

A Word to Fathers

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[0:00] Ephesians 5, verses 22, and on into chapter 6, verse 4! Ephesians 5, verse 22, the Word of God through the Apostle Paul says, Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 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, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body.

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I'm talking about Christ and the church.

[1:47] However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor 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. Lord. A little girl crawls up into her dad's lap.

Daddy, what did you want to be when you were growing up? Oh, at first I wanted to be a fireman, and then I wanted to be a soldier. Was there anything else?

Well, as a teenager I worked at a restaurant, and I thought I might like to go into business for myself. And so when I went to college I started taking business classes, but it turned out I really, I realized that wasn't for me.

[3:12] And I realized I liked to read and write, so I thought maybe I should go into publishing. And so that way I could read books all day and write all day.

And so that's what I did, and that's why I am what I am today. Wasn't there anything else that you wanted to be? No, I don't think so.

Didn't you want to be a daddy? And then the dad really felt foolish. Oh yeah, that's what I wanted to be more than anything. And that's what I love being more than anything else.

I love being your dad. Dads, that's what's wrong with us sometimes. When people ask us what we are or what we do, we think of our jobs.

And our work is important. But God has given us something even more important than this or that job. He's made us dads.

[4:19] And being a dad is much more important to our children than whether we're a publisher or a preacher or anything else that we might be. And being a dad is important, period.

Especially to our children. And it's important because as a father, we are telling our children about God. So fathers, I want you to think about something here for a moment.

Before you ever were a father, there was a heavenly father from whom all fathers derive their names. So before you were a father, he was a father.

So you're both fathers. And what your children see in you, for better or for worse, says something about God. God the Father.

And so we're either telling the truth or we're telling lies to our children. In the way that we live and what we say. So a man who's too busy for conversation or to listen to his kids says that God is too busy to listen to their prayers.

[5:33] But a father who listens to his children pour out their hearts to him says that there's a heavenly father who delights in the prayers of his people.

A man who abuses his children and is cruel to them says that God is cruel. But a father who loves and protects and builds up his children says that there's a heavenly father who desires what's best for them.

A man who constantly makes demands of his children but doesn't encourage them says that God has an endless list of demands himself.

And all he's interested in is getting us to do these things. But a father who encourages his children says that God himself is the great encourager and a great helper.

A man who makes no demands of his children says something about God. Says that God himself has no demands.

[6:40] He's a marshmallow with no expectations, no direction for what he wants done. But a father who expects to be obeyed and instructs in obedience and disciplines disobedience says that there's a heavenly father who loves, instructs, and disciplines the ones that he loves.

A man who's constantly angry says that God is a grump. And he holds grudges. But a father who is slow to anger and quick to love and abounding in that kind of love says that there's a heavenly father who himself is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love.

A man who doesn't instruct his children says that God isn't concerned about truth. He doesn't care what you do. He doesn't care what you believe. He doesn't care what you think. But a father who trains and instructs his children biblically says that the heavenly father prizes that.

Prizes our minds. It's important that we believe truth. And he wants you to know that truth. A man who's unreliable.

A man who's unreliable and doesn't do what he promises says that God is untrustworthy. And a father who comes through when it counts says that there's a heavenly father who comes through for his children when it counts.

[8:14] So dads, what, who you are, and in a lot of ways is your child's first picture of what God is like.

And so you are doing theology every day. You're teaching theology. You're teaching about God.

And so in your life, you're preaching. You're preaching.

What are you saying? What message, what messages are your children hearing? And as we've gone through that, we could say, fathers, we have sinned, haven't we?

We have not adequately reflected our father. He's been one way. And in a lot of ways, we've been in another way.

And so we've sinned. And so we can thank the Lord that Jesus died for sinners like us. That people who, men like us, that we can find forgiveness.

[9:19] Now, we can't undo the past. You can't make the last year happen or the last 10 years of your fathering just suddenly. You can't start that over, but you can repent.

You can repent. You can turn away. And you should repent. And Jesus offers. He encourages repentance because there he is.

There's a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And there you can find cleansing. And there you can find power to live a new life, to be something that you haven't been.

And so when God calls a man to repent and to die to that past, he's not calling him to total death, but to embrace life and embrace Jesus Christ and all that Jesus can make us.

And so we have sinned. Being a father is important. And that's why Paul's instructions in Ephesians 6-4 is so valuable.

[10:20] Today we talked about, this morning we talked about children honoring your fathers and your mothers. Now, Paul and God himself understands that that's a difficult task.

And there is something that we as fathers can do to help our children obey. And we shouldn't just have gone away from that sermon saying, yeah, my children need to obey.

But Paul goes on in Ephesians and he gives a word to fathers, fathers and mothers, about how we can help our children.

How we can make that honor and that obedience easier for them. And so fathering is important. Our children need us to hear this word.

So let's look at Ephesians 6-4. This is fathers. And that fathers could mean fathers and mothers together.

[11:22] I think the emphasis, though, would be on literal fathers. I think fathers have more of an inclination to be irritating and to cause anger in their children than mothers do.

But it is talking to both parents. And Paul's talking to an entire congregation. And so this is a word that we all need to hear.

And so what does he say? Paul says, Ephesians 6-4, fathers, do not exasperate your children.

That's as far as we're going to go tonight. Fathers, do not exasperate your children.

One commentator said this word exasperates. It carries the idea of not angering them to rebellion.

Paul's not saying never make your children angry.

After a properly administered spanking, children might be angry. But that's not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about a deep-seated bitterness, a deep-seated irritation, frustration, anger that's itching to rebel.

[12:34] Yeah, it might conform to your rules. It might conform to your leadership on the outside for a time. But inside, anger and frustration and bitterness and disappointment and even hatred is bubbling up.

It's working itself into their hearts. And sooner or later, rebellion is going to happen. It's going to come out. It's like 1776 in the colonies.

The colonists were tired of being pushed around. They were tired of not being heard. They were tired of being forced into doing things, of having soldiers into their houses without being asked.

They were tired of the unfairness. And it was a powder keg. It was a bomb ready to go off. And then it went off. Dads, Paul is saying, don't turn your children into powder kegs.

Don't turn your children into ticking time bombs. And don't think that just because they're under your thumb, that you have their hearts.

[13:47] You could be winning the battle and losing the war. You could wake up 15 years from now on the ash heap of a battle.

Tears. And have lost everything. You had it all together for so long, but all of a sudden it blew up in your face.

Paul says, men, you've got to think about their hearts. You have to think about their hearts. So be careful. Don't exasperate them.

Don't embitter them, Colossians says. So how do we do that? My purpose for this evening is to give us, Father, some ways that we do that so that we can examine ourselves.

So how do we do this? I put together a top ten list. It's not everything, but it covers most things, I think. So this is the top ten ways. If you want to exasperate your children, then do these things.

[14:50] Examine yourself, men. Examine yourself. Examine yourself. Put yourself under the microscope. You might be okay in one area. You might not be okay in another area.

You might think that you have all this covered. And if you do, I'd encourage you to ask your children. Ask your wife. Try to see what God's seen in your hearts.

What's God seen in your life? So top ten ways to exasperate your children. Number one, forget that they're children. Forget they are children.

You want to exasperate them. Expect them to act like adults. Don't allow any silliness, childishness, clumsiness, bad ideas, playful, silly ideas.

Expect your teenagers to act like full-grown adults. Expect them to. And I understand. We have to expect our teenagers to grow up.

[15:49] And we're going to get to that. But don't expect a 13-year-old to act like a 27-year-old or a 40-year-old. Don't let them be kids.

John Gill, the old Baptist preacher of the 17th century, he comes across to me as a very serious guy. But I found he surprised me here. He said something very surprising.

And you expect these old types to be sort of dour and so serious and perhaps so serious and highfalutin, so exalted that they don't do anyone good. But Gill surprised me.

On this verse, fathers, do not exasperate your children. He said one of the ways that fathers can do this and they can embitter their children is by not letting them play enough.

Not letting them play. So fathers, does it all work and no play? Watch out. You could be winning the battle and losing the war. Number two.

[16:50] So number one was expect them to act like adults. Forget they are children. Number two, don't let them grow up. Don't let them grow up.

So this is the other side. The opposite of the first. We can err on one side and we can err on the other side. So we're good at falling into ditches. So we want to cover both. How can you exasperate your children?

Overprotect them. Don't let them grow up. Fence them in. Suffocate them. Deny them all freedom. Never trust them.

That's a sure way to lead a child into frustration. And so dads and moms, we need to have a plan for liberty for them. We need to have a direction.

We want them to grow up. Growing up is a good thing. Them becoming independent is a good thing. And so we want a direction for them. And we want to see that direction. And then we also want them to know that we see it.

[17:49] And we want to point it out to them so that we're on the same track. I understand you want to be independent. I understand that. That's good. Let me show you the way. And that means we can't always bail them out.

If they fall, let them experience the pain of picking themselves up. That's part of what it means to just respect them as persons.

That's part of what it means to respect them as people made in God's own image who are responsible for their own lives. And so let them grow up.

Maybe your kids are out of your house. So they're married now. And you have the empty nest. Not letting them have their liberty. Being too intrusive in their lives.

Is another way that you can exasperate your older children. You aren't their primary family anymore. And so moms and dads, we need to, as we get older, and I recognize I'm not here at this stage by any stretch, but we need to be the flexible ones to recognize the new spiritual reality that they have left mom and dad, and they have joined themselves to another.

[19:09] And that's good.

That's right. That's biblical. That's godly. That's God's idea. And so let them grow up. Number three, never ask for forgiveness.

Never ask for forgiveness. A dad who can't say, I'm sorry, I sinned against you. Will you please forgive me?

That dad thinks he's better than what he is. There is only one father who never has to ask for forgiveness. And you ain't it.

And your kids know it. Your kids know it. And so when we don't ask for forgiveness, we're saying, I haven't sinned against you.

[20:10] I haven't hurt you. I, I'm perfect and you're not. And that kind of self-righteousness will breed bitterness. And it will breed bitterness like maggots on rotten meat.

If you have that rotten meat of self-righteousness, bad stuff's going to happen. It's going to come out. Dads, there's nothing like asking forgiveness, for forgiveness, to win your child's heart.

And I can say that from experience. There's nothing like saying, I've sinned against you. Will you please forgive me? To win their hearts.

Because it's as sinners that we really start to relate to one another. When I'm good and you're not, well, we can't have a relationship. But when I admit, you know what?

I'm a sinner and I need forgiveness just like you. We both need grace. And so here we are, sinners needing forgiveness. Ask your children for that kind of forgiveness.

[21:15] Don't lose their hearts because you're proud. Don't lose their hearts because of your pride. Number four, how to exasperate your children. Keep changing the rules.

Keep changing the rules. Inconsistent discipline. Rules that are enforced one day, not enforced another. So what would you think if you drove the same way to work every day and the same stretch of the road, the speed limit changed three times a week?

So one day you're going 50 and you're fine. And the next day you're going 50 and you get a ticket because you were speeding. And then the next day you see the sign back up there at 50 again.

What would you say? You would say, what's wrong with them? What's wrong? What's going on there? I never know if I'm doing what I'm supposed to or not. I never know if what I'm doing is right.

And you certainly wouldn't win their trust. They couldn't rely on you because your rules are all over the place and the enforcement of it is all over the place. So fathers, you want your children's hearts. [22 : 20] Then enforce those rules consistently. Number five, how to exasperate your children. Make more rules. Make more rules.

Every time a situation comes up, make another rule. Make rules for this and rules for that. Never say, let's think about a principle. Let's think about wisdom. Let's think about how what we've said over here applies to that. But just make more rules. Lay down more law. And make your child's life a minefield. That they're always stepping on something. That is what the Pharisees did. Half of Jesus' ministry was saying, you Pharisees put great burdens on the people's backs. And I'm here to give them freedom. I'm taking those things off. Yes, there is a need for rules. I'm not saying otherwise. But if your solution is always, I'll fix that problem with another rule. [23 : 26] More guidelines. More you have to do this. Do that. Do that. And you're not going for their heart. Then you can expect rebellion. Expect bitterness.

Expect that frustration and anger that Paul is talking about. Number six. Discipline them harshly. Discipline them harshly.

In the Roman world, fathers had full and total legal authority over their children. To such an extent, the children, are you listening to me?

I want you to listen to this, children. That fathers could exercise and use capital punishment on their children. That means fathers could put to death their own children.

And it was completely legal. So children, every morning you should wake up and you should thank God that you don't live in old Rome.

[24 : 27] Discipline could be harsh. It could be very harsh. And that's what makes Paul such a breath of fresh air into that world.

Fathers, don't exasperate your children. Don't embitter them with harsh discipline. So Rome works one way. God's kingdom works another way.

Dads, is your discipline Roman? Harsh? Cruel? Angry? Or is it God-like?

God disciplines the ones he loves. And behind every stroke is a heart that is in love with his children. That is all for them. And so, disciplining them harshly.

Over time, you might cow them at first. You might make them afraid at first. But eventually, the bitterness and the rebellion will come out. Number seven, be a hypocrite.

[25 : 30] Be a hypocrite. Tell them not to do something and then do it yourself. Don't let them watch that TV show because it's bad, but watch something just as bad yourself.

And as they get older, they will see that hypocrisy. And it won't make obedience easier. It won't make honoring Dad easier. When he does one thing and he's telling me another thing. And sooner or later, it will just end up with them saying, What does it even matter? What you're saying to me doesn't matter. It can't be true.

If it was true, you would do differently. And they won't think twice about walking away. So, number seven, be a hypocrite. Number eight, be emotionally distant.

Be emotionally distant. Fathers, if I could give you a homework assignment. Or just something to notice as you're reading and as you're taking time in God's Word.

[26 : 33] Look and notice how Paul speaks to the churches. Yes, sometimes he has some pretty strong things to say. But even in those cases, he is very warm and affectionate toward them.

He writes to the church in Corinth. You have 10,000 teachers, but not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus, I became your father through the gospel.

So, he's saying a lot of people want to teach you. They want to be in charge. They want to stand in front. They have things to say. But you don't have very many fathers. And I'm a father. And I love you.

Paul exudes affection. So, maybe you're saying, I'm not like that. I'm not an exuberant person. I understand that. I understand we have different temperaments and different personalities. But this is the beauty of the gospel. This is the beauty of having the power of the Holy Spirit in us. We can be what we aren't by nature. We can be godly.

[27 : 42] We can be spirit-empowered. And so, this is where you need God. This is where you need spiritual, supernatural help.

And it's a good thing that God has given us his very own spirit to live within us. It's a good thing that he's poured out his love into our hearts. You can change. You can grow.

You're attached to Jesus, the living vine. And that means what you are now does not decide what you can be. Your potential is Jesus Christ.

It's not what you are by nature or by your past. So, David said again and again, read the Proverbs.

He said again and again, my son, my son, give me your hearts.

We want our kids, our children's hearts. Give me your heart. Parents, fathers, we can't take their hearts from them.

[28 : 40] We can't force and grab their heart and make them love us. They have to give it to us. And so he says, give me your heart. Win them then.

Win them with your affection. Win them with your exuberant love. Over the top love. So that's number eight. Be emotionally distant.

Number nine. Have a favorite. You want to exasperate, anger, frustrate your child, your children. Have a favorite.

Isaac favored Esau. And Rebecca favored Jacob. And for all intents and purposes, it destroyed their family.

Nearly destroyed them completely. So have a favorite. Number ten. And this is the last. Don't give them the gospel. Don't give them the gospel.

[29 : 43] Moms and dads. What encourages you? What refreshes you?

What makes obedience easier for you? What makes glorifying God easier? And something that you want to do? What fills your heart with joy?

And so you could say the joy of the Lord is my strength. Well, isn't it the good news of Jesus Christ?

So are you drinking from the gospel?

Moms and dads, I have this question. Are you drinking from the gospel, but forgetting to give it to your own children? Imagine that you're on a long hike with your family.

And it's hot. It's July. You're on summer vacation and you're hiking somewhere and it's hot and it's difficult. But you brought along Gatorade.

[30 : 45] And it has the sugar and the water and the sodium and all those electrolytes they're talking about. And when you get tired, you, there you are, dad.

There you are, mom. And you get tired and you're hot and you're sweaty and you're wearing down and you take the cap off and you drink a big drink of it. And with a sigh, you keep on walking.

But then you notice your child there, he or she is struggling and starting to complain and saying, I'm hot. I'm tired. Can we quit?

And you turn to them and say, keep up. We got to keep going on. You have to finish what you started. That's what we got to do. You have to do that. And so they struggle on.

And sometime later, you get hot again and you get tired again. And and you pull out your Gatorade and you have another big, long drink and it puts new life in your step and you're ready to go.

[31 : 48] And the end is, you know, it's you're refreshed. You're ready. But then you look back and on the trail, your child, your children are back there 50 yards. And as they're coming up, you can start hearing the complaint chorus going on.

I want to go back. I'm dying. I'm thirsty. Can we go home? And you say it doesn't matter. Forget how you feel.

Be hardy. In our family, we always say God's little girl is hardy and God's little girl is hardy. But do you see what's wrong with the picture?

You're able to go on because you're drinking the Gatorade. But when your children get tired and thirsty and they're having a hard time obeying and they're struggling and they're frustrated, if you're just saying we got to keep going on, we got to keep trying harder.

But we don't give them the Gatorade. Aren't we expecting? More from them than we are of ourselves. And parents, we can do this and we can do it so easily.

[33 : 00] The gospel encourages us. And we find hope in the promises of God and the grace of God and the goodness of God. But we do have the tendency, and it's so much easier, to just say to our children, do this or do that.

More, you need to obey. But if we never give them the good news, then we aren't refreshing them. We aren't reviving them. We aren't telling them the good news that there is a Savior that loves sinners.

That loves sinners who are struggling. That Jesus, we saw that even this morning, he lived a life that no child could live. He lived a life that no teenager lived. He obeyed and he did it so that he would have this perfect righteousness to give to people like us who sin, who disobey, who struggle, who don't want to go on, who complain. And then he took upon himself our sin. And he paid that debt in full. That there's a Savior that loves sinners. And now he's willing to have people come to him. [34 : 21] And he'll save them. There's a Father in heaven who's willing to open up his arms and bring people in. All who will trust in Jesus, he will save. And he'll do them good and help them if they'll repent.

But if we try to just motivate with orders and forget the gospel, and that's the key, we forget the gospel, then we're expecting them to do the hiking without the Gatorade. We'll drink from it, but we think they can live on law alone. Now, fathers, when was the last time you told good news to your children? When was the last time you said, you know what, I have some good news to tell? And not in a way that you're beating them down, but in a way that says, you know what, this is good. This is, I have good news and it's for you. I hope you're doing it every time that there's a session of discipline. That's especially appropriate. But more than just then, tell them all about Jesus who loved sinners, who received children. [35 : 31] Tell them about how good God's law is and how wonderful it is to be walking in his paths. And that just makes it so bad that we've actually broke that law.

That God's been good to us and he's given it and we've said, no, I know a better way. And we break it. But then tell them how good it is that Jesus died for people like that. And that they can be right with God now by faith and not by works. And that you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to clean yourself up to be accepted. You can come freely as you are, sinful, guilty to Jesus and receive a righteousness. That's flawless. That's flawless. That's flawless. You can be accepted through him. Tell them about the goodness of God, the grace of God. And tell them there's a God that's a better father than I'll ever be. You know, I try to be a good father, but he he's a perfect father. And. And. They need to hear that. You know, our souls, our hearts get dry and parched. [36 : 41] So do theirs. And so be a rain cloud. Be a thunderstorm. Pour down the goodness, the grace of God.

Refresh their hearts with the gospel. And you could say, but but they aren't. But they aren't believers. They aren't believers. They don't believe. So. And my question would be, how can they believe what they have not heard? And then my other question be, why would they believe if you're not presenting it to them as good news? So be a thunderstorm, be a flood, give them grace. Yes. So fathers, how do you become that kind of father that encourages his children, that builds them up, that refreshes them, that that blesses them? Maybe you're dry yourself. I understand that. I mean, we all go through that. You're dry yourself. I can't be a thunderstorm because I'm a desert. [37 : 43] I'm a dirt cloud blowing in the breeze. I can't refresh them. How could I ever bless them? Well. I'll tell you how.

Look at how your father loves you. Revel in his goodness. You know what I mean by that? I mean, write it down. Write it down. All the blessings he's done. Think about it. Think about all the things that he's done for you. And revel in the goodness of his rules. You know, it's not a bad thing to have God's law. It's a good thing. And his wisdom is there and his goodness and his love is there. His paths are paths of delight. Because he is good. Revel in the goodness of his mercy. And his patience. And his kindness. And his provision. He hasn't blessed you a little. He's given you everything in Christ. He's made you an heir of all things. He's not small hearted. [38 : 43] He's big hearted. Think about that yourself. Revel in his gospel love for you. So turn off the TV, dads. And pray over the promises of God until they're warm in your heart.

You know, we have to get that truth. And we have to knead it into our own hearts. And sometimes the dough is stiff. But you've got to keep at it until our hearts are warm.

So turn off the TV. Take time praying over God's promises. Not because God needs that service. Not because that's the good thing to do.

But because you need him. There's a fountain filled with fresh water. Why wouldn't you go and enjoy it? You need to have some Gatorade before you give some Gatorade.

You need to have the love of God dwelling in your heart. The word of Christ dwelling in you richly before it will come out to others. And so fathers, I'm saying get near the cross.

[39 : 44] Stay near the cross. The path of Godliness and God likeness in fathering. It goes through the cross. It lives at the cross.

It stays at the cross. And men, we've sinned. We aren't the fathers that God wants us to be. And so let's go to the cross now and find pardon, forgiveness, and power.

So when we're there before Christ and thinking about how he has loved us and he's provided us an eternal inheritance.

Let's fill up our hearts with the love of God. And then we'll be able to love our children. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you are good and you are kind. And the best of us falls so far short of how good you are. I pray that you would teach us your ways.

[40 : 56] Help us to walk in your paths. Help us to follow your example. Let us find warmth and life in your love and communion and fellowship with you.

That so we as men could take on the likeness of you, our God. Thank you for changing us.

I pray that you would change us more and more. Thank you that we do have good news for our children. It's good for them. They need to hear it.

And I pray that we would be the ones who are so enthusiastic and encouraging and wanting to bless them.

And that we would be overflowing fountains ourselves of the grace of God. Because we have experienced it so deeply in our own lives. Pray that you would forgive us of our sins.

[41 : 57] Forgive us of our selfishness, especially. Our selfishness as we have lived with our children and with our wives. That we've thought about our own comfort.

And we've thought about our own problems. And we've let our idols and our dreams consume us. And there they are, our closest neighbors.

I pray that you would help us to love them as we love our own selves. Thank you for being a God that forgives sin. I pray that you would do so now.

Help all those who need to hear the gospel and to believe it and receive it. The grandeur and the greatness and the grace of Jesus Christ. That you would open their eyes and bring them in.

And it's in Christ's name I pray. Amen. Amen.