

The Biblical Role of Parents, #1

A Refresher on the Family

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Our Bible text for our message this morning comes from the book of Ephesians 6 and I would invite you to turn there with me to Ephesians 6 in verse four, a single verse for this morning and one which we won't even begin to exhaust with what we have to say in our time together here today. Ephesians 6:4, the Apostle Paul says,

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

We all share carnal tendencies on parenting to one degree or another, those of us that are fathers and mothers now, perhaps those that are children observing parents as you're growing up and getting into the age of perception and understanding, we need to kind of think through the way that we approach parenting. Some people, no doubt some of you, want a checklist on how to handle parenting. "Give me a list of rules of do's and don'ts that covers the infant years, the toddler years, the young child years, the teenage years. Give me a list of do's and don'ts and I'll do them," and assume that the outcome will be correct. The underlying thought being that, "If I keep this checklist, I've done my duty and so just give me the duties so that I can do it." The problem there being that the parent perhaps without even realizing it is showing no real interest in the principles of the heart that are at parenting. If you're oriented toward a checklist in parenting, you're off track. I'll just be candid with you. You're not approaching it right at all.

Others aren't really interested in the spiritual growth of their children at all. They are not interested in their spiritual development at all. Oh, I know that everyone here that has a family would say that you are and the fact that you are present here on Sunday is a good thing, but don't measure it by what's happening on Sunday morning and whether you're here on a Sunday morning or not. You need to ask yourself: what occupies our time during the week? What are the activities that preoccupy us during the week? And for some parents, not necessarily speaking of anyone in here, but the deep seated thing in their heart really is this, not so much that the child would become a flourishing disciple of Jesus Christ, but as long as the kid stays off drugs and doesn't get pregnant, parenting has been a success because you haven't embarrassed the family and you haven't created problems that become evident to all and that I have to deal with now. Well, look, if your

activities are just so consuming during the week and aren't really Christ-centered, let's be honest about where your heart's at, would we? You know, and that's just the thing.

I've got so many things on my heart that I want to say today that I just want to be real candid with you. I've asked the Lord to give me grace so that I would say all of these things in the proper demeanor, that I would say them with the right tone, mindful of my own many failures as a father, but I also want to be candid with you and not just make this a feel-good moment and everybody walks out without having really been confronted by what the word of God says. We need to take this to heart. We're reading the very word of God and we're reading what Christ has appointed for his church to understand and to apply in the realm of the family and one of the wonderful things about this, about this teaching from Scripture, is that we know that it comes from a good God who intends good blessing on us. And so when God has revealed the nature of salvation in the first three chapters of Ephesians, when he's called us to live a worthy life, when he's told us to live in subjection to one another, Ephesians 5:21, he intends your good and blessing through all of that. Then as he goes and applies it in the realm of marriage, "Wives and husbands, here's what I want from you," he intends your good, he intends your blessing. When he speaks to children and says, "Children, obey your parents"; he says, "Children, honor your father and mother," he intends your blessing. We shouldn't think that anything that God intends for us is anything other than perfectly good because he's a perfectly good God. And looking at the cross of Christ, we could come to no other conclusion than that, could we?

Well, look, we need to have that mindset deeply embedded in our mind as we come to the text and the things that we are saying here now because we realize that if God's word today is about to convict us, that he convicts us in love, he convicts us for our good, and the right response to that would be to receive it and to respond to it with a willing, teachable heart instead of resisting it and saying, "I don't want to go there. I've got my life the way I want it and I don't want God's word to poke around and change it." We can't approach it that way. So checklist, I'm sure there are some of you that tend that way; really busy with your activities and kind of neglecting the true eternal matters of spiritual development of your children, I know that some of you are there. You know, then at the other end, there is a whole other end to the spectrum; there are those that forget the sovereignty of God in a practical way. Oh, they earnestly care for the spiritual well-being of their children to such an extent that they are almost obsessed with it, worried and consumed by it, and think that somehow the salvation of their children depends on how they parent, not recognizing, not remembering that salvation belongs to the Lord and unless the Father draws someone, no one can come, and so they live under a burden of expectation and perceived failure that quenches their own sense of joy in the Lord. There is just a whole realm here. You know, and I'm mindful as we discuss these things that when we get into the matters of the biblical teaching on the family, we get to, we touch on nerves that go to the deepest parts of the things that most of you care about. You know, you care about what happens with your children to one degree or another, maybe your priorities are misdirected a bit but you care. And we all know something of the fact that family interactions are the fertile ground where either the deepest joys or the deepest

hurts can take place. I'm mindful of that as we say these things here today. And so we just want to come humbly before God's word and ask the Spirit of God to teach us.

Now, between somewhere on the spectrum or should we say against that range of indifference to true spiritual development of your children to an unhealthy obsession that thinks that everything about their spiritual future depends on you and you alone and against all of the mountains of books on parenting, even Christian parenting that you could find, it is stunning to come to God's word, the simplicity and clarity of God's word, and see the stunning brevity with which it speaks. It's incredible. When you think of the thick books and the manuals on parenting that some of you have read and gone through and been tied up by the different things that have been said, isn't it astonishing to come to Ephesians 6:4 and see how brief the word of God is in what it says on a general letter to Christians about how godly Christians are to live? It's stunning how brief it is. Maybe there's an element of simplicity in this that we are missing because of all the different voices that have spoken to us in the past. I don't know but let's look at verse 4 here again just to keep the text fresh in our minds, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

You know, one of the things that I'm mindful is that for some, they are so wired to say, "Well, get me to the application," that they bypass the principles that make the application possible. That's a serious mistake and so what we want to do today and next week is we want to focus on principles, the big picture, the general principles that inform and direct parenting. If you embrace those principles, if you see and understand them and say, "I will own those as that which guides my parenting," do you know what? The other points of application work themselves out in time. You need to get the big picture, the big principles in mind and not worry about, "Well, what do I do if my baby is crying at 2 AM in the morning." That is not the purview of a pulpit to address that kind of particular application because to get down into that detail means that you are going to miss the forest for the trees. What we want you to see is we want you to see, "Oh, there's a forest here," rather than say, "Do you see the bark on that oak and how it twists at a particular little angle there?" That will lead you astray. So we're looking to focus on big principles here today and I'm restraining the things that I feel in order to try to say them to you in a proper tone.

Let's see what Scriptures say to parents here today. Paul, as we saw last week, has addressed the children in verses 1 through 3 and now he pivots to those who have authority. He pivots to parents as he speaks in verse 4 when he says, look at verse 4 with me again as we look into the text. He says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Now notice, I want you to notice something, how he addresses different groups as he goes through this broader passage. In verse 22, chapter 5, verse 22, he says, "wives," and then he addresses the wives and tells them what he wants to say to them. In verse 25, chapter 5, he says, "husbands," and he addresses the husbands. Then in verse 6, he says, "children, here's what I want from you." Verse 4, he goes on and he says, "fathers, here's what I have to say to you." Verse 5, he says, "slaves, here's God's word to you." Verse 9, "masters, here's God's word to you." So you can see that he is now walking into an area of life

where he is addressing the practical daily relationships that affect all of life, giving instruction to people in different realms, "Here's how God's word applies to you; here's how obedience to Christ looks to you; this is what you are to do in order to live a godly life; these are the attitudes that are to take root and dominate your thinking and define your worldview in your position in life so that you live according to a defining principle as opposed to simply bouncing about from the waves of circumstance as you go through day to day." You see, what Paul is giving us here is he's giving us an anchor, he's giving us that which is a foundation that you build the other things on and now he comes to fathers in his address in chapter 6, verse 4. This is where we are at in our sequential exposition of the text.

Now, men, I'm talking to you today. Let's just be real straight and clear and see it from God's word as to why you are particularly being addressed here today. Notice in verse 4, look at it with me, look at the text with me when he says, "fathers," and then he goes on and makes his statement. He uses the word "fathers" rather than parents. It's interesting that he doesn't say fathers and mothers, here's what I have for you, he particularly points out fathers. Now, there are many commentators, many good commentators who say, "Do you know what? We should just understand that as a collective reference to parents," and, you know, in some ways, you know, that's okay. It's not going to change much in what you understand, but that view might cloud things just a bit. It might take the edge off of the cutting knife of God's word for the dads in our midst and the future dads in our midst if you understand it that way, and I want you to see an important exegetical point here as we're talking about this and, you know, we just take these details and build them up until we see what God has to say to us.

Look at chapter 6, verse 1, he says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Parents, mother and father, you obey them, and it's obvious that he includes both the male and female parents as he goes on in verse 2 and says, "Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise)." So he says, parents, father and mother. Do you know what? He knows how to use those terms. He's already established that. But when he comes to verse 4, he doesn't say parents, here's what I want from you. He doesn't say fathers and mothers, here's what I want from you. He uses the word "fathers." There is a pointed, intentional direction toward the men who are the heads of the household in what he says here. When you consider that in that culture fathers exercised a virtually unlimited authority over their household, you can see why he would do that. If he addresses the fathers as the pinnacle of the authority in the household, then it's going to disseminate down through everyone else including the mothers and the children and so forth. But he recognizes the unique male authority in the household and addresses them, "Fathers, here is what I have for you." He's making fathers accountable because they had the authority.

Now, ladies, let me say this to you: the principles that we're going to talk about today and next week, they apply equally to you. The principles are the same but, men, there is an elevated accountability that you have before God because God has called you out by name here in the text, "Fathers, here's what I have for you." So there is a particular application of the authority of the word of God coming upon the conscience of a father

with what is said here. Wives, see it, as it were, reflected in the mirror and say, "The things that are being said here affect the way that I parent also," but there is a particular accountability for the fathers because they had the authority.

Now, the fact that elsewhere in Scripture qualifications for elders, qualifications for church leaders require a man to manage his household well, also supports the idea that God has something in particular in mind with fathers as this is being addressed. So, moms, this applies to you today even though I'm going to speak directly to the fathers in the midst and the future fathers in the midst with how I phrase my vocatives today; "vocative" being a word, the term that means "direct address." I'll be saying "fathers," but ladies, understand that you need to pay heed also and you need to pray for your husbands even as the word works in their hearts here today. This is going to be a fairly brief message actually because I want to make one central point really, really clear with what we have to say today.

So, here we go, next week's message is a combination. I'm going to show you three principles of parenting that are found in this verse that define the way that you should approach your family and your position of headship in the home. They are very general. They are very clear. They are very defining. But today we're only going to talk about one of those principles and what we are going to talk about today is the realm of parenting. The realm of parenting. What is the realm of parenting? What does that word mean? The realm of parenting teaches us to focus on its scope. What is the breadth of parenting? What is involved when you think about the realm of parenting, men? How is it that you should approach your thinking about your role in your family? How is it that those of you with young ones at your knees or those of you that will soon have young ones at your knees, how is it that you should think about that little life that looks to you for leadership and guidance and authority? How should you think about that? Well, first of all, you should understand that God has established a realm, a comprehensive way of life for you to think about parenting. Here's the thing, men: parenting is not an isolated compartment of your adulthood. It is not one closet in the bigger house of your life. Parenting is something that permeates everything that you think about and everything that you do as I'll show you in a moment. The realm of parenting is comprehensive. It's not limited to getting your family here on Sunday and being content with that. You couldn't do this in our church because we deliberately don't do this but speaking to perhaps a broader audience, you cannot look at your children and say, "I will delegate the spiritual upbringing of my children to a church, to a youth pastor, to their disciple leader." It doesn't work that way. God calls you, fathers, to be this way; calls you, fathers, to bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So you need to understand that the authority of God's word is calling upon you in your role of fathers and saying, "Step up to the plate." I told you there was a lot on my heart. And there's a basic point of grammar that's going to help you see this as I lay this out for you.

Look at verse 4 with me again, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Now, there are two commands there: a negative and a positive. We'll talk about the details of those commands next week. He's making a contrast here. He's making a contrast. He says, "Don't do this but,"

sharp contrast, "do this instead." So he says, "Don't provoke your children to anger. Don't do that whatever you do. And," he says, "but by contrast you bring them up in the way that I'm about to tell you." So there is a contrast there. Now, here's the thing about those two commands that are there: do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Provoke and bring them up, that's what we want to talk about for just a moment right here. A simple point, a basic point of Greek grammar that you don't need a Greek degree to understand. What Paul has done here, these two commands, are written in the present tense in the Greek language and that present tense emphasizes something of the nature of ongoing action, repeated action, continual action. This is to be the pattern of your life, in other words. As a pattern, fathers, don't provoke your children to anger. As a continual matter of your approach to life, dads, do this with your children, be conscience of doing this. In other words, there is not a time in your existence as a dad where these principles are not informing what you do and how you think and what you say and what you require from your children. This is a comprehensive umbrella, negative and positive command, giving a central feature of how God wants you to live as a father.

So we realize that God has a comprehensive thing in mind here simply by the nature of the commands. Now, I'm going to expand on this more in the future, the next 10 or 15 minutes maybe but for now I just want you to see that much. Men, this is speaking to patterns of life throughout a day and throughout the years. This is what is to mark you. And here is the way that you should think about it and I'm just so glad that there are young men in here whose families are just ahead and this is an opportunity as the concrete, as the cement is being poured into the foundation of your life, that there is an opportunity for you to embrace these principles and say, "This is how I'm going to live." And you have the opportunity to embrace it and say, "By the grace of God, I will form my life according to what is laid out in God's word here." Now, that can be the same aspiration of those of you who are a little further along in life like I am, but there's just a particular ability to form things on the front end that's harder to undo when you get to be 40 or 50 or 60. You get established in your patterns and you're just not all that interested in changing no matter how passionately the pastor preaches at you or preaches to you, I should say; choose your preposition, I don't care. But those of you who are young men, I want you to see and I plead with you, there is an opportunity here before you to shape the direction of your entire trajectory of your family life if you simply embrace it and hear what it has to say.

Now, what can we say? How should we think about this? How should we think about what God is saying to us here in his word? Well, first of all, understand that Paul is writing here to Christians. We've covered that so many times. This is written to the saints at the church at Ephesus and the broader group of churches in that area at the time. It's written to Christians and so this presupposition of Paul's text here is that you are a born again believer in Christ. That's the assumption that informs that which is here. It assumes, men, it assumes that you have gone through the first several chapters of Ephesians and you have been overwhelmed and moved to praise by the greatness of the salvation that God has given to you in Christ; that although you were dead in your trespasses and sins, God made you alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved, Ephesians 2:4.

And you see his rich grace, his rich mercy, and your heart has melted before the glory of Christ in your own life and you recognize the greatness of the power and the sovereignty of God that saved you out of your sin; the mercy that delivered you when you were a rebel against God. And your own heart, that's the point, you see, we're not even talking about your kids yet, your own heart is so captivated by grace, so captivated by mercy, that you are already inclined to obey whatever this God says to you; that the sweetness of Christ who laid his life down for you and saved you from your sins, you are so drawn in love and obedience and submission to Christ that whatever he says, your reflexive impulsive answer is, "Yes, Lord, of course. What else would I do except what you tell me to do?" Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?" And the redeemed heart says, "I'm not going to be like that, Lord. What you say I will do." So you come from that greater mindset, the greater perspective of Christian salvation which is the full foundation of what Paul says here in chapter 6, verse 4. There is a whole context to it.

Now, with that said, as you move along, you realize that Paul in chapter 4, verse 1 says, "Live a life that is worthy of the salvation which you have been given. Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And you say, "Oh, Christ, oh, Christ, the only thing I want out of life is that I would live a life here that is worthy of you. You have done so much for me. You laid your life down for me by name. You have shown mercy to me. I see that. I've been washed from my sins. I have heaven in my future. Oh, Christ, whatever you say, that's what I want to do as a response to you and to your grace because I'm so heartfelt grateful for what you've done." So you move on in the text and you see that he says understand what the will of the Lord is, be subject to one another in Christ, and you're saying, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, that's what I'm going to do. That's what I want to be. That's what matters. That's the only thing that's important."

So this admonition to fathers is linked by a powerful strong chain to all of the things that went before it in the text and the things of salvation, the things of Christ. Here's the thing, beloved, you should never, ever, ever think about your role as a dad, your role as a parent, apart from that chain that links you to Christ. You should never think about your role as a parent as something separate and divorced from and different from what it means to be a Christian because what Scripture says about parenting comes in the flow of that greater revelation. In other words, we'll state it a different way and we'll see this in another text in a moment, your children are simply an aspect of a greater commitment to obedience to Christ that flows from the nature of your salvation. You cannot, you cannot, cannot, cannot, think about this in isolation from Christ. You can't. That would distort everything. So what you're hearing here is simply a plea for you to love Christ and respond to him and to recognize Christ and respond to him, and then once that's settled in your mind, then the other things about parenting flow obviously and easily and logically and revelationally. Don't view your family as something separate from a commitment to Christ, and don't think about your commitment to Christ without realizing that it permeates and influences everything that you do day to day including, as an aspect of that, the way that you deal with your children the Lord has given to you. I'll be happy to show you a few places in other scriptures that will reinforce that for you. You say,

because I understand. I understand, you say, "You just built an awful lot on the present tense command in Greek." I get that. If that was all that I had to say about it, I wouldn't blame you if you said, "Eh, I don't know if I see all that in the text."

Well, let's make it plain and explicit. Turn back to the book of Deuteronomy, if you would, Deuteronomy 6, beginning in verse 4, which, by the way, we're going to look at a couple of passages here in Deuteronomy, actually three, it's very pertinent for us to go back to Deuteronomy; it's very appropriate for us as an interpretive principle to go back to Deuteronomy from this passage because Paul in verse 2 had just been quoting in part from a passage in Deuteronomy. It's obvious that what was in Deuteronomy was influencing Paul's thinking here and so it's very appropriate for us now to go back and see, "Well, what does Deuteronomy have to say about this?" as a means of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. Well, it's wonderfully practical.

Chapter 6, verse 4, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." Now, beloved, let me invite you to look up at me for a moment. What I have just said a few minutes ago about saying that your parenting flows out of your view of being a Christian, it flows out of Ephesians 1 through 3, and this is what it means to be born again, and the obligations that flow, starting from a view of your salvation and a view of Christ and parenting as something in the context of that. What did I just say? Now, what I want you to see here is that the pattern in Deuteronomy 6 is exactly the same. You cannot miss this. Here Moses is telling the nation of Israel, "You focus on who the Lord is and you recognize that he is one. Here is your obligation flowing out of the holiness and the character of God. Here is your obligation. What? You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Jesus said in Matthew, "That's the greatest commandment."

So, you see, you start with who God is and you realize that flowing from that is not horizontal implications with your human relationships, it starts with how you respond to this God who has made himself known. Moses told Israel, "The LORD is one. You shall love him with all your heart, soul, strength and mind." Paul, in Ephesians says, "This is Christian salvation, you should walk in a manner worthy of it." It's vertical. It's vertical. It's vertical. It focuses on God first and then internalizes it and says, "This is how I must respond to this." You see, it is useless, it is worse than useless, it is counterproductive, it is destructive to talk about and to have seminars on Christian parenting that don't start there because when you do that, you're severing the umbilical cord of that which gives meaning and power and direction to everything about parenting. You have to start there as a general matter and then for you men, here's what you need to understand is that your parenting starts with your vertical response to the Lord God Almighty. Your parenting starts with your response to Christ. It does not start with, "How can I help this little guy?" The parenting flows from greater heart commitments and you must see that. There must be established in your heart and mind that the most important thing to me is the nature and character of God; that I love Christ more than anything else; I love Christ more than my life; I love him more than my wife; I love him more than my children because he

alone is the one who gave himself for the salvation of my soul. That's where parenting starts. That's where parenting starts and only then do you say, "Oh, how does this apply to the other ones that are here? I almost forgot." It's just like it's incidental by comparison to the love and devotion that I have for Christ. But those things go on, those things come out of those commitments and you're in Deuteronomy 6, now with that said, look at verse 6 again, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on," what? "Your heart." You should embrace them in your inner man. This should be the matter of your affections, your passions. This is what you care about. This is what you give your life to. This is the supreme thing in life to you that it should be on your heart. Oh, I've got so much to say.

Look where Moses goes from this. From that, now he talks about the way that you deal with your children. "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." What's Moses saying there? The same thing that I said from the observation that they are present tense commands in the Greek in Ephesians 4. He's saying this is a lifestyle. He says this informs everything that you do from the time that you wake up, when you stand up, when you sit down, when you lie down, these things should be on your heart, tongues and lips, as you're interacting with your sons throughout life. The interaction, the training, the admonition of children flows from a prior heart commitment to Christ and becomes that which colors everything about your interactions during the day. Day to day, week to week, year to year, it becomes a pattern of life.

Deuteronomy 11:19, turn there if you would. Deuteronomy 11:19. You know, do you know why I can't just talk about these things in a monotone way? Do you know why I can't just stand up here without any sense of emotion about it? It's because it's too important. It's because it matters. It's because I care about you. It's because God's word is true and this is what life is to be like. If I just stood up here and spoke in a monotone way like I was lecturing a college class, you would think that it doesn't matter; that it's not that important. How could I expect you to think these things are important if my demeanor somehow betrayed that it doesn't really matter and I'm indifferent to whether you receive it or not? The reason that I get animated is because I want you to receive it. The reason I want you to receive it is because I want the good that God intends for you. That's why.

Deuteronomy 11:19, and I want the good that God intends for your children as well. You've got to be a man of God if you're going to be an instrument of the blessing of God in the lives of your children and that starts with your vertical dimension toward Christ. That's what you've got to see. But looking at this realm of parenting as that which permeates the totality of life, look at Deuteronomy 11:19, "You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up." Men, do you see something here? I know that a lot of people get stressed out about family worship and devotion times and all of that. I'm not going to say much about that except to say this, that a devotion time with your family, it's good if you do that, but understand that it is not a substitute for the lifestyle of communicating Christ morning, noon and evening as you go through life in very natural conversations that come up as you're just going through life with your family. You can't

substitute - the one isn't a substitute for the other. This is a comprehensive approach to family interaction that's on a 24/7 basis. That's clear. It's obvious. If it was supposed to be reduced simply to a 10 minute Bible time, that's what Scripture would have said and that would have been enough. That's not what it says. It says, "Men, you be mindful of talking to your sons about the things of the Lord God who is one. You be mindful of talking about Christ who shed his blood for sinners. You be mindful of that when you get up, when you go through the day, when you sit down, when you lie down at night." You see, you can't compartmentalize it. That's what I want you to see. You can't isolate this and say, "Well, I took care of that duty for today." What if your kid comes and says, "I've got a really important question about Christ," at seven in the evening and that doesn't fit with your devotional time? You say, "Well, it's not devotional time. We're not going to talk about those things now." No, in the minds of children, the hearts of children don't operate on your timetable anyway. That's why you've got to have a mindset that this is continual. You engage them when they are fresh to hear, when it's on their mind. So Scripture pictures a continual dialogue with your children over life that is rooted in the character of God and your own love for him. You ask questions of them. You answer questions from them and this just becomes a way of life.

And, dads, it should be evident to you by now that what we're describing here is something far more than just Bible stories about Jonah and Noah from a picture book. As they get older, it's far more than the matters of just trying to enforce external morality on them so that they don't embarrass the family and you can at least maintain appearances even if the reality isn't there. No, that would be a horrible way to treat God's word when it says you love him with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind. How could we just justify making it a matter of external morality and don't do drugs and don't get pregnant? How could we justify that in light of the comprehensive nature of the word of God that says, "Love him with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind"? How could we reduce it like that and feel like we are honoring Christ in the way that we approach life? Does that make any sense whatsoever? Do you think God would be pleased with that kind of blind, lame lamb as your sacrifice? "Well, God, I made it a matter of external morality and they didn't get into drugs. Here's my one mina, you have what is yours." Don't be surprised when the Lord rejects that out of hand and says, "That's not what I called for at all." No, you see, you lovingly and you patiently teach them the nature of God, the character of God; you teach them the Gospel of Christ; you lovingly and patiently reinforce again and again because they are slow to learn. Through no fault of their own they don't have the maturity to grasp it all at once so you lovingly and patiently teach them about repentance and faith in Christ and obedience to him and trusting him throughout the course of life. You communicate to them that God rules over all and what happens in life is something that comes from his hand so you trust him and you respond to him and you draw from your own spiritual experience illustrations that say, "You know what you're going through reminds me of what I went through when I was like that," and you communicate it to them like that when you get up and when you sit down and when you rise and when you lie down, morning, noon and evening.

You see, the real realm of parenting is the natural opportunities that come in the course of life. That presupposes something really important, men, there's a fundamental

presupposition in this that I've already stated but I might as well make again: men, it presupposes that you yourself know Christ. That's the pre-supposition of all of this. Christian parenting can only be done by Christians. You have to ask yourself, you have to realize that you cannot be a Christian parent unless you yourself have humbly repented of sin and received Christ by faith. It all flows from that. Do you know what else it presupposes? Even assuming your regenerate nature, even assuming that you've been born again, this presupposes something else: it presupposes that you yourself are walking with Christ. You cannot naturally in the course of life when you stand up and sit down and rise up and lay down, you can't naturally talk about the things of Christ and God unless they are the things that saturate your own heart. How could you do that? Can you talk knowledgeably about nuclear physics with your children? I'm thinking none of you can but if there's an exception, don't let it miss the general rule. No, you can't because you don't live in that realm; you don't know it for yourself; that's not what you're engaged in with your life. Well, there is something far more worthy of study than nuclear physics, it's God, it's Christ. How are you going to talk greatly and importantly to your children about matters of eternal significance if somehow you're not plugged into them in your own mind and in your own heart with what you read and think about and listen to throughout the day? How do you expect to do that?

Let's go back to Deuteronomy 4:9. What a great verse this is and notice the context. He says, "Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons." Grandparents, grandma, grandpa, here you go, here's a verse for you, a word for you in the midst of it. Let's reverse engineer what he said here: make these things known to your sons. What does that flow from? It flows from the things that you've seen and heard. And what are you to do so that you're in a position to communicate that? Look at verse 9, "give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently."

This is so important that I at the last minute cut out 50 percent of what I intended to say this morning and I'm not even going to talk that much longer for the sake, sometimes less is more. I know, I know, that's impossible to think that I actually mean that when I routinely preach 70 minutes. I'm inconsistent. What can I say? But this is so important, what remains here is so important that I cut out 50 percent of my intended material so that I could make this one point to you today. It will shock you with what I'm about to say but I've heard it so many times in so many places from so many people that this absolutely has to be said. Men, if your first thought about Christian parenting or life in the church or righteousness or biblical truth, if your first thought, stay with me here, if your first thought is this, "You know, I really want this for my kids," men, you are completely missing the point about what it means to be a Christian father. You're completely missing the point if that's what motivates you toward the things of Christ, "I want it for my kids. I want it for them." If that's what motivates you and I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with people who've come and gone in our church that have been look like this, "Well, you don't have any programs for your children. I've got to have something for my children." Do you know what? They don't realize that they are betraying an entirely wrong view toward the whole nature of Christianity when they say

that. They're saying, "This is for someone else. I want it for them. I want you to teach them." Do you know what? My response internally always is and maybe as I get older I'm just going to start being more candid, then you'll really see people flying out of the church. "What about you? What about what you need, you who still live in sin? You whose repentance is at best imperfect? What about your desire to know Christ and to love him and to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and in the understanding of his word? What about that?" That never comes up in the conversation ever. You know, this isn't about people who leave, this is an illustration and if people don't want to be here, that's fine. I just want you to understand the principle and how this works out.

So they say, "This church isn't for me because you don't have a cute kid's ministry with a cute name like The Hive, you know, and the bees buzzing around the hive and it gives us a sense of activity because I want my kids to like church and to have fun there." Gracious. What an ignorant way to think about Christ. I'm serious. You see, the true Christian parent, the true Christian dad, the true Christian mom, has an understanding and has a thirst that says, "I must receive God's word. I must be fed God's word. I need this for myself. I am weak and I need the strength of Christ. I am ignorant in doctrine and I need to be instructed." And when you say, "Well, I just want something for my kids," you're just blowing all that off. Beloved, do you think God is going to honor that? Do you think that as you excuse yourself from responsibility under the word that God is going to honor that? Do you think that you can excuse yourself from the authority and the instruction of God's word and think that you're actually going to be the parent that God calls you to be? Here's a hint, I'll give you another Greek word: no. Okay, that's not Greek. No. Why would you presume on God that way? And further, don't you think that as you go through life that your kids are going to see through the hypocrisy of that? Don't you think that as we see generations come up through the church and then move on, don't you think that they are seeing things that somehow there's some kind of testimony somewhere, talking collectively in mass rather than individuals here? Isn't there something that says that they are not walking away from something that they saw day to day anyway? They just abandoned the external form that some, many parents, have tried to use as a substitute for the reality of the true realm of parenting; day to day when you stand up, when you sit down, when you rise, when you go to sleep at night. "I want this for my kids." Stop it. Don't ever, don't ever say that again if you haven't first said, "More than anything, I want the Scriptures for my own soul." Don't pretend to foist something on your kid that you don't love yourself.

You see, men, and I'm just so, and let me just say, let me just inject something here: I truly and honestly thank God for all of the young dads that are here but those of you that are here and you're a part of our church, I want you to know that I see you trying to be this kind of person. I see that in you and I thank God for it and I am confident that he will bless you for it. I'm confident of that and so I don't want you to think I'm rebuking you when I'm actually affirming you in what you're doing, but speaking generally and this applies to all of us, oh beloved, oh beloved, here's where I realized I knew I had to cut everything out of the message and finish with this: the realm of parenting, your first priority is not that your kids would be godly. That's not it. That's not it. Your first priority is that you would be godly. You must read God's word for yourself and make it a part of

your life. You must be the one who prays without ceasing. You must be the one who is faithful to Christ in his church and with his people. Don't expect your kids to adopt something which you are indifferent to. Don't play the part of the hypocrite like that.

So the question here really when we think about Christian parenting, fathers, is this: where are your desires? Where is your devotion to God reflected Monday through Saturday? I'm glad you're here Sunday morning, praise God for that, but where are your desires Monday through Saturday? Where do you make time for God's word? Where do you make time to hear teaching? Where do you make time to pray? You see, that's where it starts. You see, what we're doing here, we're not looking through a window so that you can see your kids beyond it, we're looking in a mirror and you're seeing yourself reflected back. Men, don't talk about your kids until you examine yourself.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, all of this is ultimately premised in your supreme worth, that you are a God of all authority, of all value, of infinite goodness, infinite holiness, our Creator, in Christ our Redeemer, and we must see ourselves in light of who you are first and not presume on your grace with a detour, with a shortcut, that tries to get our kids to you without having filtered it through our own lives first. God, there are a lot of good faithful men in our church and I thank you for them. I pray that you would encourage them as they seek to be a godly man, first of all, and that you would give them much, much grace as they balance the demands of providing for a family and other responsibilities and a wife and kids. Father, there are so many things competing for our attention. Help these men, help these dads, whether new or more advanced, Father, help them to see the priority for their own life even to the point of making changes in their lives if need be in order to respond to what your own call on their own heart is. Father, it seems as we study your word that if we live a godly life, it will spill over naturally into the lives of our children. Oh, there are things with structure and different things like that that we can do, but parenting flows from who we are and if we are godly, then our parenting is going to be flavored by the godliness. If we are godless, even if we are nice guys, our parenting will be godless as well. Help each one to examine themselves in light of your word. Encourage those who need to be strengthened because their efforts are sincere and biblical. Father, for those whose hypocrisy has been exposed in their own heart, give grace to them that they would not silence their conscience once again but that they would respond in repentance and faith in Christ so that your word would have the effect that you fully intend in each life. We ask you for your grace upon us as we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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