

Pastor Kyle Mercer
What Parents Need to Know

July 23, 2023
Series: The Church and the Home
Ephesians 6:1-9

BIG IDEA – THE TENSION BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY

We've all been there. Or if you've not been there, you're going to be there. That's the tension between work and family. I used the word *tension* for a reason. I wouldn't say the whole family/work thing is a problem you can solve. It's certainly not a problem you can solve. It's more of a tension you manage.

There's no such thing as balance. Let me just break it to you and me. There's no such thing as balance. Why? Because your life isn't static, your job isn't static, your marriage isn't static, your kids aren't static, and your health isn't static. It's dynamic. It's fluid. You know you always have to be in that tension of work and family.

What happens if you only work? Have you met those men? They tend to be men. They only work. They don't have much of a family to come home to. Here's what you need to know. This is what they've shown us. Once you get over 50 hours a week, three things happen. Your IQ drops. If you start working more than 50 hours a week, you get so stressed, you get so focused, your IQ drops, on average, by 13 points.

Here's what happens if you work more than 50 hours a week: the romantic relationship in your life almost definitely struggles. Here's what happens if you get over 50 hours a week: you begin to have long-term health problems if you keep it up. So, 50 hours is... There's a breaking point there.

If you only work, you won't have much of a family to come home to, but if you only spend time with your family, you must have a trust fund or something. I don't know. We're jealous of you. We don't know how you do it. But if you only spend time with your family, you're not going to be able to provide for them.

So, here's what you do. This is what you do, and this is what you and your wife or you and your husband... You have to talk about this constantly your whole marriage to get it right. You go, "What season are we in, and what is the rhythm?" That's what you say. Work understands this. Why do you have paternity leave? Why do you have maternity leave? Because we finally figured this out.

It's like, "Well, you're in a unique season (newborn baby), and you're going to need a unique rhythm. Let's work that out." You're going to have to do that the rest of your life. Certain jobs... "I'm a landscaper," you might say. If you're a landscaper, you just say, "Hey, honey, the summer is going to be a uniquely busy season." I'm having this conversation with my family. I'm like, "Look. We're getting into this building."

The month leading into the building, the month in the building, the first few months after the building... It's going to be a uniquely busy season, so I'm trying to create rhythms now that are healthy. I'm trying to say there are different seasons that are busy at work. There are different seasons that are busy at home. Forget the idea of balance. Start working with the tension. Talk about it all the time, and you need to figure out what to do.

Now, if you'll turn to Ephesians 6, Paul addresses this topic. In Ephesians 6:1-9, Paul puts family and work right next to each other. By the way, this is a generational conversation. If you talk to the Builders and the Boomers... I love the Builders and the Boomers. The Boomers are my dad's generation, those in their 60s, and the Builders are the generation after that.

Guess what. Were they talking about the tension between work and family? Like, "No. I was too busy working." They were not doing that. What's interesting is the younger generation, anyone under 40, has unrealistic expectations about what their life is going to be like. Try hiring people under 40.

They have certain expectations about how much time they're going to have off, about how they're going to be able to go to the dance recital at 10:00 a.m. on a Tuesday; unrealistic expectations about how much maternity and paternity leave; unrealistic expectations about being able to "work from home" (wink, wink). So, we have to constantly talk about these things.

Now, I'm going to read this to you. We're going to talk about two topics today. We're going to talk about family and work, and they both show up in Ephesians 6. Look here. This is every parent's favorite verse. Here it is, parents. ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord..."*** All of the parents go, "Say it again, Kyle." ***"...for this is right."*** Then he quotes the fifth commandment.

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

We're going to talk about family, and we're going to talk about work. Notice, first, that Paul assumes a multigenerational church. Isn't that interesting? He assumes that there are children, and he addresses those children. I told you a couple of weeks ago he addressed the women and the wives, and that was unique in that culture, but then to address children and not, by the way, just boys... There's a different word for boys.

He's talking to boys and girls. He addresses them together and speaks to them, because Paul assumes a multigenerational church. By God's grace... I don't know how it happened. I don't know if we could do it again, but we have in here a multigenerational church. We have from diapers to dentures in this church. Praise the Lord. We have it all. That's exactly what you want.

What you want in a church is what you want in a home. You want the strength of the young with the wisdom of the old. If you just have young people, it's a nightclub...a lot of passion, a lot of emotion, a lot of energy, staying up too late. If it's just old people, it's a nursing home. It's like, "Why isn't anyone visiting, and we're all getting ready to die." We don't want either of those. We want the strength of the young with the wisdom of the old. So, Paul addresses children. Multigenerational church.

Secondly, I want you to see this. Verse 5: ***"Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling..."*** So, he's going to talk about work. ***"...with a sincere heart, as you would Christ..."*** By the way, Jesus is going to be mentioned four times when talking about work.

"...not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him."

We're going to have to talk about work in a few minutes, but I have to talk about another topic that you see in that. See the word *bondservant* there? (I don't do this a lot, but I'm going to do it today.) Literally, in the Greek, it's the word *doulos*. What does *doulos* mean? Slave. So, here's what we have to talk about for just a few minutes: slavery, which is obviously a very sensitive topic. Rightly so.

I want you to hear me say four things about slavery. The reason I'm not passing this over is we don't pass anything over in the Bible. If the Bible speaks about it, we talk about it. So get ready for this. Four things I want you to know about slavery. Hear me say all of these. You have to hear me say all of them.

First, slavery is always wrong in every form, and it needs to be condemned everywhere it's found in every form that it's found. Hopefully that was clear. Slavery is a sin. Secondly, the slavery Paul is talking about is different than what you're thinking about. If you're thinking about Civil War slavery or American South slavery...different. How's it different? I'm glad you asked.

The first is it wasn't race-based. About a third of the Roman world at this time were slaves, and it had zero to do with race. So, it wasn't race-based. Secondly (this is going to be a surprise to some of you who don't know this), in many cases it was voluntary. In fact, certain translations will translate this... Instead of *bondservant*, they'll translate it *indentured servant*.

Listen. I mean, human history is horrible. A lot of terrible things happened. For a long time, there was no Social Security. There was no safety net. So, here's what people would do. They would be in debt, and then they would go and sell themselves voluntarily into slavery for five to seven years to pay off the debt.

Or people would have these terrible lives. They were orphans or widows or from poor families, and they were like, "What am I going to do?" Often, they would go to someone and say, "Can I be your slave?" Basically (translation for a lot of us): "Can I be your apprentice? Can I do a long-term internship with you for free where I work for you for free, but I learn a skill, so when I'm gone after a certain amount of time, then I'll start my own business, my own thing."

The third thing about slavery that's different is it was not lifelong for most people. There were ways back then to get your freedom, to gain your freedom, and many people did that. So, what I want you to hear me say... Slavery is sinful. It must be condemned in every place and in every form that it's found. Secondly, this slavery is different than the slavery you're thinking about in an American context.

Thirdly, why did we have slavery until 200 years ago? Have you ever asked that question? I don't know how much you guys know about history, but slavery was a normal part of every civilization that has ever existed in all of human history until 200 years ago. Why? Hear all of this, please. Because for most of human history, to every person on the planet, slavery made sense...sinful sense.

By the way, don't listen to people like Sam Harris and those atheist types who go, "All we need is reason." Let me give you reason. Do you want reason for a second? Here's

reason. What's unreasonable about this? "I win the war. I enslave everybody." You don't think that makes logical sense? That made logical sense to everybody forever, everywhere. What isn't logical about "If I'm more powerful than you, I will enslave you"? That's the definition of logic.

Okay. Here's what I want you to understand. It was only the Bible... This is well documented by secular people who hate it. Only the Bible set people free from... Why did slavery end? Here's a very simple answer that secular historians write down: because of evangelical pastors and evangelical politicians, of whom William Wilberforce was the first and foremost.

Guys, the only reason you recoil at slavery is because you're haunted by the Judeo-Christian worldview, whether you know it or not. It's not immediately obvious...it has to arise out of Scripture...that every person is made in God's image. It was Christianity and the Bible that gave the intellectual and theological framework for slavery to disappear and for slaves to be set free.

Do you think people naturally care for needy people? No. That's a Christian idea. Where do you think we get this idea of justice, giving people what they're due? Where do we get the idea of loving our neighbor as ourselves? It's all Christian. It was the Bible with the gospel at the center that is the reason we don't have slavery as the norm in the world anymore. Amazing.

01 WHY WE WORK

So, we have to talk about work for a little bit. There are a couple of things here I want you to notice. He talks to bondservants. Think employees. He talks to masters. Think bosses. That's how we're going to practically apply this today. There are a couple of things I want you to understand.

First of all (and some of you need to hear this, especially in our culture), work is a good thing. How do we know work is a good thing? Well, Jesus Christ worked. Jesus Christ swung a hammer and worked a blue-collar job for the first 30 years of his life. It's like, "What?" You want to talk about honoring work?

God shows up in the Scriptures, and what's the first thing he's doing? Working. He's very busy. He creates the whole world in six days and then rests. Women love when they hear this, but what does God do with Adam? He gives him a job before he gives him a wife. All of the women said, "Amen." Work is a good thing.

Now, here are a couple of things. Paul only, always, talks about work as a good thing. Here are a couple of things people don't often understand. Labor creates leisure. A lot

of young people do not understand this. They look at older people who have more time and have a second home and are able to take longer vacations and are able to retire, and they want all that now. It doesn't work that way.

I can tell you how it works. This is how it always works. A young person trades in their youth for one skill set, or maybe two, that they're good at, and then they use that skill set to make money. Once they've done that for a long time, they're able to rest. That's how it works. We live in a time where people want leisure before labor. It doesn't work that way. Labor creates leisure.

The other thing people have a problem with (the modern mind today) is there's a sacred/secular divide. You have to have a sacred view of your work. That's why he's talking about Jesus as Lord of the workplace. Here's what tends to happen. You tend to view what we're doing here as sacred, even though it's in a warehouse.

You're like, "Well, this is a church building, and he's a pastor, and that's the Bible. It's Sunday morning. This is sacred." Or people go, "I'm going to sequester, like, 30 minutes..." If you're a good Christian, you sequester 30 minutes, and you read your Bible and journal and pray. That's a holy time. Or people think, "My discipleship relationship, my Community Group...that's sacred."

Well, nothing is not sacred, or everything can be sacred if you see Christ as the Lord of it. So, here's what Paul does, because I have to spend a lot more time on parenting. Paul flips the script for bosses and employees by saying, "Here's how you transition: you need to see Jesus as Lord." He's working on the motive.

So, here's another question you might want to ask: Why do people work? It's okay. It's church, but just give the real answer. People work to make money, and that's okay. It always has been and always will be the number-one reason people work. In fact, the definition of a job is something I wouldn't do if you weren't paying me. Some of you are like, "That *is* the definition of my job."

Here's how you know you're working to make money: because some of you already know the day you're going to stop working. I've talked to people before. "I've talked to our financial adviser. When I'm 67-1/2..." What are you saying? You're saying, "At that point, I won't have to work for money. My money will work for me." Praise the Lord.

The second reason people work is development. It used to be "I want the corner office." Now it's "I want to get better at something. I want a skill set. I want to be able to work from home. I want new titles. I want new authority. I want a new position. I want more autonomy." People work to be developed.

A third reason people work is relationships. This may surprise some of you. Relationships are even more important in blue-collar work. The reason for that is blue-collar work is so hard. They've done studies that say blue-collar workers joke with each other way more than white-collar workers do. Why? Because the jobs are so hard they can't make it through the day if they don't joke around all the time. Relationships are unbelievably important. People often stay in jobs they hate because of relationships they love.

The fourth reason people work is for vision. That's what the Millennial's dream is. "I want to work for a company that's changing the world." Well, maybe. Good luck. Probably you won't, but that's okay. So, there's vision. There's mission. "I'm excited about what we're doing, the product we're producing, the need we're meeting." Praise the Lord.

Paul says this will change your life if you see Jesus as your boss. Here's the whole message of 6:5-9: you can have a different boss with the same job...Jesus. While you're sitting in your seat right now, you can transfer bosses without transferring jobs. Paul is addressing bosses and employees, and he's saying that each has their temptation.

There are two main temptations when it comes to work. They're two of the seven deadly sins: greed and sloth. I'm generalizing, but it's mostly true. What is the temptation of a boss? To overwork and underpay his employees, obviously. Now, a good boss wouldn't do that because the employees won't stay. It won't work. It's a short-term strategy, but that is the temptation of a boss.

By the way, if you're working for a boss, you have to learn how to negotiate. The chance that your boss is going to give you a raise just because, just because you think you're doing a good job, is a very small chance. You have to learn how to negotiate. You have to learn to ask for it.

You have to learn how to say to your boss something like, "Look at these five things I'm doing that weren't being done. Isn't this amazing? And I will do a lot more of this. Can we talk about what could be different for me?" You have to do that stuff. Young people don't know how to do that, and they're afraid to do it. You have to do it.

What is the temptation of employees? The temptation of employees is to try to see if they can keep getting paid for doing less and less work. This is why, during the Great Resignation, which was during COVID... Have you heard of the phrase *quiet quitting*? Google it. Not now, please, but Google it later. *Quiet quitting* was a phrase that basically said people...

I know. You're working from home, and everybody is on Zoom calls, and all that kind of stuff. So, people were trying to see, "How little work can I do without anyone noticing I'm doing a lot less?" He's saying, "Look, guys. If Jesus is your boss, you're going to be a better employee, because your Lord and Savior is your boss and you're working as if for him, and that's going to make you work hard."

What's the danger of bosses? The danger of bosses is to think you don't have anyone over you, that you're some island, that you're the man or woman on top of the hill. No, no, no. Every boss bows to the greater Boss, Jesus Christ. It's good for him to do it, and he'll be a better boss because of it.

Now, a couple of things I want people to understand. If you are an employee, here's what you need to know. Every study that has ever been done on employees versus bosses tells us this one thing: bosses are more stressed than employees. You need to know that about your boss. I know. You're an employee. Who are you worried about? You and making sure your boss is happy. Who's your boss worried about? Everybody underneath her. And if you have more than three or four people, somebody is always not doing well.

Some of you need to understand that you are going to be future bosses. We're a multigenerational, socioeconomically diverse church, but we have a lot of, what I would call, the *emerging affluent* in our church. You're going to be the boss one day, and praise the Lord. Be a good boss. But here's what I would say to that.

I was with a pastor recently. He's in his 70s, and I want to be like him. He's a great guy. He's successful and fruitful. I said to him, "Give me some advice." He's toward retirement. I said, "Tell me what I should do. I'm still a young man," you know, all this stuff. He said, "Be very kind on your way up. You'll meet the same people on your way down."

Have you ever wondered why it's hard for certain bosses who lose their jobs to get other jobs? I don't know all of the reasons. It's like, dude, be very kind on your way up, because you will meet the same people, most likely, on your way down, and they will remember how you treated them on the way up.

The word to all of us is that work, for most of us who have full-time work...you're working 40, 50, or 60 hours a week...will be the main place of witness and worship for you. So, you're going to have to redefine what you think worship is and what you think witness is, because you're going to spend a lot of time there.

The number-one witness at your work will be the quality of your work. It's the doorway. It's what mercy ministry is for the church. Mercy ministry is we meet these

needs in our city, and it legitimizes what we're doing, because we really do care about the people, and it gives us the place to speak. Well, that's what your work is at work.

It's like, "Look at my integrity. Look at the quality of my work. Look at my ability to be a part of a team. Everybody wants to invite me to be a part of what they're doing. Now I have the ability to open up my mouth." Here's what this means. If you are a lazy worker, please do not tell anyone you go to Two Cities Church.

02 HOW PARENTING HAS CHANGED AND GOALS

Guys, we have to talk about parenting for even a longer time, because work is part-time and full-time, but parenting is lifetime. If you'll go back to verse 1, I want to talk to us about parenting for a little bit. This is an important conversation for us to have, and here's why.

A couple of weeks ago, when I talked to the women, here's what I tried to do. I want you to know what I was trying to do there. I was trying to say to women everything their husband doesn't know how to say, can't say, won't say, doesn't know if he should say, is afraid to say. I tried to say all of that.

Then last week, I tried to say to the men all of the things I think their wives wish they could say, want to say, can't say, won't say, don't know how to say. But when parenting, why am I going to just... We're going to talk about parenting for a while. Why? Because there's no talking to people about their kids. Have you noticed this?

Have you ever just watched somebody, and it's like a train wreck watching them parent? Or you see their kids, and you're like, "Those kids are miserable. They're little tyrants walking around." There are a couple of different unwritten rules, and one of the unwritten rules is "Don't talk to me about my parenting." It's like, "Really? Never?"

The reason you can't talk to people about their kids is because, technically, a kid is an extension of you. So, it's impossible to talk about somebody's kid without them feeling like you're talking about them...in part because you *are* talking about them. So, what we're going to do for a while this morning with our time left is we're just going to talk about parenting, because we need to, because it takes a church to raise a Christian. And it's not going to be easy.

Here's the thing. I heard a story about a pastor. He was single, not married. He takes over this small church. You know how small churches are. The deacon board is running everything, and they're telling the pastor what to do. So, the deacon board

tells the pastor, "Hey, I need you to teach a Sunday school class on parenting." He's single. He doesn't have kids. "Okay, I'll teach it."

So, he teaches it and calls it the "Ten Commandments on Parenting." It doesn't go over very well. A couple of years later, he gets married and has a couple of kids. He says, "You know, I think I need to teach that class again." So he teaches it. He's a little more humble. He has a bit more time under his belt, a couple of kids. He renames the class "Five Principles on Parenting." People seem to respect it.

Ten more years go by. He has a couple of teenagers. He has seen a lot of life. He decides, "I need to teach this class one more time." He titles the Sunday school class "A Few Random Thoughts on Parenting." That's kind of how I'm speaking to you today. By the way, if you're here and you don't know what it's like to have a kid, Jim Gaffigan says if you don't know what it's like to be a parent, imagine you're drowning and someone throws you a baby. That's the experience of parenting.

We have to talk about how parenting has changed. This is very important to understand. The way things are now, obviously, are not the way things have always been. As soon as I tell you how parenting has changed, you're going to go, "You're exactly right." Then you have to ask the question, "Well, then how is this affecting how we're parenting?" So, let me just give you them.

How has parenting changed? The first way parenting has changed is we're having way fewer kids. I mean, *way* fewer kids. You have to understand that since 1950, the size of the average American home has doubled and the family has been cut in half. Go back 50 years. The average home is 1,200 square feet. The average family is six with four kids. What is it today? Flip it. A 2,400 square foot house is average now, and only four people live in it instead of six.

Now, here's what's interesting. For almost all of human history, women were pregnant from the time they got married until they went to menopause, and they had 12 to 18 kids, half of whom died. There's no doubt. That was human experience, and it was horrible to have half of your kids die. But you have to understand that people used to have a lot more kids than one or two. If you ever see somebody with more than four kids, what do you think? "What Mormon church do they go to?"

The second thing that's different is we are having kids way later in life, and that means a lot. Instead of having kids at 18, 19, 20, or 21, we're having our first kid at 38. So, then you'd ask this question: "What happens when I have one or two kids and I start having kids when I'm 35?"

Your kids mean way more to you than they would have if you had them earlier, and, strangely, you have an economic reality you did not have when you were 22. So you

have one kid. This is why you have fragile parenting, overprotective parenting. "I will send you everywhere and make sure every need is met. I will get behind you and give you everything you've ever wanted."

The third thing is both parents are working. How many homes in America have a stay-at-home mom full-time? Fourteen percent. We're not arguing one is better. I'm just telling you the reality. Here's what we know. With fewer stay-at-home moms, who does it affect? Nonprofits, school districts, and neighborhoods, because the stay-at-home mom was the engine of those three things for decades. They're just different without Mom who has the time to give to them.

What's happening (we're seeing this in our church) is a couple... They're both working. The wife gets pregnant. Then they have to have this conversation. It's something like, "Well, what do we do? Are we a nanny family? Are we a nice daycare family? Are we an okay daycare family? Can we coerce the grandparents to get over here? Do you work part time? Do I work part time?" It's like the first time you grow up in marriage. It's very hard on people.

The fourth thing is grandparents aren't around. I know. Isn't it great? You went to school in Chicago, and then you hung out in New York City, and now you live here, but your parents live in Ohio. We live in this transient world, which is very strange. It's a blessing and all that. So, we live far away from our grandparents, which basically means a couple of things.

Parenting is not twice as hard without Grandma and Grandpa; it's probably five to ten times as hard. You don't know that. If you have your parents here as the grandparents, you're really blessed. What happens is there's no date night. Not when you're young. You can't afford \$15 to \$20 an hour for a babysitter plus date night. Are you kidding me? So it affects the marriage.

There's nobody in your life who actually might speak into your parenting. I know probably the grandparents do it too much, but there's nobody, and they would be the only ones. Then there's the child-centered home. Have you seen this? The child is the center of the home, which is why children are anxious.

One of the things you want to tell your kids is, "Let me tell you who the center of this home is: Jesus Christ. Then let me tell you who the center of the home is after Jesus Christ: me and your mom." I promise you your kid, if he's 7 or 8, will go, "Oh, thank God. I don't want to be the... I'm 7. I'm going to be a mess if I'm the center of this home."

Then there's the passive and permissive parent. Have you heard of gentle parenting? Some of you are doing this. Whatever. We'll talk afterward. Gentle parenting is... I

know what this is. This is the, you know, "Let's just have a conversation with Timmy." Timmy doesn't want to get in the car. "Well, Timmy, don't you want to see Grandma and Grandpa?" No. Timmy doesn't care. Timmy can't be reasoned with. Timmy needs authority.

Here's the thing. You have to ask what's the goal of parenting. If you're an Asian American, what's the goal of parenting? Success. I respect it. At least they know what they're doing. I saw this at Duke. You would not believe the amount of money people spend just to get their kids into Duke. I'm talking hundreds of thousands of dollars. I'm talking these kids, from the moment their preschool was selected, knew where they were going.

For the average family that gets their kid into Duke, getting into Duke is the same thing as getting into heaven. It's like, "We've worked so hard for this." The goal of Asian Americans is for their kid, as a general rule, to be successful. What's the average goal of the average American for their kid? Come on. "I want my kid to be happy and healthy." That's not a goal. I mean, no one wants the opposite. "I want my kid unhealthy and unhappy." No.

We're just shallow. You have to look in the mirror sometimes and just go, "I'm shallow." The goal of parenting... By the way, it says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." I'm giving you a Christian view of parenting, which you won't hear anywhere else. A Christian view of parenting says this: the goal of parenting is the salvation of your child. That's the goal. And it's a hope and a prayer, and God has to move.

I tell you, this happens all the time. I'm talking to someone, and their son is addicted to pornography, or it's a daughter and, you know, "She doesn't want to date any Christian guys, she doesn't want to go to youth group, and she doesn't want to read her Bible. We can't figure out what's wrong." It's like, "I know what's wrong." Can anyone say what's wrong out loud in here?

Let's say the part that no one wants to say out loud. "Your daughter is not a Christian." Sometimes when you say that people cry, because they know it. They didn't want to say that part out loud. They'd rather just say, "She's struggling, and I don't get it because she was baptized when she was 7." It's like, "Stop. She's not a Christian." That's the issue. We have to diagnose the problem if we're going to find the solution.

What does God use in the salvation of our children? Well, thankfully, the Bible tells us. In the Old Testament, it says, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord." Then do you know the phrase that follows that phrase the most in the Old Testament? "Blessed are his kids."

What is the number-one thing God will use from you in the life of your children? It's parents who fear God. Please listen to me. Some of you need to hear this. You need to fear God more than you fear your kids. Just be honest. We're in church. I know there's no place to be honest. We're going to be honest for a second here. You can be afraid of your kids.

You can be afraid of your 6-year-old daughter, because she'll cry, and she's smart, and she'll whine. You know, you go into your closet and go, "She's 6. I'm 30. She's 6. I'm 30. I can do this. I can do this." Psych yourself up. I promise you. If you're afraid of your 6-year-old, you will be terrified of your 16-year-old, because they only get bigger and smarter.

This is another thing. You have to fear God more than you fear the culture. Some of you are going to make some decisions, and your neighbors are going to raise their eyebrows, and they're not going to understand. Here's another big one: you have to fear God more than you fear your parents.

Some of you are the first generation trying to raise Christians in the home, and you're making some decisions. Your parents aren't going to like it, because you're trying to do Christmas a little different. You're trying to do Easter a little different. You're schooling a little differently than they did. You just have to say, "I fear God more than I fear my parents."

The first goal of parenting is the salvation of your child. The second goal of parenting is the socialization of your child. This is very important. Where do I get this from? Well, what does the Bible say? Here's the desire of parents: that our kids would obey and it would go well with them. The desire Jesus has for our kids is that they would be salt and light.

Please hear me. Most people do not understand this. The first goal of parenting is the salvation of your child. The second goal of parenting is the socialization of your child. What do I mean by that? Here's what you want for your kid. This is the way it should feel. "I want to send my kid into the world so that everywhere he or she goes, everyone likes them."

What's the opposite of that? I've met kids who are the opposite of that. Have you ever had that? It's like, "Hey, guys, should we have Junior over to sleep over?" "No! He's a terrorist." Right? "No! What other friends do you have?" Your daughter is like, "Can Sally come over?" It's like, "Oh, no. Sally only eats chicken nuggets dipped in ketchup, and they're a certain type of chicken nugget." It's like, "No!"

Whose fault is it that the kid only eats chicken nuggets? Mom and Dad, 100 percent. You don't want that. I've seen this. It's like, "Oh, no. We don't want Timmy on our

baseball team." This is real stuff that no one talks about. You do not want the kid who no one wants to be around, and that happens.

No one wants him in the class. No one wants him in the youth group. No one really... I mean, we'll do you a favor, but no one wants to invite him to the birthday party, and every teacher just smiles at him while they resent him and can't wait for him to move on to the next class. That happens. I want you to hear me. That happens. And how does that happen? It's the parents' fault. And how does *that* happen?

Well, here's what happens. When two people get married, they make one normal person. Some of you go, "Wow! That makes sense. Yes." So, you have your idiosyncrasies, and he has his idiosyncrasies. You have your family background, and he has his family background. When two people get married, they make one kind of normal person.

That normal person is a mirror to the child of what the world is like. So, if you don't like something, the chance that everybody your kid ever meets won't like it is almost 100 percent. Part of your job, as a parent, is to constantly tell your kids when they're doing things you don't like. You're going to have to get used to that.

It's like, "Don't eat that way." "Why?" "Because I don't like it, and neither does your mother, which means everybody you ever eat with won't like it." It's that simple, but parents don't do that. Then they send their kids into the world, and people who love and like him less have to deal with him. It's not good.

03 CHILDREN: OBEY & HONOR

So, we need to talk to the kids for a little bit. It says to the kids, "***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.***" There are three reasons children are to obey. It's *right*, it's *written*, and it's *rewarded*. If we could talk to the kids for a minute, you obey your parents because it's right. Here's what it's talking about.

The Bible talks about children obeying their parents as, what theologians call, *natural law*. Now, what is natural law? *Natural law* is what I can know without a Bible. There's special revelation. "Jesus is the only Son of God who came and died for my sins." I'm not going to know that without the Bible, but I can look at any family...

Here's what Paul is saying. Any person from any culture can look at any family and go, "Those kids should obey those parents." It's obvious. The problem is we live in a world in which obedience seems strange. Look. My family is a perfect example of an imperfect family. My kids aren't perfect, by far, and I'm not either. They disobey, and it's embarrassing, and all that kind of stuff. We're working on all that.

I say that to say it's not infrequently... I promise you it's not infrequently that we go out to a restaurant, and the waiter and waitress talks about how well behaved our family is. What do we do? Well, we taught our kids to shake people's hands and look them in the eye, and we taught them to say, "Please" and "Thank you." They're 11, 9, and 7. It's like, "You order your own food and speak loudly enough so people can hear you."

Then we say, "No screens at dinner," and we don't hate each other. That's something, I guess. Afterward, people are like, "Your kids are so well behaved." It's like, "This should be normal." You know, some teenager... His dad says, "Be home at 10:00," and he's home at 10:00, and everyone is like, "Whoa. What happened?" It should be normal.

The second thing is it's written. Paul basically said, "Look, guys. This made God's top 10." The Bible talks about this in such an important way. It's interesting. Romans 1 talks about the downfall of society, and a lot of people read Romans 1 and think the downfall of society is sexually deviant behavior because verses 26-28 talk about sexually deviant behavior. You know, "God gave them over" and "God gave them up," and all that.

Keep reading. If you pass verse 28, you'll come down to the last section of Romans, chapter 1, which talks about the cultural collapse, the bottom and bankruptcy of culture. Guess what it is: children disobeying their parents. I mean, think about it. What's the difference between an unstable society and a society in which the vast majority of kids don't obey their parents? It's the exact same thing.

The third thing is it's rewarded. Basically, Paul wants us to understand that disobedience is dangerous and that if we want our lives to go well as kids, the best thing for us to do is to obey our parents. So, he says it's rewarded, it's written, and it's right.

Then we need to talk about honor, because it says, "Honor your father and mother..." It took us awhile to understand this, but here's what Christians have understood: we obey while we're in the home; we honor all of our lives. This is a word to some of you. You need to honor your parents. This is actually really important. Some of you are not doing this, and I want to talk to you about this for a few minutes.

How do you honor your parents? First, don't forget them. Even if they're dead, still honor them. You can honor your parents while they're dead. But if they're alive, don't forget them. Do math. I've done this math before. Say your dad is 70. Do you know how long the average man lives in America? To 78. Okay. Maybe he's above average, but say he lives for eight more years. Okay. I have eight more years with my dad.

Then you realize, "Wait a second. I only see my dad four times a year." So then you do *that* math, eight times four. You go, "Oh my goodness. I may only see my dad 32 more times before he dies. What should I do with that time?" Well, how about starting by honoring him? How about telling him and your mom (moms as well) how much they mean?

Here's the second thing about honoring. How do you honor your parents? You live a life worthy of the sacrifice and suffering they put in to raise you. That's something really worth thinking about for, like, a year. It's like, "Wait a second." Because some of you are doing nothing with your life. You need a lot of motivation, so you need the gospel and all that. You need to wake up at 2:00 in the morning sometime and just go, "What am I doing?"

Your parents changed your diapers. They fed you in the middle of the night. They raised you and gave you a house for 18 years. They educated you. For some of you, they also paid for all of your college. They gave you everything, and it cost them an enormous amount. One thing you could do is look in the mirror every once in awhile and go, "Is the life I'm living honoring the enormous suffering my mom and dad put in to raise me?" That's partly how you honor your parents.

04 PARENTAL AUTHORITY (TYPES OF PARENTING STYLES)

Now back to parenting just for a second. We have to talk about this. It says, "***Children, obey your parents...***" Now, we've flipped it. We say, "Parents, obey your children." This is not good. We have to talk for a few minutes about parental authority, which is hard for Millennials. I know I pick on Millennials. I'm a geriatric Millennial.

It's hard for young people. And I see this everywhere. I see this in business. I see this in the church world. I see this in the home. Millennials don't want anyone to be in charge. "Can we do everything by consensus, please? Can we do teamwork?" It's like, no. That is not leadership. Mom and Dad, you're in charge.

Christian Smith, who is a sociologist and a professor at Notre Dame, so he's a really smart guy... All he does is study families. He did a multi-year study, and he focused on Christian families. He asked, "What type of Christian parenting is most effective?" It was, like, a decade-long study. Guess what he found.

He said there are two things that must be present in the home. First, high expectation, high demand, and high accountability. Second, an abundance of warmth, expressive

care, and deep relationship. The temptation is to not bring both of those but only one of those.

If it's just warmth, it's gentle parenting. We talked about this earlier. It's "Oh, Timmy could do no wrong." So, you're at the school, and the teacher is like, "Hey, Timmy is not doing well in this class." "*Gasp!* Not Timmy. What teaching style are you using?" If you have enough money, you just bring him to a different school. That happens all the time. That's an abundance of warmth with not enough high expectation.

If you have neither, the child is neglected. That's why we have a foster care and adoption ministry, because that happens. If you have high expectation without warmth, you feel like you're in prison or the military. You need to have both authority and affection in the home.

So, the word to some of you parents is you need to have a conversation with yourself and with your spouse, and you need to say, "I'm in charge. We're in charge, and we are going to lead this family," because the Bible says we are to instruct and discipline our kids and not provoke them.

05 DISCIPLINE & INSTRUCT, PROTECT

I want to talk a little bit about discipline. There are only two words we're given as parents on what to do. We're told not to do one thing: don't provoke. Then we're told to do two things: instruct and discipline. So, let's talk about those. I know. As soon as I talk about discipline, I know how some of you are. You go, "We don't discipline Johnny." We know. Okay? We know. We've had him in kids' ministry. We know you don't discipline him.

There are different categories of discipline, and I'll give these to you. Be led by your conscience. Be led by Scripture. We don't believe in abuse and any of that kind of stuff, but discipline is a gift. The Bible says God disciplines every child he loves. This is what Proverbs says: he who does not discipline his son hates him. I just paraphrased a Bible verse. So, you have to understand discipline.

There are a few levels of discipline. There's *reproof*. Reproof is when you get eyeball to eyeball with your kid and tell them in a warm but stern voice what he or she did wrong, why it was wrong, and what they need to do differently. You will have certain kids, and as soon as you do it, they'll collapse and melt. You'll have other ones who are like, "Are you talking to me?" You're like, "All right. Next step."

After that it's *deprivation*. Deprivation is taking something away from the child. Why don't parents practice deprivation? Answer: it makes their lives more difficult. This is

the dirty secret of parenting. By the way, when you do deprivation, here's the rule: however long you think you should take something away, you triple it.

It's like, "Okay. Here's what I do. But if I say, 'No TV for the rest of the week...'" The mom thinks, "Oh man! That was my two-hour window every day to work on my side hustle or to get rest or to sleep or to nap." This is a principle, and I learned this from my wife. We've discovered this. The job of a parent is to suffer now so your kids don't have to suffer later. A lot of parents don't want to suffer now, so their kids will suffer later.

Do you ever go to a restaurant and everyone has a screen in front of them? It's like, "Oh, great. Good job, parent. You don't have to suffer now, but your kids will suffer the rest of their lives, because now they don't have the social skills and don't know how to behave at dinner. And your relationships will suffer because y'all don't know how to talk to each other. You think you're going to turn that on at 15 years old when it hasn't been on for 10 years? You're not going to turn that on."

You suffer now so your kids don't have to suffer later. You teach them good eating habits now. Why? You could just let them eat sweets and snacks and sugar all day, and you wouldn't suffer because they wouldn't whine and complain, but they will suffer. They will be unhealthy. Then they will have all this addiction to food that they shouldn't have, which will make their life very difficult, and then they'll go off to college and indulge in all that. You suffer now so your kids don't have to suffer later.

So, you need to embrace your parental authority. Let me give you a couple practicals that I think are helpful. Margy and I learned these from other people. We're not this smart, but I'm going to give you some good ones here. First, save "No" for the big things. Don't have a lot of rules; have a lot of relationship. Don't have a lot of laws; have a lot of love.

Make sure everything you're saying "No" to actually needs to be said "No" to, because here's a rule about rules, if that makes sense: bad rules make people not respect good rules. If every rule you have it's like, "Man, that makes sense. That's a good reason. That's a good rule. There are not a lot of them, and I think I could do this," then people will respect them.

This is why I don't like going to the swimming pool. Do you ever go to the swimming pool? You show up, and there are, like, 42 rules of what not to do in the pool. I'm like, "This list is ridiculous! What bureaucracy put this together?" I'm like, "I'm only obeying one of those rules. I'm not diving in the shallow end. That's it. The rest of those rules are goofy. Who put them there?" It makes you not respect the rules you should follow because there are so many goofy rules that you're like, "Who made this?" You get it.

The second thing... This one is actually really important. This has been the thing most people have talked to me about after the sermon so far. Here it is. A couple of years ago, there was a family in my last church with seven kids. There were multiple families, actually, in my last church that had seven kids. I don't know if they all just thought, "Okay. We could be a baseball team. Let's stop."

There was this one family. They were especially exemplary, and I said to them what I say to people when I admire them. "I would like to be like you. Tell me how you do this." Because all of their kids were amazing. Like, *all* of them, all seven of them. I said, "What did you do?" She kind of sheepishly said to me, "Win the battle at the dining room table." I never forgot that.

The dining room table, in some sense... I mean, do you want to see who's in charge at a home? Go visit them at dinner. It's a microcosm for life. It's different based on their ages, but do they know how to sit through a meal? Do they eat everything you give them? Do they know how to make eye contact?

Do they know how to have a conversation? Do they know how to have a conversation that's not centered on them? Do they know how to ask questions? Do they know how to engage a guest? Do they know how to stay seated? Do they know how to clean up? Do they know how to help? It's like, "Oh my gosh." You could spend six months perfecting the dining room experience, and it would probably have an impact on all of their life.

So, there's reproof, there's deprivation, and there's *isolation*. Isolation is when you say, "Go to your room" or "Go to the steps." Here's the rule on isolation. You say to your kids, "You can come back when you're ready to be a full part of this family again." That's the best way to say something because it will make them learn how to regulate their emotional system.

You'll see them. If they're 3 years old, they're fighting. They're trying to get it under control. Like, "Okay. I want to go back. I want to be with my family." Here's the amazing thing. Do you want to know when you can tell if they really want to be part of the family? When they come back, you'll like them. It's weird. You can tell when it's fake. You can tell when they're just trying to get out of something.

You can tell when they've really integrated it in themselves and said, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. I'd like to be part of the family again." "Well, come on back, man. We're in." That's another rule of discipline. We're not going to keep talking about this. Some of you do that. It's like, "Okay. Cold shoulder for you for three hours." None of that. You're not bringing it back up again and again. No, you're not telling all of the other kids in the house about it. You're not doing any of that.

The fourth thing is *logical consequences*, or what we like to say at our home, "That's what you get for doing that." In other words, if you broke it, you buy it. I remember our kids broke this thing from IKEA, and it cost \$3. I was like, "Guys, this is really expensive." They were like, "No!" You know, \$3 to a kid is a ton of money. They each had to go get a dollar from their room.

Then the final is the *rod*. I know some people are very sensitive about the rod, but the Bible is very clear about the rod. The rod is a rescue mission. There's something that words don't get at in the human heart. The Bible speaks (I would encourage you to do a study on your own) about the importance of the rod.

When we talk about the rod or spanking, we like to call them *reminders*. Why? Because if you say to your kid at the grocery store, "You're getting a reminder," he'll scream, "Not a reminder!" and then social services doesn't come to your house. You're going to have to figure out discipline.

06 DON'T PROVOKE...OR OVERLY PROTECT

Here's the final word: don't provoke your kids. Fathers have a certain pathology and mothers have a certain pathology. The pathology of Dad is to provoke, to tease. *Provoke* means to exasperate, to make unnecessarily angry. Let me give you a couple of ways dads provoke.

First, dads provoke by *disciplining without first instructing*. The kid is like, "What the heck? That was wrong? You're disciplining for something I didn't know was..." That will exasperate a kid. *Being a hypocrite*. By the way, your kids will feel hypocrisy at age 5 or 6. They'll be able to articulate it at about 10 or 11, and they'll resent you as teenagers for it.

"Dad is different at church. Like, really different. He uses the whole religious language, and he's really nice. He shakes, and he prays for people, and blah, blah, blah. Then he gets in the car and screams at us." They'll resent you for it. It'll be one of the reasons they'll think Christianity is a game you're playing that they don't want to play, because that's not a fun game to play. They'll find a different thing to do on Sundays.

Another thing is *being inconsistent*. This can happen with Mom or Dad. It's like, "Which Mom are we getting and which Dad are we getting? Is this drunk Dad? Is this angry Dad? Is this lonely Dad? Is this tired Dad? Is this stressed-out Dad? Is this happy Dad? Is this easygoing Dad? Is this flip-out-on-everything Dad? Which Dad am I getting? It's too much for me. I have to know."

Vicariously living through your kids. That'll be another one. They'll notice that by the time they're a teenager too. It's like, "Dad, look. Just because you didn't do everything you wanted to do in life doesn't mean I now have to do it for you." It's overwhelming, and it's another reason homes are child centered.

Homes are child centered because "I have to live my life through you, so you have to be the center, and you'll now do what I want you to do. You will play baseball. You will go to the type of school I could never get into. You will do it. You will like it." That'll exasperate kids.

Moms have their own pathology. It's protecting. It's overprotecting. It's something moms need to watch out for, especially moms who don't have a good relationship with their husband. Freud noticed this. The worse your relationship is with your husband, the more you try to find in your son what you can't find in your husband...not sexually but in other areas.

I've seen this many times. Women who do not have a good relationship with their husband try to keep their son in the home as long as possible. They don't say this out loud, but they basically say some version of, "Please stay here, and I will take care of you. Let's not say it out loud, but let's make a deal. You never have to grow up, and I never have to stop being your mom. Stay."

So, what Mom and Dad do is they constantly, across the whole life of their child, push on each other to make sure neither of them do that. The wife is always saying to the husband, "You're being too hard on them." Half the time she's right, and half the time she's wrong. The husband is always saying to the wife, "Quit protecting them so much. Let them get out in the world." Half the time he's right, and half the time he's wrong. You have to talk about this again and again and again.

Let me just say this. In your parenting, you will see the best and worst of yourself. I've seen it in being a parent now for 12 years. I see the best of myself and the worst of myself in parenting. This is what I want to end with: *the parent that parents best is the parent that repents the most.*

Believe it or not, after this message last night, I was out to dinner with some people. They had some cornhole, and my kids were there. My son William, who's 9, said, "Dad, can we play cornhole?" I was talking to some guys, and I said, "In a little bit. In a little bit." Some other things happened. He came back over, and he said, "Dad, can I play cornhole?" I said, "In a little bit."

He came back over again, and I finally said, "Man, it's late. I don't have time to play cornhole," because I had been talking to some guys, but I told him I'd play cornhole. I

watch him go over to the picnic table, and he starts crying. I'm like, "Dude, did I just mess up after giving the parenting talk?"

I did what I've done a hundred times. I went over to him, and I said, "Man, listen." I was talking with some guys. I said, "I've got to go." I went over. I go, "William, I am so sorry. I broke my promise to you. I'd love to play cornhole now. Will you forgive me?" Through tears, he goes, "Yes."

By the way, what you'll find, especially while your kids are young, is it's a unique grace of God. They will so quickly forgive you. *So* quickly. Then the gospel will become very real for them, because it's like the same grace I'm talking about... You know, Jesus and grace and Bible. It's like, "Daddy needs all that. Mommy needs all that. Dad is a sinner, and I need the grace of God."

So, I don't know where you are, guys. Here's the word. If you're a child under 18 and you can hear me...you're in this room...here's the Word of God to you today: submit. We're not told much about Jesus when he was a child, but the thing we're told in Luke 2 is that he went home and submitted to everything his parents said, and the next verse says, "And he grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man."

The verse before that says he submitted to his parents. Submission is a portal to health and growth. Some of you need to honor your parents. For some of us, it's hard to honor our parents from some things that have happened. The first picture in the Bible of honoring parents is when Noah gets off the ark and gets drunk and is naked. Do you know this story?

His one son, Ham, looks at him and laughs and tells his brothers. That's dishonor and shame. The other two brothers come together, grab a cloth, and walk backward to cover their dad's nakedness. That's the first picture of honor in the Bible. You're going to have to figure out how to honor your imperfect parents, and here's how you do that.

Every adult knows this. Here's how you need to think about your parents. This is the mature view of your parents: "My parents did the best they could with what they knew and had." That is most people's experience, and that's going to be *your* experience. You want to say, "I believe in the grace of God, and I did the best I could with what God gave me. I'm going to trust the grace of God for the future."

In two weeks, we're starting a new series on Joseph. Guess what we know about Joseph. He came from one of the most dysfunctional families in the Old Testament, and he's one of the greatest men who ever lived. That's our hope. If you need help, we want to walk with you. We want to parent best by repenting most. Let's pray.

Thank you, Jesus, for this time. We have parents and children. We need to honor and obey. There's a lot in the text. We didn't even get to talk about work a lot. Lord, this is a moment for us, as a church, because parenting is such a great joy. I've heard it said that, for most people, their greatest accomplishment will not be something they do but someone they raise. We just thank you.

I pray right now for parents who feel stuck, who feel anxious, who feel discouraged, that they'd open up to one family, one person, and they'd help them. Lord, I pray for people in this room who desire to be parents or struggle with infertility. I pray you'd give them the grace and the blessing of children.

I pray especially for single moms. When we talk about the tension of work and the tension of family, it's just constant for them, and they feel that, Lord. I pray for a special grace on single moms trying to do two jobs and be two people at once. We pray for grace. We ask it for your glory and our good. In Jesus' name, amen.