

Ephesians 6:1-4 — Ancient Wisdom For The Modern Family

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Good morning CrossWinds. If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. A few weeks ago, I was talking with a new family at church. They had no idea who I am married to. They were guessing which of the worship team members it might be. Thankfully, they didn't think I was married to Clay, the man who sings bass. I thought it would be good to start this morning by resolving this mystery and Introducing you to my family.

David — He is my oldest. He just graduated from Spirit Lake High School. He is heading to Northwestern College in Orange City in the fall. He likes to wrestle, lift weights and specializes in



picking on his sister. We are excited about the new chapter in his life he is about to begin. We are very proud of him.

Deanna — She is in front of me of this photo wearing the red sweater. She is our bubbly girl that can't get a smile off her face. If you need a little encouragement, Deanna can give it to you. She enjoys gymnastics, dance and softball. She also loves babies and practices caring for them by volunteering in the church nursery. She loves to drag her mother with her for a little mother-daughter time around the babies. I am sure she will be a great mother. She's also a good babysitter. Yes, that is a shameless plug to help with her college fund.

Cindy — She is my lovely wife. As you can tell, I married up, way up. She is the secret that keeps our family running. Without her, there wouldn't be much of a home. She loves her kids and is patient with me. I can't brag on her enough.

Daniel — Daniel is my middle child. He is the sharp looking guy on the right side of the photo. He will be a sophomore in the fall. Like his brother, he is a wrestler. He is also the family comedian, and he keeps us laughing with his tricks and humor.

As a father, I am proud of my wife and kids.

As a church, we are studying our way through the book of Ephesians. We are in the last half of the book where Paul told us how we are to live our lives in gratitude to God for saving us through Jesus. In this last part of Ephesians, where we are at this morning, he talked about relationships. He talked about marriage and the relationship between a husband and wife. He talked about family and the relationship between parents and their children. He talked about work and the relationship between an employer and an employee. Today, we are in Ephesians 6:1-4 where we are looking at the family and the relationship between parents and their children. The question for the day is, "How does Jesus change my home?"

Paul divided his teaching into two parts: How do I honor Christ as a child?
How do I honor Christ as a parent?

How do I honor Christ as a child?

Obey my parents.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Ephesians 6:1 (ESV)

That is pretty straightforward. All of us expect this. As I studied it, I began wondering about the word *children*. At what age do children gain independence? At what age should a child feel he or she no longer has to obey his or her parents?

In the Greek, the word for *children* means children in the home. In ancient society, this typically meant children up to 20 years of age. The biblical dividing line between being under your parents' authority and under your own authority is typically marriage. When a child marries, he leaves his parent's family unit and starts his own family.

One of the questions we wrestle with is what should we do about teenagers and young adults? They can drive. They are in college. They are considered adults by society. They can vote. They are not married. They are not financially independent. How much authority should mom and dad have in their lives?

When it comes to teenagers in that awkward middle stage of independence yet dependence, I like the term *limited-sovereignty*. While your teenagers may technically be adults, if you are still supporting them, if they are eating from your refrigerator, if they are sleeping in your basement, if you are paying their cell phone bills and co-signing for their college loans that means they have limited sovereignty. They have independence but not complete independence. You

have the right as parents to still make some calls in their lives. They should do their best to obey you.

Every teenager goes through this struggle with his or her parents.

Teenagers, while you are growing independent, it is still important to obey your parents, especially if you love Jesus.

Obedience of children to their parents is akin to obedience to God.

Paul talked about children obeying their parents “in the Lord.” Children that disobey parents are not just rebelling against their parents, they are rebelling against God, who put their parents in their lives as an authority figure.

Teenagers, the culture around you encourages rebellion against your parents.

Christian teenagers are to stand out from the crowd because they honor God by obeying their parents. Christian teenagers, expect your lives will be very different from your peers. Your friends will disobey their parents. They will get joy out of disobedience. Rebellion is at the core of the sinful nature. You are to be different.

Will your parents be perfect in everything they ask you to obey them on?

No. Will they make requests you don’t understand or agree with? Of course!

They are not perfect. Do your absolute best to obey them anyway. Why do you do this? Obeying your parents is honoring to God.

Obedience of children to their parents is just plain right.

A child disobeying his or her parents is just plain wrong. A parent’s job is to raise his or her children to be successful in the world for Jesus. To that end, parents sacrifice their lives hoping and praying their kids will succeed. I joke

around with my kids but I am actually serious. I have more money saved for their college educations than I have saved for myself. In our home, just like in yours, we will do anything to help our kids succeed. This is why children disobeying their parents is plain evil. The Bible doesn't mince words on this.

"Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. Exodus 21:15 (ESV)

"Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death. Exodus 21:17 (ESV)

Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols... 1 Samuel 15:23 (NLT)

The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. Proverbs 30:17 (ESV)

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents... Romans 1:29–30 (ESV)

Disobedience to parents caps off the list of what it means to live a depraved life apart from God, like a cherry on top of an ice cream sundae. Disobedience to parents is plain wrong and sinful. What about casual disobedience? What about ignoring your parents and not going out of your way for them? What about not honoring them?

Honor my parents.

"Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Ephesians 6:2–3 (ESV)

Honor means to treat someone with special respect and reverence. It means to give somebody a special position in your life. We do not typically honor people in our culture. Sometimes a man honors a lady by opening her car door.

We honor the president by standing when he walks into a room. The Bible tells us children must honor their parents.

What does it look like to honor my parents?

- **Give them the respect they deserve.** Mom and Dad deserve respect. One way we can do this is by always calling them Mom and Dad. I once worked with a teenager who called his parents by their first names. I remember working with him, and he weighed less than 100 pounds but called his father by his first name, “John.” “John. I need the car keys tonight.” I wanted to hit that kid like Rocky Balboa going for a knockout with Drago. That is your father, and he is the only one you have. Give him the respect he deserves. In every way possible, honor your parents. If you are a teenager at home, that means emptying the dishwasher for Mom, folding the laundry and putting your dirty dishes in the sink. It means loading the dishwasher. It means cleaning up your room. If your parents are sick, you go out of your way and sacrifice your freedoms to stay home and help them. Give them the respect they deserve. Make sure you give Mom and Dad a hug and kiss when you leave for school. Always tell them you love them. It is a matter of respect. It is a way you honor them.

- **Make time for them.** If you are a teenager at home, be interested in spending some time with your mom and dad, not just your friends. I know all about the busy life of a teenager. It is good for a kid to stretch his or her wings and leave the home. Just don’t kick your parents in the face on the way out the door. Ask your mother and father if you can go out to breakfast with them once in a while.

They will pay and you can order all the bacon you want. If you are out of the house, call them on the phone. Text them. I know some college-age kids who text their parents daily. They are not neurotic or codependent. They just want to honor their parents. It is not a huge conversation but just a little something to let Mom and Dad know you are there and thinking about them, just like you text your girlfriend or boyfriend.

- **Remember holidays, birthdays and anniversaries.** Honor your parents by remembering their mile markers. Remember Mother's Day and Father's Day. Remember their birthdays. Remember their anniversary. Do something special at Christmas and Easter. I look back on my life and this is one of the things I wish I did better. I missed many opportunities to honor my parents and give them the honor they deserve. Here is my big confession. My parents' 50th wedding anniversary came and went and I missed it. I had no idea they were married that long. I feel terrible about it to this day. I am so proud of my parents for staying together after all the tough stuff they went through. Not many couples make it to 50 years of marriage. I am proud of them and the example they set for me. I missed an opportunity to do my biblical job and honor them. Children, teenagers, young adults and the rest of us, don't miss a chance to honor your parents. Do the hallmark thing and send your mother a card. Dad doesn't really care about cards. Buy him a New York strip steak. He won't forget it. It is biblical.
- **Do your best.** One of the things I never expected about being a father is how much joy parents have when their children succeed. There is great joy in

watching your children on the athletic field, in the band or succeeding in academics in school. Even if your children aren't successful in everything they do, there is great joy in watching your children try their best and improve. Our family enjoys wrestling. We love to see our boys compete. I never realized how close the connection was between me and my sons until they stepped on the wrestling mat. When my boys go on the mat, I get so nervous I literally can not stand. My legs give out. I never felt that way when I wrestled. It is easier to handle the emotions of me wrestling than the connections I feel to my boys when they wrestle. I love watching my boys do their best. I love watching them learn and improve. I feel honored when they refuse to give up and they do their best.

- **Consider how your actions affect your family, not just yourself.** When I was in college, I had a college roommate that went crazy for car stereos. He had this little Toyota Corolla. In college, when he received his first credit card, he began buying Blaupunkt stereo equipment for this tiny car. We are not talking hundreds of dollars. We are talking thousands of dollars in stereo equipment for this little car. Driving around campus he would have brick buildings shaking from the sound coming out of his little Toyota. The stereo was worth more than the car. The problem is he bought it all on credit and had not idea how to pay for it. All of us told him he was nuts. I don't know what happened when he went home for summer break but I think it was probably ugly. His father bailed him out of the thousands of dollars on his credit card. He didn't come back the next semester. I felt bad for his parents. His greed

broken his father's heart and broke his father's savings account. It wasn't honoring to his parents.

What if my parents don't deserve respect? What if my parents yell? What if my parents get out of control? What if my parents are asking me to do things I don't agree with? To the best of your ability, you still honor them. The Bible doesn't say honor your parents only if they deserve it. It says honor your parents because they are your parents. Paul said this is the first commandment with a promise. What did he mean? It is the first commandment of the Ten Commandments that deals with human relationships. The Ten Commandments are given in Exodus 20. They are given a second time in Deuteronomy 5. Paul was quoting from the Deuteronomy passage which is slightly longer and has a promise with it. What are those promises?

God promises that dishonoring my parents will lead to my demise. The better job I do at honoring my parents, the more successful I will be in life. Dishonor your parents and you will suffer. It always cracks me up when I see a rebellious teenager who will not honor his parents or listen to his parents. The teenager is the one who suffers in the end for his own rebellion. That is a promise from God.

God promises that dishonoring my parents will lead to my early death. People who don't honor their parents won't last long. Nothing personal, just a promise from God that you will not live long and prosper if you dishonor your parents. You will die poor and young. That is a bad way to go.

How does this apply to adults with their aging parents?

While most of our emphasis is on young children, this command to honor our parents is not just about young children honoring and obeying parents but it is also about adult children honoring their aging parents. In the New Testament, Jesus chastised the Pharisees for attempt to circumvent God's clear command for adult children to honor their aging parents.

For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban" ' (that is, given to God)— then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.' Mark 7:10–13 (ESV)

We have a guy with a job. He has money. His parents are needy. They can barely make ends meet. There is no social security system. There are no government checks. Paying to support your aging parents is costly. What the young guy does is he makes a promise that when he dies, he will give his money to the synagogue. Since the money will technically be the synagogue's, the Pharisees wrote a rule saying people were released from their obligation to use their resources to care for their aging parents. While the young man is alive, he can do what he wants with his money and spend it on himself but the Pharisees said he was released from his obligation to take care of his aging parents. That would reduce the size his financial portfolio that he planned to give to the synagogue after he died.

Jesus said, "No way!" The greater obligation is to take care of your aging parents, not to line a future offering plate. Jesus said that honoring your father and mother is not just for kids. It is for adults. As adults, we have a responsibility before God to care for our aging parents.

This is very different from the way we live in American culture. Most aging parents go to a retirement home where the retirement home takes all your parents' money and children are never involved in their parent's life. There is nothing necessarily wrong with a retirement home. What often happens is adult children consign their parents to a retirement home so they can skip out of their responsibility to honor their aging parents and care for them. I do not believe that is the best way for adults to honor their aging parents.

How do adult children honor their aging parents? It may mean moving your aging parents into a portion of your home in a separate living space. It may mean you moving your parents near you so you can help care for them. It may mean you move closer to them to help them.

This is something I am wrestling with. What does it mean for me to honor my aging parents? There is no easy answer. They are elderly and living in Philadelphia. The one thing we know is that as adults, we are responsible to provide for our aging parents, even if it costs us.

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8 (ESV)

How do I honor Christ as a parent?

Don't provoke my children to anger.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger... Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)

This doesn't sound weird. It sounds pretty standard practice. It was not that way in the ancient world. In the first century, a father had life and death power over his slaves and everyone in his household. He could kick anybody out of the house. He could sell his own children into slavery or kill them and not be held accountable. Newborn children were placed at a father's feet at birth. If he picked up the child, it was welcomed into the family. If he walked away, the child was taken and left in a field to be eaten by wild animals or to be picked up by the worst sort of people who walked around at night. Unwanted children were raised to be prostitutes or slaves. It was common for fathers to be harsh with their children. Instilling fear was the guiding principle of fatherhood in the ancient world. Paul told us this isn't the way a Christian father treats his children. A Christian father doesn't provoke his children to anger.

What does it mean to provoke a child to anger? It means a repeated pattern of behavior that builds up deep-seated resentment. What does it look like?

Hyperprotectivity — This is usually a mom thing, though not exclusively. Moms try to protect their children from anything that could harm them. They don't play sports because they could get hurt. They don't play in the dirt because it is dirty. They can't sleep over at a friend's house because they don't serve organic food. This is mom putting her child in a plastic bubble. We never give children an

opportunity to safely fail. This is good when a child is young but as they get older, hyperprotectivity leads to resentment. When a kid gets to college, he or she rebels because his or her parents never let them do anything.

Favoritism — This is hard when you have multiple children. It is important to try to keep everything fair between the kids. We find this especially hard at Christmas. The problem is that sometimes, you can't be completely fair because your kids are different. Times are different. Situations are different. If one child gets played as a favorite, you will find the other children filled with deep-seated resentment.

Giving identity through achievement — Every parent wants his or her child to succeed. Parents should help their children get involved in sports, music and social events. It is a parent's job to help his or her children reach their potential. It is OK to get your kids involved in sports and extracurricular activities. It is good to push them. They will rise to the level you set for them. The problem is when parents start living their dreams through their children or pushing their children beyond their potential. This is the mother who lives her beauty pageant dreams through her daughter by taking her to beauty pageants every weekend. This is the father who lives his dreams of athletic success through his son's success on the athletic field. As a father, I will admit that I found it hard to not let myself become overly involved in my kids' sports. I had to consciously step back. Let it be their sports season, not my sports season. There is a fine line to walk on this one. Do any fathers know what I am talking about?

Always pointing out flaws — Some parents are always telling their children what they do wrong. While our children need to be told of their mistakes so they can improve, you need to have at least three deposits in a child's emotional bank account before you make a correction, which is a withdrawal. Most kids won't remember the things you tell them they did right. They will only remember the things you tell them they did wrong. After every athletic event or musical or drama, it is good just to praise them and let it be. Get to the corrections later.

Physically present but emotionally absent — I have found myself sometimes coming home from work and crashing on the couch. I am tired and completely oblivious to the chaos around me. As a parent, it is easy to crash and watch the television, get on the computer, work in the yard, get on the phone and be home physically but be absent mentally. That will provoke your children to anger, not to mention your wife. Kids want, and need, their parents' time. They especially need their dad's time. When your kids tell you a story, actually listen. Be engaged with your kids. Let them know being with them is more important than answering your e-mail.

Don't be a bore— Kids get frustrated when their parents are too serious. Don't be boring. Play games. Be silly. Play whiffle ball. Get excited and get out your pocket change when the ice cream truck comes down your street. Be fun. Fathers, your daughter needs you to dress up and play house. Your sons need you to take them fishing and hunting. In our house, one of my favorite times with Deanna is what she calls the "Daddy Makeover." She sits me on the couch, puts a towel on my shoulder, wets my hair and combs it into a freaky hair style. It

worked better when my hair was longer. It was always fun! She laughed uncontrollably and took pictures on her iPod. Thankfully none of them are posted on the Internet. It is good to make fun memories. Don't be a bore.

Public humiliation — This is saying something negative about your kids in public. It is hard when you are frustrated with your kids to bite your lip. When you humiliate your kids by, in frustration, saying negative things to your adult friends or their friends, they have a hard time working through it. If you have done that, model repentance and ask their forgiveness. As a wrestling family, we would frequently see 200-pound fathers pulling their 10-year-old children aside after they lost wrestling matches and yelling at them in front of their friends. In addition to being intimidated by the obvious size difference, yelling at their sons in front of their friends created great public humiliation and led to many of those kids quitting the sport not because they disliked the sport but because they couldn't handle the humiliation their fathers gave when they lost.

As a father, I am responsible to bring up my children to know the Lord.

Fathers...bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)

This is something most of us don't think about. Fathers are the ones with the primary responsibility to bring their children up to know Jesus, not mothers. This is not discouraging mothers from disciplining their children in Jesus. It is simply telling us that before God, Dad doesn't get a free pass. Dad has responsibility in this area. Jesus is not girly. Jesus is a stud. Teaching about

him in the home is first a father's job. Dads, here are some tips for teaching your kids to love Jesus.

Tips for dads on how to teach the Bible to their children.

Start when my kids are young.

...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)

The word for *childhood* in this verse from 2 Timothy is the word for infancy. It means a little baby. From the time Timothy was a little baby, he was taught the Bible. Bible stories were his first stories. My simple point is that it is never too early to start teaching your kids the Bible. Some people think you have to wait until kids are in junior high before you can teach them anything abstract. I disagree. I personally wish somebody was teaching me the difference between Jesus and world religions before high school so I was better prepared for that hurdle. Teach your kids the Bible stories when they are young. Don't be afraid to challenge them and introduce things that are tough when they are young. Your kids won't explode. They won't lose the faith.

One of the best things you can do is get your kids reading some high impact biographies. I remember the biographies I read when I was younger and they helped me through things when I was older. One parent I met put his kids to bed early every night. They gave their children 45 minutes to read Christian books and biographies every night before bed. That was brilliant. I wish I did a better job of that with my own kids.

Pray for your kids and with your kids. One of the best things we can do is learn to pray together as a husband and wife. One of the next best things we can do is to pray over our children and with our children every night at bed. Pray a blessing over them. In addition, get your kids accustomed to praying with you in the everyday struggles of life. Pray over the prayer list in the bulletin.

Remember other in your prayers and not just yourself.

Read the Bible to your kids and make it fun. The family's job is to teach the Bible to their kids.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:6–9 (ESV)

We are to use every opportunity to teach our kids the Bible. Use breakfast, the car trip, the bed time and the drive to Wal-Mart to teach your kids the Bible. Use WWJD bracelets, put Bible verses on your sunglasses and put Bible verses on T-shirts so kids are always seeing the Bible. Put Bible verses on artwork that you hang on the wall. Everywhere they look, saturate your kids lives with the Bible.

My favorite time with my children was when they were young. David and Daniel had bunk beds in the same room. I would come in the room and read the children's Bible with them before bed. I loved reading to them. It was total gold. When you read the Bible to your kids, don't be boring about it. When God talks, make your voice boom. When Goliath talks, sound like Goliath. Don't make the

Bible boring. It isn't boring. If the Bible is boring it is because you are making it that way.

I knew a pastor who took it upon himself to teach his kids biblical Greek. I don't know how well it went over. While I applaud his efforts, to me, that sounds like making the Bible boring for an 8-year-old kid. Learning a second language, especially Greek, is hard. Read the Bible in English and have fun with it. Help your kids fall in love with it.

Use Bible story videos. Let's face it, we all use videos for baby-sitters. The church library has a good assortment of Bible story videos that can help our kids learn the Bible. One thing we are introducing today is RightNowMedia. This is a



huge online library that we subscribed to as a church. Everyone who has a completed City profile will get it for free. It has a huge selection of kids videos that are solid Bible teaching material.

Remember that more is caught than is taught. The way our kids will learn best is when we simply live our faith. When our kids see us with our Bibles open, when they see us praying, when we confess sin, when we love our spouses, kids learn how to live by watching us live.

Conclusion

How does Christ change our home? Children honor their parents instead of rebel. Adult children honor their aging parents even if it costs them money and

time. Parents don't rule their children by fear and provoking them to anger but by love. Parents are the ones in charge of teaching their children the Bible.

What is the goal of every parent? The goal is not to have a well-behaved, compliant child. The goal is not to have a kid who graduates first in his class. The goal is not to have a star athlete. The goal of a parent is to have kids that fall in love with Jesus. If your kids love Jesus, everything else will fall into place.



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