

A Godly Family

Message for Sunday, June 21, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Ephesians 6:1-4

The Bible passage we're looking at today has two parts. The first part, verses 1-3, is the role of children in a family: to obey and honour their parents. The second part, verse 4, is about the role of fathers in a family: to be a godly example and lead their children to the Lord. Although, really, just about everything I'm going to say about fathers applies equally to mothers.

Ephesians 6:1-4, New International Version:
Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

"Honour your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

1) Children, obey and honour your parents

This is the role of children in the family: to obey and honour their parents. One big way to honour parents is to listen to them. I don't know how many people have said to me, "I wish I had taken time to get my parents to tell me more about their life when they were growing up." If your parents are still alive, don't lose that opportunity.

I could talk for an hour about this, quoting lots of different Bible passages and explaining how each one relates to that theme. But instead, I'd like to share a story. Stories speak to the heart, not just to the head.

The Board meeting at the church had come to an end. Bob started to stand up and jostled the table, spilling his coffee over his notes. "How embarrassing. I am getting so clumsy in my old age." Everyone had a good laugh, and soon we were all telling stories of our most embarrassing moments. It came around to Frank who sat quietly listening to the others.

The Pastor said, "Come on, Frank. Tell us your most embarrassing moment."

Frank laughed and began to tell us of his childhood. "I grew up in San Pedro. My Dad was a fisherman, and he loved the sea. He had his own boat, but it was hard making a living on the sea. He worked hard and would stay out until he caught enough to feed the family. Not just enough for our family, but also for his Mom and Dad and the other kids that were still at home."

He looked at us and said, "I wish you could have met my Dad. He was a big man, and he was strong from pulling the nets and fighting the seas for his catch. When you got close to him, he smelled like the ocean. He would wear his old canvas, foul-weather coat and his bibbed overalls. His rain hat would be pulled down over his brow. No matter how much my Mother washed them, they would still smell of the sea and of fish."

Frank's voice dropped a bit, "When the weather was bad he would drive me to school. He had this old truck that he used in his fishing business. That truck was older than he was. It would wheeze and rattle down the road. You could hear it coming for blocks. As he would drive toward the school, I would shrink down into the seat hoping to disappear. Half the time, he would slam to a stop and the old truck would belch a cloud of smoke. He would pull right up in front, and it seemed like everybody would be standing around and watching. Then he would lean over and give me a big kiss on the cheek and tell me to be a good boy. It was so embarrassing for me. Here, I was twelve years old, and my Dad would kiss me goodbye!"

He paused and then went on, "I remember the day I decided I was too old for a goodbye kiss. When we got to the school and came to a stop, he had his usual big smile. He started to lean toward me, but I put my hand up and said, 'No, Dad.' It was the first time I had ever talked to him that way, and he had this surprised look on his face."

I said, "Dad, I'm too old for a goodbye kiss. I'm too old for any kind of kiss."

"My Dad looked at me for the longest time, and his eyes started to tear up. I had never seen him cry. He turned and looked out the windshield."

"You're right," he said. "You are a big boy....a man. I won't kiss you anymore."

Frank got a funny look on his face, and the tears began to well up in his eyes, as he spoke. "It

wasn't long after that when my Dad went to sea and never came back. It was a windy day when most of the fleet stayed in, but not Dad. He had a big family to feed. They found his boat adrift with its nets half in and half out. He must have gotten into a gale and was trying to save the nets and the floats."

I looked at Frank and saw that tears were running down his cheeks.

Frank spoke again. "Folks, you don't know what I would give to have my Dad give me just one more kiss on the cheek....to feel his rough old face....to smell the ocean on him....to feel his arm around my neck. I wish I had been a man then. If I had been a man, I would never have told my Dad I was too old for a goodbye kiss."

Today is Father's Day. If you're lucky enough to still have your Dad or Mom around, then go and visit, or at least call. Tell them how much you love and appreciate them. And if you can, put your arms around them and give them a kiss on the cheek.

1) Fathers, be a godly example, leading your children to the Lord

Learning faith in Jesus Christ isn't like a school subject, nor is it like a skill. There's an old saying about this: "Better caught than taught." In other words, the greatest part of the lesson happens when your values, your beliefs, just rub off.

How do you teach faith? There are several obvious ways:

- ▶ Reading the Bible together. Jane and I did this each night before bed. It was a favourite activity, curling up on Mom or Dad's lap, and reading. As a result, they grew up knowing much of the Bible, plus they are excellent readers and they love books.
- ▶ Praying together. Again, it's never too early to begin. Show them that God is close by, and we can talk with God just like talking to a neighbour or a friend.

One more thing: that Bible passage says "Do not exasperate your children." One of the greatest ways to do that, and to demonstrate love and care, is very simple: have time with them.

A man told about the time his son's sixth birthday was approaching. The boy had mentioned he

wouldn't mind a party, but what about presents? So Dad asked his son what he might like for his birthday. The boy was usually very specific about things, so Dad expected an answer like, "I'd like a Parcheesi game. The games are in alphabetical order in aisle 1 at Toys R Us; it's between the Pac Man and Pay Day."

But his son's request was a different. He said, "Dad, I'd like a ball to play with for my birthday."

Dad said "Great, what kind of ball?"

"Oh, I want don't know, either a football or a soccer ball." "Well, which would you want more?"

He said, "Welllll," and thought about it. Then he said. "If you have some time to play ball with me this year, I'd really like a football so we could throw it back and forth in the back yard. But if you're gonna be real busy this year, maybe you just better get me a soccer ball, because I can play soccer with the rest of the kids in the neighbourhood."

The dad thought about this and said, "Let me surprise you. How does that sound?"

And the little boy smiled and said, "Oh that would be great Dad. I really love you."

One thing was pretty obvious: his son was not so much interested in the gift. He was interested in the giver, and spending time together.

Next Steps:

- Pray: give thanks to God for your parents. They weren't perfect, but neither are you!
- Honour your parents, especially by listening to them.
- If you're a parent, be a godly one. Lead by example. The evidence that God makes a difference in your life will count for more than a hundred lectures.

Charlie Stoltzfus

This is a shorter message than usual. That's because I wanted to make time to share another story with you. It's not about Father's Day or families or anything like that. It's about prayer. [In the worship service, I told this story as an introduction to prayer.]

Tony Campolo was invited to speak at a small Christian college not far from where he taught at Eastern University in Pennsylvania. He says: "I love going to this little school because the people there seem to be so in touch with the power of the Holy Spirit." Before the chapel service, several members of the faculty took Tony into a side room to pray for him. Tony got down on his knees, and the six of them put their hands on his head and prayed for him, asking the Holy Spirit to fill him and use him effectively as he spoke to the students. They prayed long prayers, Tony says, and the longer they prayed, the more they leaned on his head. "They prayed on and on," he says, "and leaned harder and harder."

One faculty member, he says, prayed at length for a man named Charlie Stoltzfus. "That kind of ticked me off," Tony recalls, "and I thought to myself: If you're going to lean on my head, the least you can do is pray for me."

This faculty member prayed on and on for this guy who was about to abandon his wife and three children. Tony says: "I can still hear him calling out: 'Lord! Lord! Don't let that man leave his wife and children! Send an angel to bring that man back to his family. Don't let that family be destroyed! You know who I'm talking about, Lord. You know who I'm talking about—Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives down the road about a mile on the right-hand side in a silver house trailer.'"

With some degree of exasperation, Tony thought to himself: God knows where he lives. What do you think God is doing, sitting up there in heaven saying, "Can you give me that address again?"

After his chapel talk, Tony got in his car and headed home. He was getting on the Pennsylvania Turnpike when he saw a young man hitchhiking on the side of the road. So he pulled over and picked him up.

As they pulled back onto the highway, Tony introduced himself. He said: "Hi, my name's Tony Campolo. What's your name?" The guy said: "My name's Charlie Stoltzfus."

Tony didn't say a word. He drove down the Turnpike, got off at the next exit, turned around, and headed back the other way. Charlie looked at him and said: "Hey, mister! Where are you taking me?"

To which Tony said: "I'm taking you home."

"Why?" asked Charlie.

"Because you just left your wife and three children! Right?"

"Right," he said.

Charlie moved to the far side of his seat and leaned against the passenger door the rest of the way, staring at Tony. They got off the Turnpike and drove back to the college and down the side road, straight to his silver house trailer. When Tony pulled into the driveway, Charlie looked at him with astonishment and said: "How did you know I live here?"

Tony said: "God told me!"

He told Charlie: "You get in that house because I want to talk to you and I want to talk to your wife."

Charlie ran into the mobile home ahead of Tony. Tony says he doesn't know what Charlie said to his wife, but when Tony got into the home, her eyes were as wide as saucers. Tony sat them down and said: "I'm going to talk and you're going to listen."

They did listen, Tony says. And during the next hour Tony led both of them into a relationship with Jesus, and their marriage was saved as well.