten Commandments that God gave Moses was “Honor your father and mother.” So the first reason children should want to honor their father and mother is that they want to obey God. Kids and teens, if you tell God that love him but you don’t honor your parents, he will say I don’t know you. Be afraid of that. Call on God to change your heart so you will want to obey your father and mother. This is a prayer he wants to answer, but you must humble yourself to ask.

The second reason this verse gives for why children should honor their parents is so that their lives will go well and that they may live long in the land. This promise is a near repeat of the promise attached to the original commandment given to Moses. In the days

of Israel, God promised and warned the Israelites that as they obeyed and followed his commandments, he will prosper their lives and give them long lives in the land of Canaan. The verses we are looking at this morning are not written to the Israelites, but to the church of God. And the land of Canaan is not where most of God's people live. Yet, the writer of these verses repeats the promise. Kids and teens, God delights in children who honor their parents and God gives them special blessings. It's just smart of you to want God to delight in you and to bless you. So honor your father and mother from your heart and receive God's blessing.

* Summary

So what have we found so far in our text? Children are to obey their parents as they would obey the Lord, for this is right. And children are to honor their father and mother because God commanded it and promised a good life to those who do.

3. Exposition: Fathers

Children aren't the only one with a role to play in how they turn out as adults. Look with me now at v. 4. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." If you are a father, God's word here is for you. Let's listen to him.

God tells us dads something not to do and then tells us something to do. Don't provoke your children to anger. This means do all you can to avoid irritating them, don't demean them, don't mock them. Don't be harsh or sarcastic.

Kids, this command isn't here for you to judge your dads. God gave you your command, obey and honor your parents. Just because you get angry doesn't mean it is your dad's fault. Do you know what I mean? If your dad tells you to do something right and good and you get mad, that isn't what God means here by provoking to anger. God will hold you responsible for your anger.

But dads, God is telling you to do all you can to make it easy for your children to obey. If you mock or demean them, God will hold you responsible for failing to lead them.

One strategy for keeping your children from anger is never to tell them what to do. If you let your children parent themselves, they'll be quite delighted. But this is not a godly option for a father. This verse not only tells fathers not to provoke them to anger, but tells dads to intentionally and actively bring them up in a particular way.

Children will grow up, with your help or not. Some dads are intentional about raising them well. Other dads just let it happen. If you are a dad, God is commanding you to be intentional about raising them well. When we talk about bringing up children, we mean raising them from infancy to adulthood. God tells fathers to bring up their children with

his discipline and instruction. How would God discipline and instruct your children? This is how he wants you, dad, to do it.

The word for discipline is the word for training. Your children need training. When they are born, they don't know how to do almost anything. Who will teach them to tie their shoes, to make a friend, to take responsibility? More so, who will teach them to repent of their sins, to love their neighbor and classmate, and brother and sister? Who will teach them to read and think, to say no to wrong and yes to right? Who will teach them to pray to God, to see God as wonderful, to read the Scriptures on their own? Your children need training from God. And God has appointed you, fathers, as his agent to train your children.

The word for instruction in v. 4 is helpfully translated correction or admonition in some other versions of the Bible. Your children need you not only to tell them the right way to go, but to correct them when they go wrong and to admonish them when they sin. In the short term, they might get angry with you when you do this. Your children resent being corrected just like you do. So use no more force than necessary to get the job done. But get the job done. Dads, you know adults who didn't get corrected as children and you know how their adult lives are a wreck because of that. Let God use you for your children's good. Raise them as the Lord would have you do.

* Summary

So, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

4. Application

Fathers, I want to help you with some practical advice. But before we go there, I want to have a word with the mothers. Moms, God has given your husband the primary responsibility to train your children in godliness. But this doesn't mean that you are to be passive. God calls you to help your husband fulfill his God-given roles. So God wants you to be praying and strategizing and implementing godly training alongside your husband. Help him to lead in this area and help him to carry it out. God has called moms to this. And what if you are a single mom, you don't have a dad in your home or perhaps the dad in your home is not worshiping the Lord, then what should you do mom? Sit back? No all of the commands that we see here for fathers, apply to you. Don't provoke your children to anger. Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

When should we teach our children about God and godly living? In Deuteronomy ch. 6, God tells the Israelites to teach their children "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." Sitting and walking are a pair of opposites. So are lying down and rising. God's point isn't to teach your children his words just during 4 activities: sitting, walking, lying down, and rising, but during

every time of the day and every activity. So when should we teach our children about God and godly living? Whenever we are with them.

* Car Rides

Let's talk about some of those times. Car rides can be great times to teach your children about God. You can do that through conversation: asking your children what they are thinking about, how things are going with friends, homework, and hobbies. Then as they talk, help them to see how a godly perspective would be a help to them. You can also play good Christian music while in the car. The point isn't so much that you find acceptable entertainment as that you find music that teaches about God. Parents, find music to play that teaches wonderful theology.

* Times Outside

Does your family hike or spend time at a park or cabin? Anytime you are outside you have God's wondrous works all around you. One way to teach your kids is just to thank God when you enjoy something outside. Say aloud, "Thank you, God, for that sunset. That is so beautiful." Another is to connect it to God's character. You can say something like, "The sunshine just makes me happy. In the new heaven and new earth, God himself will be the sun. Imagine how happy we'll be then!"

Dads, I'm guessing this might be a little intimidating for some of you. You might be thinking to yourself, "But this just isn't me." Well, this brings us to a key ingredient in being able to bring up your children in the Lord's way. You can't bring them where you are not. You see, saying just the right words is not the key to training them in the ways of the Lord. You have to be the right dad or mom behind those words. You have to believe them yourself. They have to be your words. What you say to them about God only has power if the words come from who you really are. God brings up children to walk in his ways through parents, not through some magic words said in the children's ears.

I don't know any dads (or moms) who don't need to grow in their walk with God in order to help their children do the same. So if you feel spiritually inadequate inside yourself, then get help. Get on a path for you yourself to be growing in the Scriptures and the ways of God. We offer Sunday morning classes for adults, mid-week studies, and even one-on-one discipleship. I know you care that your children (and even their children) are walking with God. So let that motivate you to prepare yourself to help them.

* Prayer

Another way of discipling your children is letting them hear you pray. When "life happens," what do you do? When we were on vacation this summer, we had just parked in a big parking garage in Washington DC when one of the powered side doors in our van wouldn't close. I started imagining driving 70 mph on the interstate with that side door open. My favorite car mechanic was over a 1000 miles away and I don't know anyone in DC. I immediately started looking around the door to see what might be wrong. After a

few failed attempts to close it, I prayed. Aloud. With Renee and the kids right there, I told God that I didn't know what to do and asked him to help us. I genuinely felt my need for God's help. It wasn't a prayer for show in front of the kids. But I prayed aloud rather than silently because I knew it would be good for my children to pray with me and to hear how a dad asks for God's help when he is in a tough spot.

Dads and moms, this starts with your feeling your need for God's help and your believing that he wants you to ask him. And then you just need to express that honest request to God, in your own words. Let your children hear you talk with God. It's another good way to give them the instruction of the Lord. I recommend the book, *A Praying Life*, by Paul Miller for help with your own prayer life.

* Family Devotions

Another helpful way to bring up your children in the Lord's instruction is to have some devotional time together as a family. The key parts would be reading the Bible or an age appropriate book based on the Scriptures, praying together, and singing to God. If your children are readers, I recommend taking turns reading the Bible aloud. If they are young readers, then everyone take just one verse. And keep going around until you've finished reading the passage you planned on. Dad's you will be helped by reading the passage ahead of time and thinking about what you see there. Decide what is the big idea of the passage. You might use a study Bible in your own preparation. Then after your family has read the passage aloud, ask them questions to help them see what you see in the passage. You want to engage them, help them to think about God and his ways.

Dads, when it comes time to pray, just ask your family a simple question, "What do you need God's help with?" This works with preschoolers up through adults. Encourage honest personal prayers.

For singing, I purchased 3 hymnals when my children were young. I realized that they learn songs all the time and so there is no reason my pre-readers couldn't learn some hymns. I'd recommend teaching them one song at a time. Sing that one song time after time until they've got that one down before teaching them another. And you know what, if you start when they are young, they'll love those early songs. One of my children today still loves to sing the first song we ever taught her from that hymnal. She remembers it as #11. It is "Come thou fount of every blessing." But you don't have to use a hymnal. Use the songs we sing here in church. You can find the words on the internet and print out copies for your family. But the point is to actually sing to God in your hearts, not just entertain each other with your voices.

Dads and moms, the hardest part of leading family devotions is getting yourself ready. Remember this is not about externals. The key to this being instructive to your children is for you to be all in: for you to see the good in the Bible words you are about to read, for you to have your heart really wanting to pray for God's help, and for you to sing on the inside at the same time you are singing on the outside. I tell you that this is the hardest part because it is true for me. A few minutes before I sit down with my family, I go to a

quiet place and pray. I ask God to help me believe once again that his words are life and that he wants to hear our prayers and to help me worship him as I sing. Then I go to obey God's command to lead my family toward him.

* Church

Another helpful tool in every father's discipleship tool belt is church. As you saw from the passage in Ephesians, God gives you, the father, the primary responsibility to disciple your children, not the Sunday school teacher or youth leader. But just as you use the outdoors or the Bible or a song book, so you should use the church. Bringing your children to Sunday school and Awana or youth group helps you fulfill the job God has given you to lead them. If you aren't bringing them, is it because you are so confident in your own discipleship ability that you don't need the help? I can't imagine any dads saying yes to that. Or is it because you don't believe that God will really hold you responsible? After reading our passage from Eph 6, I can't image you saying yes to that either. So dads, get yourself and your family out of bed on Sunday mornings in time to get them to Sunday school. And arrange your Wednesday nights to get them to Awana or youth group. Dads, you need all the help you can get.

Let's talk for a minute about Sunday morning worship. Parents, think for a moment: why do you bring your children to worship? What do you hope will happen? Set your hopes higher than just thinking you want them to be in church ... just because. Why do you come for worship? Parents, I hope you come to see more of God and to worship what you see. I hope you come to hear from God's word as we sing it and pray it and preach it. These are great Sunday morning hopes for you and your children. So, parents, be intentional about seeing these hopes fulfilled, so far as it depends on you.

If your child was in a school class room and they slouched in their chair, wouldn't look at the teacher, day dreamed, refused to participate in class when the teacher wanted them to, would that bother you? It would, right? I would say to my son or daughter, "I'm not sending you to school for you to just take up a seat. I'm sending you to learn and grow. I want you to pay attention and participate from now on." And so far as I was able, I'd make them do that.

So in church, even if my children were quite young, I would expect them to stand when we stand, sit when we sit, and pray when we pray. I'm not doing this because I want people around me to think my family is great, but because I want my children to grow up to think God is great. Parents, ask and expect your children to fully participate in the worship service.

Parents, your children will be watching you in church. If you have a too casual attitude, like: I come late, I don't sing, I play on my phone during the sermon, I look bored or distant during the worship service, then your children won't see much of God here and won't grow up learning to worship him. Dads especially, come Sunday mornings humble, hungry for God, happy to worship with your brothers and sisters, eager to hear a good

word from God during the sermon. Then after your Sunday morning heart is set right, ask your family to follow you in that.

* Kids and teens

Kids and teens, all the applications I've made have been addressed to your parents, especially your father. Is there any application for you? Think with me. If you are ready and willing to obey and honor your parents and they whisper to you in the pew on Sunday, "Hey, please stand and sing with us.", then will you smile and sing or will you shoot them the look that says, "I can't believe you are asking me to do that."? If next week dad tells you that he'd like to start having family devotions, will you be glad for it and tell him you are looking forward to it, or will you frown and tell him how boring that will be?

Kids, you have strong role to play in your own discipleship. If you want to grow up like Hophni and Phinehas, then when your parents discipline and instruct you in the Lord, don't honor and obey them. But if you want your life to go well, if you want God's special blessing to those who honor their parents, then follow your dad's lead when he tries to train and correct you as the Lord would. Your being brought up in the Lord requires your cooperation.

5. You can't do it. Encouragement.

Kids and teens, I'll bet if I could ask you privately right now how hopeful you are that you will obey your parents and honor them, that many of you would tell me you've tried and failed many times. You'd like to do better, but don't know how to change.

Fathers, I'll bet if I could ask you privately right now how hopeful you are that you will not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, many of you would tell me you try, but aren't too good at it, especially nurturing them spiritually.

You know that if your hope is in yourself, that your hope is very thin. You children and teens won't naturally obey and honor your parents. And you fathers won't naturally raise them as God has designed. You both must look to God for your hope. You need him to transform you, even to make you want to do right.

Earlier in Ephesians Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Might being a godly child and a godly father be one of those good works that God designed for us before we were born? Surely. How will he accomplish those good works? Well, in another place in Ephesians, Paul prays that "God may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ..." Christ changes the heart he resides in. He wants to clean up your

desires, even the desires of children who know they ought to obey and honor their parents and the desires of fathers know they ought to bring up their children in the Lord.

Children and fathers, you can't live with each other like God commands unless ... God unleashes his cleansing changing power within you. Repent when you fail to do it right. Tell God you are sorry and ask him to give you more of his Spirit so your heart will want to do right. This is a prayer God is eager to answer.

6. Conclusion

The big idea this morning is that the Lord raises children through the cooperation of fathers and children, by fathers bringing up their children in the Lord's training and by children obeying and honoring their parents.

This is God's word for us this morning. Please come talk with me if you have questions or want to talk more. I love to help parents lead their kids and teens.