

Spirit Filled Parenting

Ephesians 6:1-4

“Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”

Hebrews 12:9

Introduction: Knowing that this section on parenting was coming up in our series, the Bakker’s decided to do some research regarding how modern families interact with their children. There is one hotbed of activity where this interaction is put on display: *Disneyland*. A day of overpriced fun that mixes high family with over stimulated kids hopped up on sugar, memories made with nightmares of overtired kids realized, and pictures taken with meltdowns to follow. The happiest place on earth reveals the irony of the joy of parenting: **parenting is hard**, and just like marriage, most are left unsure as to the purpose and goal of parenting beyond the temporal happiness of the moment.

As we continue to consider how the gospel of Jesus Christ and a Spirit filled life play out in all aspects, we turn our attention to **parenting**. Being a parent is a unique opportunity to rear, train, and ultimately release the next generation into the world to fulfill all that God has commanded. Every follower of Jesus is a disciple, which demands not only belief but consistent learning, and simultaneously a **disciple maker**, *calling others to follow Christ by faith and obey all that He commanded*. **The call to make disciples STARTS in the home, and every Christian parent is called to Christian education**, training up their children in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. In fact, what we are called to do in the church is simply mimic what goes on in the home. This is NOT anything new, but is exactly what Israel was called to do in the Old Testament. Consider **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**, and notice the progression of thought and action of parenting:

*“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ²that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³Hear therefore, O Israel, and **be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.***

⁴*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”.*

- **Godly parenting starts with Godly parents** – Parents are ones who have already been taught and have a healthy FEAR of the Lord
- **Godly parenting seeks for generational influence** – The hope is that our children and grandchildren will follow the example set for them. Notice the three promises given to Israel if they would be faithful: long days, well-being, and proliferation in the land

- **Godly parenting saturates with the love and knowledge of God** – Teaching and training are not relegated to a class in school or the professionals in the church, but ALL of life provides opportunity to teach our kids about the greatness and glory of God.

God's call to parents is not only consistent, it is not new. The reality is it takes commitment and hard work, but more than that, it takes parents who are yielded to the fear of Christ and who are filled with the Spirit to fulfill God's mandate. It is telling that in this section, the explanation of parenting is exceptionally short, with more words given to CHILDREN to obey. But what IS stated is packed full. In a world that proliferates books and resources on parenting, God gives us principles and guidelines so that we will walk BY FAITH, dependent on the Spirit and committed to the Word as our greatest resource. *What does Spirit filled parenting and childing (I know it's not a word) look like?*

Spirit Filled Responses of Children

Ephesians 6:1-3 – “Children, **obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** 2 “**Honor your father and mother**” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

The first thing to note about a section on parenting is the emphasis on **children**. The word *tekna* means “offspring”, which means that it is not indicating babies or infants but those who are old enough to understand the concepts of what was being communicated. Because the word has a broad range, it extends to all ages of being under a parent's authority and influence. There are two quick observations here: **1)** Once a child, always a child in terms of relationship to parents. Though the specific nature of the relationship changes, the reality of parent/child never does; **2)** All children have the ability to understand and respond to the gospel. Clearly he did not address infants here, but there is a point where our children have the Biblical expectation and responsibility as free standing moral agents to respond to what God has called them to. This is both exciting and sobering for parents and children alike.

- **Primary Mandate to Children: Obedience** – The word obedience literally means “to hear under”, which means to listen closely and respond positively to the instruction of their parents. Obedience is the fundamental response of every disciple to Jesus Christ, “**By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.**” (1 John 5:2-3) When we love Christ, it is no longer a burdensome duty to do what He says, but rather a joy, since we want to please Him and knowing that He wants what is best for us. When children are called to obey in THIS CONTEXT (the same as wives and husbands), they are not called to a slavish response but a joyful choice, a volitional desire to follow. This is NOT our innate or default setting, so this would absolutely necessitate a new heart and mind in the gospel. Any child in here this morning who is living under the roof of their parents home, take this as your primary call if your desire is to please the Lord. Seek to obey your parents willingly and joyfully without complaint. If the question is “why”, the next part of the verse answers that.
- **Primary Motivation for Children: Please the LORD** – Notice a consistent thread throughout these verses on interpersonal relationships: we submit to one another out of *reverence or fear for Christ* (5:21); Wives submit to their husbands *as to the Lord* (5:22); Husbands love their wives just as *Christ does His church* (5:25); Children obey *in the Lord* (1); Fathers instruct *of the Lord* (4); workers work *to the Lord* (7); we are to be strong *in the Lord* (10). Do you see a distinct pattern? When we believe in Christ as our Savior, our eyes are opened to the fact that He is our

Lord and Master, which means our lives are His and we are His servants. We cannot earn anything with Him since He forgave our sin and gave us His righteousness by dying in our place on the cross. Since our lives are not our own our greatest delight is to please our Master. That is why our motive to obey parents is because “**it is right**”. Obedience to parents IS obedience to the Lord, and disobedience to them signals a defiance and rebellion against Him.

- **Ongoing Mission for Children: Honor** – We do not often use the word “honor” much since at its core honoring has to be selfless. But when we honor someone, we *count them as valuable, to revere the person and respect their wishes and input*. The call to honor father and mother is sourced in the 10 Commandments, and equates obedience with honoring, where anyone who strikes his mother or father should be put to death (Exodus 21:15, 17) and those who would dishonor mom and pop would be cursed (Deut. 27:16). Paul reminds that in this 5th **Commandment** there was a POSITIVE promise attached (the first of the 10 with such a promise) of long life and well being in the land of promise (which we also saw in Deut. 6). Though that promise is NOT a one for one promise to us since we are NOT in the Promised Land now, there is a general promise of well being and blessing for children who honor their parents. Let’s consider what **honor looks like for a moment**.

Though there will be a time where a child no longer is under his parents direct authority (though that was different in Paul’s time where the Father was the *Patria Potestas* and had absolute say in a child’s life, from discipline to death, from making decisions to selling them into slavery), there will NEVER be a time that we do not seek to **honor our parents**. My dad taught me this while I was in college. I chose to go to a wedding with a girlfriend (who ended up being my wife) instead of travelling to a cousins wedding. Sensing that I was blowing him off, he WROTE me a letter stating that though I no longer had to OBEY him (since he commissioned me as a man to leave his home), I always needed to honor him, to count his counsel as valuable. He was right and taught me a clear lesson in honoring the Lord. There is no major decision in life that I do not seek his counsel, and no piece of advice that I do not consider deeply.

The **second way** we honor is by **caring for our parents**. If a believer does not provide for his relatives and especially his own household, “*he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*” (1 Tim. 5:8). This kind of care is costly, uncomfortable, life-altering, and right. It’s been a delight to watch so many in this church take care of parents in old age, a full circle of responsibility, and something the Lord honors and the world watches.

So the call for children is a call to us all who have parents, and we all are called to obey our Father with joy and gladness. But what about the call to parents? That is what Paul addresses next in a power packed sentence.

Spirit Filled Influence of Parents

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

When the world moved from a largely agrarian culture, where large families would stay together and generations would stay close, to an industrialized one, parenting got much more complex. Consider the numbers. The total number of hours a typical church child spends in church over a calendar year is **47**. The number of hours of **social media** a teen will intake is **2,555 hours a year**, and the amount of time in school for 180 days in a year is **1350 hours**. The amount of time a dad spends in face to face

conversation with his child in a day is less than **15 minutes**, which equates to **41 hours a year**.¹ This not only illustrates the great need of intentionality for parents, but also what we are up against.

Notice that both parents were addressed in verse 2, but only father's here in verse 4. Though both parents have responsibility to rear children, and these commands of verse 4 extend to both, it is significant that only fathers are addressed. Husbands are given ultimate responsibility for the whole family, so fathers have a unique opportunity in training up their children. The first command is **negative** followed by two **positive ones**. A Spirit filled father should be distinct from the rest of culture and should emulate his heavenly Father in the relationship with his children.

1. **Do Not Exasperate Your Children** – The word used here is translated to “provoke to anger”, or build resentment and frustration. In **Colossians 3:21** it says, *‘do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.’* This is more than telling bad dad jokes and annoying your kids (which we can all admit is our God given joy and responsibility!) This is a refusal to care for the heart and mind of your child, to lack a pointing to Christ, and leaving your child with a negative view of parents and ultimately God Himself. *But what are ways that we can provoke our kids to anger?*

Overprotection – Today this is called “helicopter” parenting, which means instead of preparing our kids for the hard road ahead, one tries to keep them away from any hard thing. It's bailing our kids out of every jam, blaming others for their misbehavior, and not trusting them to take responsibility for their actions. At its core, overprotection is parenting out of **fear**, trying to play the role that only God can play in their lives. I grew up in a highly conservative church and had many of my friends whose parents kept them away from “the world”, not allowing them to interact with anything *bad*, trying their best to shelter them from the ills of the world. What they produced were weird, socially stunted kids who rebelled HARD from their parents, the Lord, the church, etc. Though well intentioned, it backfired. Parenting is **like a funnel** (if you can picture one in your mind), where we start with the small opening, giving our kids few and narrow decisions at first as they mature and grow in their ability to understand. As they grow, so does our entrusting to them to make decisions and take responsibility, especially in light of failure, until we reach the large opening of the funnel where they are ready to leave our care and authority. It's one of the hardest things as a parent, to watch our kids get hurt (both by skinning their knee and having people treat them poorly) and to make poor decisions. But our goal is to get them ready for the road, to walk in wisdom, to make decisions consistent with Biblical truth, and to the honor of the Lord.

Focusing on Achievement over Character – We live in a day of *therapeutic moralistic deism*, which believes that the main thing people need is to **feel good about themselves, to be ‘good’, and that God is there but only to help us achieve the first two goals**. In his book *“The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self”* (a book I'd highly recommend to anyone trying to understand children/teens/college students today), Carl Trueman pointed out that in this therapeutic vein, the commitment of parents and children is the **self and is inwardly focused**. Institutions like schools and churches are no longer viewed as places where character is formed but are now *platforms for performing*, as children get to be their “authentic selves” by focusing on their own performance. Winning is paramount, my child's part in the play or ability to achieve in the classroom is MOST IMPORTANT, the teacher is always wrong, and my child is the focal point. Any roadblock to achievement is not seen as an opportunity to learn life lessons but to be removed, cancelled, or fired. We see this growing in schools of all expressions, as teachers

¹ Dr. Alan Pue, *“Rethinking Discipleship: Why Christian School Matters”*, p. 75.

and administration is no longer assumed to be right or given the benefit of the doubt, but the child is seen as “right”, always believed, and the final arbiter. This will stunt our kids and leave them frustrated as they can never live up to the **expectations of their parents**, but get burned out of the activity without the opportunity to learn the valuable life lessons.

Lack of Encouragement – We are built and wired to receive encouragement from those we love and those who love us. God loves us, and lets us know, not withholding this information in demonstration or verbalization. God *demonstrates* His love through Christ’s death (Rom. 5:8), giving Himself up for us (Gal. 2:20), and *disciplines* us (Heb. 12:6). He tells us He loves us (John 3:16), loving us the way the Father loves Christ (John 15:9), calling us His friends (John 15:14). Parents and fathers can provoke or exasperate their kids by NEVER or RARELY telling their kids that they are loved, appreciated, and known. Talk is certainly cheap with parents who do not back this up with action (which also provokes), but we need to give our kids the same thing God gives us freely.

Failure to Correct/Confront – On the flip side of this previous issue, we can neglect our responsibility to correct our kids. When they are young, we instill discipline in terms of reminding them to obey when their default setting is to disobey. **Proverbs 13:24 says**, *“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”* In fact, God demonstrates His love for us BY disciplining us (Heb. 12:8), and *“for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”* (Heb. 12:11). If we love our kids, we are willing to discipline, even inflicting proper pain without anger, to be able to correct, remind, and exemplify the gospel. When parents think that love is giving in to their kids or giving them everything they want, or when parents do not bring consequence to clear defiance and disobedience, we are actually setting them up for failure and demonstrating a lack of love.

This is especially seen in the parenting of prominent OT characters like **Eli, the priest of Israel**. Eli was given the responsibility of spiritual care over a nation but failed miserably in his own home (which is a main disqualifier of pastors/elders). His main failure was to properly discipline his sons who were “fattening themselves with the choicest parts of every offering made to the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:29). God indicted Eli because he chose to “honor his sons above the Lord”, and Eli KNEW his sons were blaspheming God “and **he did not restrain them**” (1 Sam. 3:13). Because of this, Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day, Eli would die, and his house would be punished forever. A failure to discipline our kids leaves our children frustrated and angry in the future. We must never choose the temporal happiness of our kids over their welfare for the future.

Focus on Moralism over Grace – Children are called to obey ultimately from the heart, and we seek to shepherd their heart toward the Lord. Moralism seeks to conform our kids externally only, most often because of our own insecurities as a parent, wanting to feel better that our kids are doing well. Giving grace to our children means we are willing to discipline, but we do so to help them understand what God would have for them and how obedience is better. Grace is willing to **listen, to seek to understand, and to guide**. Grace is the pathway to our child’s heart. **Paul Tripp said**, *“The parent is the child’s guide. The shepherding process helps a child to understand himself and the world in which he lives. The parent shepherds the child to understand not just the ‘what’ of the child’s actions, but the ‘why’.* As a shepherd you want to help your child understand himself as a creature made by and for God.”² When we simply focus on the “what”, we leave our children frustrated and resentful, seeing our discipline as an expression of anger and disappointment, not correction and training.

² Tedd Tripp, *“Shepherding a Child’s Heart”*, xix.

Verbal or Physical Abuse – Though discipline is important, there is no place for physical abuse in parenting. Anytime there is a reaction out of **anger or lack of self-control**, be it verbal or physical, it will exasperate your child. Discipline must always be done in a measured and clear way, always under control. In fact, whenever we get to the point of having to yell or scream at our kids it's a signal we have already missed the opportunity. Demeaning, passive-aggressively criticizing, and disparaging our kids will draw a direct line to anger and frustration.

How do children thrive in our homes? When we are **consistent in our love for them** by being firm and consistent in discipline, and having standards that don't change day to day, mood to mood, or emotion to emotion, we create an environment for thriving. When a father leads out in discipline and training (which we'll talk about next week) and where parents demonstrate proper affection for each other and the kids, children will know they are loved and can rest. When parents spend time together and with their kids, not out of duty or mere activity, but to show them what it looks like walk with Christ, children will be able to catch even more than they are taught. When Christ is the central figure, when God's sovereign love and grace is made much of in every facet and aspect of life, not just in formal Bible study, children will know the greatness of God in Jesus Christ. Parenting is not complicated, but it is hard. Now more than ever, children need parents who are engaged, present, and willing to do the hard work of discipline and instruction in the Lord. That is such an important topic we'll save it for next week.

2. **Guide Your Child Through Discipline**
3. **Warn Your Child Through Instruction**