

Ephesians 5:21-6:4  
Christian Parenting  
Sunday October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

Little Johnny was over at his Grandma's house and as soon as he sat down for dinner he began to eat. His dad stopped him and said, "Son we need to pray before we eat."

Little Johnny said, "That's ok, we can go ahead and eat, Grandma knows how to cook."

Prayer. One of the most important items when it comes to raising kids, because these are troubled times in which we live, and it seems like the goal posts, and the rules for raising kids keeps changing.

As many of you know I was a Children and Youth Pastor for 24 years. My wife was a church children's choir director for 20 years. At First Mesa we had over 200 children and youth on the rolls. We have 3 children. The oldest is Sarah. The middle child is Amy and the youngest is Kevin.

The truth is for quite a few years, I thought Deede and I were God's gift to teaching others how to raise their children. Our girls were gentle, well mannered, and hardly ever spoke back. We asked them and they did it. What we learned is they had "compliant personalities". It had nothing to do with us.

The older one especially tried to be good, because she took on the problems of the church and family on her shoulders. We didn't realize, until she told us as an adult, that part of the reason she had been so good was she thought if she wasn't I would get fired and we would have to move. What a burden for a little girl to carry. Be merciful to the children of church staff for they carry burdens you can't imagine.

Now I thought we were God's gift to parenting until my son Kevin was born. He put the word "strong" in the phrase "strong willed child."

He was always his very own person. He always tested the limits and gave us a run for our money up through High School.

I humbly learned I didn't know everything about parenting and my wife then proceeded to read every book she could get her hands on and shared many things with me. "The Strong Willed Child" by Dr. James Dobson was our favorite. I learned parenting style and discipline had to match a child's personality.

And Kevin was like me as a child, always into something. My mom once said to me she wished I had a son just like me. And I did!

One Sunday at Church, someone gave him a 1lb chocolate Hershey's Bar right before Sunday School. He proceeded to eat the whole thing all at once. Someone came into worship to retrieve me, but since I was leading worship, they got my wife. Kevin had so much sugar and caffeine in him that by the time Deede got to his classroom he was hanging on the bottom of a folding table as wild as a child with 1lb of chocolate in him could get.

Well through lots of pray and some counseling (for us) he grew up, went to college and works with the Division of Developmental Disabilities for the state of Arizona. He recently was promoted which means he now has more difficult people to work with and he has 47 of them. He is kind and generous and loving Christian. He also plays electric lead guitar at a Mega Church in East Tucson a couple of times a month. We eventually did something right with prayer.

All our children were deeply involved in church right up until Covid and are doing well in life. And I no longer believe I am God's gift to parenting, but the adventure of the last 38 years has taught me a few things that I want to share with you about Christian parenting, which actually the Bible laid out many years ago.

The key to Christian Parenting is bringing Christ into your family and your family into Christian Fellowship—the church.

The Church is the only lifelong activity you can involve your child in that has lifelong benefit and even eternal benefit. Soccer, football, baseball Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts they will all outgrow or their bodies will eventually give out. But a solid faith is a gift given by you to them for a lifetime and beyond.

We will begin at the end as we look at our scriptures today verse 6:4. I am using “The Message” paraphrase of the Bible because it brings out more immediately some of the things I am talking about along with the NIV. Verse 6:4 says, **“Fathers, don’t frustrate your children with no-win scenarios. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.”** The NIV version says, **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”**

It is the responsibility of Father’s to take our children by the hand and bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. And not just fathers; mothers, and grandparents too. Some translations use the word “discipline”, but it is more accurately translated here as “training and instruction”. How do we do that?

Well, I asked an expert and my wife said, **“By example!”** We do this by letting them catch us praying. By leading the prayer at meals and making sure they know what we are doing is giving God thanks; so we remain thankful, and don’t let our prosperity make us forget its source the Creator. When at meals ditch the cellphones, iPad and TV. Share about your day.

If you have little children pray with them before bedtime. Read them a Bible stories. I remember to this day when my mom said I should do the prayers on my own. I missed that time with her.

Let them hear us praying in the car and not just shouts of “Jesus” as someone runs a red light and almost hits you, but pray for ambulances that pass by, firetrucks and policeman. Pray for the homeless on the street.

Again, read them Bible stories. Let them catch you reading the Bible.

Take them to Worship. Take them to Sunday School and if you have a chance attend a Bible study too. Let them know that your faith and it's practice is important to you by doing it. Later when they are old enough encourage them to go to a church youth group. Encourage them to go on youth group trips, mission trips and other events. It may take them a while to catch on that it is all about faith in Jesus. I started going to a youth group simply because I fell for a girl. I guess you would call that "dating evangelism". She hardly knew I existed. **X Slide Off**

Now men, whether you like it or not, whether you feel like it is patriarchal or not, the truth is most kids form their image of God after their fathers. Now that is difficult for some but rather easy for others.

You whether you like it or not, you are the example of what God's love is for his children. And some like my mother had to overcome the image and experience of her earthly father to grasp an image of God as a loving father.

But men one of the best ways to fulfill this role is by loving your wife! Verse 25 makes this point, "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.**" As your children see you loving your wife, they will see a concrete example of love and can better grasp that God loves them.

Now back to the beginning, verse 21 says, "**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**" Or as the Message paraphrase says, "**Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.**"

Remember last week I said "The Jewish term for marriage was *Kiddushin*. *Kiddushin* meant "**sanctification or consecration.**" It was used to describe something which was dedicated to God as his exclusive and peculiar possession. Right, there is the idea of reverence for one another that each is the passion and possession of the other. Not one subservient to the other.

That idea casts the next verse in a better light that is often translated, **“Wives be subject to your husbands as you are to Christ.”** The idea here is of women in complete commitment and respect for her husband within a mutual relationship of love. The husband reciprocates with love.

Now some read this today, and again the charge of it being patriarchal and hierarchical are made but that misses the point. In its day and age this whole section was actually revolutionary thinking on marriage and relationship. The revolutionary idea was that a woman and a wife are to be held in high regard. How radical was that in its day?

As Dr. Barclay put it, “In Ephesians we find Paul’s true teaching on marriage, that Christian marriage is the most precious relationship in life, whose only parallel is the relationship between Christ and the Church!” p. 199 And, “It is impossible to exaggerate the cleansing effect that Christianity then had on home life in the ancient world and the benefits it brought to women.” Really? **X Slide Off**

Yes, in Paul’s day marriage was in shambles. As I said last week for the Jews it was very easy for a man to divorce a woman for any reason. A Jewish man in their morning prayer would give thanks that God had not made him, ‘a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.’ P. 194 But, **Paul lifts up that the love of a man for his wife in marriage should be at the level of the love of Christ for the Church.**

The Greeks of that time were even worse. “Prostitution was an essential part of the Greek life.” “The Greeks expected their wives to run the home and to care for their legitimate children; but the husbands found their pleasure and their companionship elsewhere.” ‘And there was no legal procedure for divorce. It was simply the result of a whim of which the women were completely subject to.’ P. 196

And the Romans were worse still. I mention these for they were the 3 major cultures the Gospel was first taken to. For the Romans

divorce and marriage were so common ‘that women dated the years by the names of their husbands.’ It was serial marriage and divorce, but not monogamy. The Biblical scholar Jerome declares it to be true that in Rome there was a woman, who was married to her 23<sup>rd</sup> husband and she herself was his 21<sup>st</sup> wife.” P. 197

Marriage in the ancient world was in chaos and into this, Paul through Christ, brings a new concept of marriage. **Marriage is a lifelong relationship of love, fidelity, and caring.** In fact, Paul brings out four things that Christian marriage and love should be.

**First, it is characterized by sacrificial love.** Verse 25, “Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting.” This is not a tyranny of control, and submission, but a love that is ready to make any sacrifice for her good.

**Second, it is a love that is purifying,** again verse 25 in NIV translation, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,”

**Third, it is a love that is caring,** verses 28 & 29, “In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it just as Christ does for the church.”

**Fourth, it is a love that is unbreakable.** Again, quoting the words of Jesus who quoted Genesis, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” Within Christian marriage for a woman there was deep security and love in cultures that denied the worth of woman and the value of marriage and family. **X Slide off**

So, what do we take away from this? First, we teach best by example. Let your children and grandchildren etc. catch you loving your spouse, speaking glowingly of them. Note again the rules of “Fair

Fighting” in the bulletin #2. Practice the means of grace, (prayer, Bible study, worship, service) growing in the love of God and let you kids/grandkids see you.

If some have strayed from the faith, pray for them. And when given the opportunity just share about your faith, your church, your answered prayers. Speak to what encourages you and makes you proud like Vista Church’s mission in Agua Prieta Mexico that has lifted a community out of utter poverty.

Seek other Christian parents to help you understand how to raise your children. When my son Kevin was 5, he couldn’t tie his shoes. I thought he was being stubborn and strong willed and simply would not tie them, because his sisters at five could tie their shoes. I then found out from another person that 5-year-old boys do not have the eye hand coordination that 5-year-old girls do. He didn’t tie his shoes because he couldn’t tie them. Thank God for Velcro straps.

Become involve in the Wednesday evening program here. It gives parents a great place to talk and support each other. At least one of our parents is in a group that shares sermons on parenting. I can give you a name if you want to participate. We need some older adults who can help with the physical, behind the scenes, part of our Wednesday evening program: food, set up, clean up. We had 12 people this last week and we are looking at 20 plus in the week to come, because they are breaking out the Ukuleles.

We are moving toward offering a parenting class called “Love and Logic”. Valerie has more info on that.

Finally, members and friends, if you are led by the Holy Spirit, consider helping with our children’s Sunday school. It will be very challenging. Some weeks you will have two or three and others maybe 15 to 20. I don’t offer you an easy way to serve but one that is worthwhile and has meaning. Again, see Valerie.

And in the end, I say pray. Pray for your kids and grandkids. Pray for yourself as you raise them or watch others raise them. Pray.

So let us pray. (For all of the above.)

In Jesus Name amen.