

## A PARENT'S PURPOSE EPHESIANS 6:1-3

In this past year, nearly eight million people in this country took a giant step in their lives - they brought a baby into the world. They became parents!

But how many of those eight million people were prepared for parenthood is a different matter.

Take for example the man left in charge of his infant son while his wife went to the store. When the young lady returned she found her son crying... *and her husband sweating...* He was at loss for what to do!

She walked up to the crib and instantly detected the problem. One whiff and she realized the diaper needed to be changed. It had been filled several times over...

She moaned, "*Honey, why didn't you change the diaper?*" The new dad held up the box of disposable Huggies, and pointed to the print on the package, "*Well, it says right here, 'Good for up to ten pounds!'*"

Not all dads - *or moms, for that matter* - are prepared for the rigors and challenges of being a parent.

*And I have no room to laugh...* When my daughter, Natalie, was a few weeks old Kathy went out with friends, and I took care of her. It was bed time, and my little girl was hungry, so I fed her 8 ounces of sweet-tasting Similac... *gave her a complimentary burp - we prayed together - then I tucked my princess into bed.*

I'd just settled in to Monday Night Football when I heard horrible sounds coming from her room - *gagging, gurgling noises*. I rushed in to discover Natalie had thrown

up all 8 ounces of the formula. I cleaned up my daughter, put fresh sheets on the crib - then walked into the kitchen still puzzled over what I'd done wrong.

That's when I saw the can of formula in the garbage.

Words were written on the label I'd never seen before... **“Concentrated: Must Add Water.”** I had given my child 8 ounces of undiluted, 100-proof Similac - the equivalent of 32 ounces of baby formula. If babies could sue for parental malpractice she would have!

Entering the hospital to birth a baby is a *thrilling new deal*, but bringing that baby home from the hospital can be a *chilling ordeal*. All kinds of self-doubts arise in your mind... *Am I ready for the responsibility?*

*Am I prepared to tackle the challenges? Do I have the wisdom and know-how to be a good parent?*

Here's a spoof entitled **“Preparation for Parenting...”**

Supposedly, if you really want to prepare yourself to be a parent here's what you should do... **“First, go to the supermarket. Arrange for your salary to be paid directly to the cashiers for the next 18 years...”**

**Buy a newspaper - then read it for the last time...”**

To discover how nights are spent as a parent, **“Walk around the living room from 5:00 to 10:00 PM carrying a wet bag weighing approximately 8-12 pounds.**

**At 10:00 PM put the bag down, set the alarm for midnight, go to sleep. Get up at midnight and walk around the room again with the wet bag until 1:00 am.**

Put your alarm on for 3:00 AM. Since you can't get back to sleep, wake up at 2:00 AM and pour a glass of milk. Go to bed at 2:45 AM. Get up again at 3:00 AM when the alarm goes off. Sing songs in the dark until 4:00 AM. Put the alarm on for 5:00 AM. Get up. Make breakfast. Keep this up for five years. Look cheerful."

Here's how to practice dressing your child once he's born, "Buy an octopus and a bag. Attempt to put the octopus in the bag so none of its arms hang out."

To practice grocery shopping with a child in tow, "Go to the market with a fully grown goat. Buy your groceries and don't let the goat out of your sight. Pay for everything the goat eats or destroys."

And here's how to practice feeding a 12 month old, "Hollow out a melon. Make a small hole in the side. Hang it from the ceiling on a rope, and swing it from side to side. Now get a bowl of soggy oatmeal and attempt to spoon it into the swaying melon by pretending to be an airplane. Continue until half the oatmeal is gone. Tip the rest of the oatmeal into your lap, making sure lots of it falls on the floor." And that's just preschoolers wait until they become teenagers!

I'll let you in on a secret... Nobody is really prepared to be a parent. Parenting requires lots of on-the-job training. In fact, "Parenting is the one job where by the time you're experienced at it, you're unemployed."

Yet all the feelings of inadequacy don't make the job any less important. Ready or not, you're a parent.

And as a parent you're shaping the world you'll live in, and the one you'll leave behind. You're impacting the future of the world by how you treat your child

A parent has enormous power and incredible responsibility... When you pick up a baby you realize you're holding unlimited potential in your arms.

Louis Pasteur once put it this way, “When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments: tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he may become.”

One Sunday morning at church we had a heckler! A lady just couldn't believe I would suggest that a mom's top priority should be her kids... *I didn't realize that was such an inflammatory idea!* But in the middle of the service this woman jumps up and shouts, “Well, you stay home all day and change smelly diapers.”

It just so happened the day before I'd done just that! Kathy had taken off and I'd stayed home with our baby.

From the pulpit, I looked that lady in the eye and told her... “That's exactly what I did yesterday, and it's the most strategic job on earth. That child with the messy diapers could grow up to be the world's next great evangelist... or a scientist who discovers the cure for the cancer... OR the next evil dictator... *and the direction he takes largely depends on my input!*” It went so well people thought I had planned the outburst.

But it's true, parents are part of a special power block working behind the scenes, to shape the world.

My parenting days have now come and gone. My youngest son is 22 years old now. Once, I was asked *if I had it to do over again, would I do the job differently?*

*Absolutely!* Surely, I'm wiser at 56 than I was at 25.

But I couldn't have given my parenting any more effort. I can honestly say, “*I left it all on the field.*” I could've *done better*, but I couldn't have *tried harder*.

You don't always realize it when you bring that baby home from the hospital, but a parent's time to influence their child is limited. You blink and they're all grown up.

For the next three weeks we'll be talking about parenting, and before I start, I want to issue the disclaimer I always give whenever I discuss this topic..

**When it comes to kids there are no guarantees!**

This isn't because God isn't powerful - or prayer isn't effectual - or that the Bible isn't infallible... It's because your kids are human, and all humans have a free will.

As parents we do our best. We try to be wise. But in the end it's the child who decides how he or she will live their life. Like it or not, that's the way God made it!

It reminds me of country singer, Barbara Mandrell.

Barbara was a devout Christian, and a conscientious mother. When her son Nathan was an infant she would sing to him often. She sang three songs to her baby boy - "Jesus Loves Me", "This is the Day the Lord has Made", and "Jesus Loves the Little Children."

Barbara always wondered which of the three songs Nathan would sing first... *it was none of the above.*

To her disappointment she says the first song she ever heard little Nathan sing was the tune, "All my Xs Live in Texas..." All parents need to understand there are no guarantees when it comes to raising kids!

Think of God Himself... He was the perfect Father, yet both his kids, Adam and Eve, still rebelled. God did everything right... yet his kids took a wrong turn.

Once a mother was hurried and hassled. She had dinner guests arriving soon. It was her husband's family, and she wanted to make a good impression.

At dinner that night she told her little girl to ask the blessing. The girl was intimidated, "Mommy, I don't know what to say?" This mom should've just left it alone, but she was hoping to impress her guests with one of the sweet prayers her daughter often prayed.

She said, "*Honey, just say the last prayer you heard mom pray?*" The little girl bowed her head... "O Lord, why in the world did I invite all these people over for dinner?" With kids, you never know what to expect!

Parenting is a scary, risky proposition. When you sign up for the task you realize things can go wrong.

The world we live in is a wicked place. Predators roam the streets, and temptation abounds. Our kids grow up surrounded by snares we can't control...

Satan attacks from the outside. Sin pulls from the inside. There comes a point when parents can no longer control their kid's circumstances, and it's up to the child to make wise decisions... And when that time comes some mistakes are inevitable... As I said, *when it comes to raising kids there are no guarantees...*

But here's what I *can* promise...

When a parent *consults the Bible*, and *adopts God's purpose*, and *parents with God's power*... The odds increase dramatically that your kids will turn out okay.

In so doing, it's far more probable that your children will *know God - walk with God - and live to glorify God.*

Here's the good news... God hasn't left us in the dark. We're not on our own. God is the perfect Father. He's the one parent who knows what He's doing - and He's given us insights to make our parenting effective.

The first 4 verses of Ephesians 6 contain **Paul's principles for parenting**. Verses 1-3 set out **the purpose of a parent**. Verse 4 addresses the **do's and don'ts**...

Let's read our text. Verse 1, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.'**" Then to parents, **"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."**

Here's how we'll break down these four verses...

This week we'll discuss **a parent's purpose**.

Next week we'll look at **a parent's tools**.

And finally, we'll note **a parent's avoidances**.

And there's a method to my madness. You're the parent, I'm the teacher, and our association makes for a **PTA** - *a parent / teacher association*. Here's our outline: **"P" - purpose, "T" - tools, "A" - avoidances**.

*It's a P.T.A.!...* We'll start with **a parent's purpose!**

**Have you noticed that some** people are parents by default? Just having a kid doesn't make you a real parent. **What makes a parent is a God-given purpose!**

CR Snyder writes about two dads on two separate airplane flights... First was Jenny and her dad.

Snyder figured Jenny to be about 3 years old. It was her first flight, and the dad was as excited as Jenny...

He explained the loud noises came from the engines. As the force of take-off pushed them back in their seats, dad whispered, "**Honey, I'll hold your hand**". It was obvious she trusted him wholeheartedly. This dad turned the whole trip into a learning experience.

But Snyder tells of another flight and a different parent and child. Teddy was also 3 years-old.

After dad buckled him in, he ordered, "**Now sit here and be quiet. Daddy's going to sleep.**" And sleep he did, for the whole trip. At times the little boy was noticeable frightened, but dad was oblivious to his fear.

The slumbering dad ignored *his child's thoughts - his needs - his questions*. No words or touches were exchanged. In a real sense, Teddy was *flying alone*.

Just because you sit in the seat next to your child at breakfast - or sleep down the hall - doesn't mean your child isn't *flying alone*? Parenting needs to be intentional and deliberate. All parents need a purpose!

And we find it in Ephesians 6...

In verse 1, Paul gives two commands to children - they're to **obey** and **honor** their parents. Then he provides two reasons for these two commandments...



**First, obedience makes sense!** "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." It's just the right thing to do. Generally, parents are wiser than their kids.

A parent has been around the block a time or two. They know stuff the kids don't. Why should a kid learn the hard way? Obeying your parents just makes sense.

The **second** reason for a child to obey is that it carries a promise! Paul writes in verse 1, "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

If a child obeys and honors his parents, he'll probably live *longer and better*.... God is the only person who loves a child more than his parents. Thus, a child will minimize the dangers in life, and maximize its enjoyments - just by listening to their mom and dad.

Proverbs 30:17 should be every father's favorite verse. Parents should teach this verse to their kids - *especially when those kids become teenagers*.

Here's a great verse for a *testy teen*. "The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it." **What a great verse for a teenager!**

When your kid bucks, kicks, rebels - warn them to stay inside. "If you don't obey your parents, you could be walking down the sidewalk and a flock of birds land on you, knock you down, and start picking out your eyeballs - *if it happens, don't say I didn't warn you!*

Every time a bird flies over the head of a rebellious teenager without swooping down on top of the kid, and pecking at their eye sockets... God is showing mercy!

Of course, *I'm being a little facetious*. But the correct interpretation of the proverb makes the same point...

It's saying that a rebellious child is prone to make foolish and costly mistakes. As a result he could die at a young age, and having so alienated the people who love him, there would be no one left willing to give the child a decent burial. In ancient times, his carcass would be thrown out as food for the vultures.

But the point of the interpretation is the same - *you live longer and better when you obey your parents*.

There's one other reason kids should obey their parents. **We learn to obey and honor God by first obeying and honoring our parents.** *It's a picture!*

God uses our relationship with our parents to deepen our relationship with Him. *How can a person submit to God - an authority they can't see - if they're unable to submit to the authority they can see... their parents?*

Loads of people have a hard time obeying God because they never learned obedience to their parents.

I view *my children's obedience to me* not as an end in itself. I'm not a power-hungry parent on an ego trip.

I've never bullied my kids just so I could feel like I was in control. I love my kids - with all my heart - and I saw their obedience and respect *toward me* as the first step toward them learning how to relate *to God*.

On the surface, Ephesians 6:1-3 are instructions addressed to children not parents, but I take these verses to also communicate **a parent's purpose**.

And this is foundational... **The purpose of a parent is to teach their children obedience and respect!**

Understand obedience and respect for one's parents are not traits that come naturally. Obedience and respect have to be taught, instilled, and insisted upon.

Thus, *the obligation God places upon children becomes the purpose of their parents.* **Again, the job of a parent is to teach their kids obedience and respect!**

*Feeding, clothing, protecting, educating, and entertaining your child are all part of parenthood - but if you're not teaching a child obedience and respect you're not doing the job!* A parent's primary purpose - is not to win their kid's friendship, or make the kid happy, it's to teach their children obedience and respect.

And that's true when the child is 15 months or 15 years. God puts no statute of limitations on His command. Obedience and respect are lifelong traits.

It's impossible to be the parent God desires you to be until you realize a basic truth... **your kids are little sinners.** They're born rebels. They exit the womb defiant and self-centered. You don't teach a baby to cry when it doesn't get its way. *I have four kids – and laboratory findings reveal: selfishness is a natural trait.*

Recently I ran across an instructive document entitled, **“Property Law from a Toddler’s Perspective.”**

Law #1, **“If I like it, it’s mine.** Law #2, **If I can take it away from you, it’s mine.** Law #3, **If I had it a while ago, it’s mine.** Law #4, **If I say it’s mine, it’s mine.**

Law #5, **If it looks like mine, it’s mine.** Law #6, **If I say I saw it first, it’s mine.** Law #7, **If you’re having fun with it, it’s mine.** Law #8, **If you lay it down, it’s mine.**

And lastly, Law #9, **If it’s broken, it’s yours.”**

When kids are born they have no respect for other people, nor are they willing to obey standards that limit their behavior. Children are greedy, selfish, and totally preoccupied with three people... *me, myself, and I.*

Parents, your children are *sinful little buzzards.*

Granted, it may not be obvious at first... A newborn appears so cute, precious, innocent, tender, adorable, but deep down inside your baby is in reality a diabolical, ruthless, sinister sinner - dressed incognito!

The Minnesota Commission on Crime was established to study the spiraling crime rates in Minnesota. Here's an excerpt from their findings...

“Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it - his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous were he not so helpless.

He is, in fact, dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, no just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist.”

Understand parents, your child resembles two people - and I'm not talking about their *mom and dad.*

First, the Bible teaches that humans were made in God's image. According to Psalm 139 every boy and girl has been “**fearfully and wonderfully made.**” All humans bear the stamp of God upon their life.

But your child also resembles another person, and that's the first man, Adam. He too was made in God's image... *but something went wrong!* In Genesis 5:3 we're told, "Adam... *begot a son in his own likeness, after his image.*" In Adam the image of God was dominant, but his son more closely resembled Adam.

The Bible teaches that Adam's sin marred God's image in both himself and his offspring. Adam bit the forbidden fruit and made a choice for all mankind.

Through Adam, sin passed down to all humanity. And due to his sin - you, I, and our kids - are born with a nature that opposes God. *We're rebels from the womb.*

This is why your child resembles two people.

Despite his sin your child still bears the marks of God's creation. His intelligence and creativity and initiative - her conscience and moral center - their spirituality and hunger for meaning and truth - these are traits imbedded in our nature by the hand of God.

But *the Adam's family* is a good thing gone bad. *One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch.* Adam's sin also made pride and selfishness human traits. It robbed us of what God intended... And now if left by their lonesome your child will disobey and go his own way.

That's why if he or she is going to learn obedience and respect they have to be taught by their parent.

And to effectively parent a child both resemblances have to be kept in view!... Help your child identify his God-given traits and personality. Rejoice in the talents and characteristics with which he's been blessed.

But at the same time realize there's always a rebellion bubbling under the surface. *It could explode at any moment.* Every child needs parents in his or her life who will insist on their obedience and their respect.

Understand, when Paul uses the word “obey” in verse 1, it's the translation of a Greek word which means “to hear under, or to listen attentively.”

Thus, the first step in teaching obedience to your child is to cultivate in them a listening ear. If you want children to obey you, they first need a willingness to listen to you. They have to be eager to receive.

I like the saying, “Parents need to talk to their kids in a way that will encourage them to listen, and listen to their kids in a way that will encourage them to talk.”

Parents, imagine a 12 foot giant hovering over you, with a scowl on his face. He's angry and upset - and it's clear to you that you're the object of his frustrations.

If you were faced with that scenario... your inclination wouldn't be to sit down and have a friendly chat! You'd want to get out of Dodge. Run for your life!

Well, when a 6' tall parent towers over a 3' tall toddler - that's how the parent appears to the child - the same way that giant might appear to you.

And if you're obviously angry and frustrated don't expect your child to eagerly sit still and want to listen.

Parents, if you want your kids to obey, they have to hear - *and I mean hear more than your words...*

Do they hear your heart, and sense your love?

Do you stoop to their level, and communicate in ways they can grasp? *And Jesus is our example here.*

God could've remained on His lofty perch, removed from our predicament - instead He took on flesh and blood, and became one of us. He descended to our level - stepped into our shoes. This is the way you approach a kid. You communicate in a relatable way.

I remember watching the late Peter Jennings on ABC's World News Tonight. After each broadcast he picked up the telephone. One time he explained why, "I don't like news anchors who just sit there and shuffle papers, so I got in the habit of picking up the phone."

And guess who he would call?

He said, "Sometimes I call the producers to see if they liked the show, but just as often I'll call my children and tell them that I'm on my way home for dinner."

I thought that was great. After he gave news to the world Peter Jennings engaged in his most vital communication... *he called his kids*. Likewise, all parents need to stop shuffling papers and call their kid.

Even when a child grows to a point where they can look their parent eye to eye, communication is still key.

Cultivate a listening relationship with your child, and they'll hear your heart and be more inclined to obey.

When Natalie reached dating age, we had a rule. Before she could date a guy I had to meet him.

I'll never forget the first - this boy wanted to take Nat to the homecoming dance. We met at Fuddruckers on 124... talked for a bit... then I drove him home.

But as we got into the car I said, "Son, give me your wallet." He was a little unsure - *but was in no position to refuse*. He handed it over and I stuck it in my pocket.

When we got to his house, and he started to get out of the car, I pulled out his wallet, and asked him if he wanted it back... *He did*. But before I turned it loose, I told him, "I appreciate you trusting me with something as valuable as your wallet - and you'll find I'm returning it in the same condition it was in when I took it.

Now, I'm trusting you with something much more valuable to me than a wallet - and I expect it returned in exactly the same shape it was when you left with it."

Well, my instructions were *heard* and *obeyed*. I think effective communication had a part in the outcome.

Too often, parents only react to their kids. We talk without thinking through what we need to say. The key to instilling obedience in your kids is to get their ear by communicating in wise and compelling ways.

**Realize too**, it's possible for a child to obey a parent without respecting them. This is why *obedience* is just half the goal. **A parent's purpose** is also to teach their child *respect*. As Paul puts it, "**honor**" his parents.

Don't settle for mere obedience without respect.

With my kids I was as quick to address and correct a *bad attitude* as I was a *bad behavior* - maybe quicker.

I've seen parents bribe or threaten their kids to obey.



Such an approach may get a desired result, but it doesn't teach the child the importance of respect.

It reminds me of the boy who misbehaved in school.

He was made to stand in the corner, but all the while he was seething under his breath. He said, "I might be standing on the outside, but I'm sitting on the inside!"

That's obedience without respect.

The Greek word Paul translates in verse 2 as "honor" literally means "to prize." *Parents, do your kids prize you?* Have you taught them to value their parents?

When Zach was a tot, I asked him one day what he liked most about his dad. He said, "When you wrestle with me." Then I asked him what he liked least about his dad. His reply was obvious, "When you spank me."

Then I asked what he liked most about his mom. He said, "When she cooks me breakfast." I felt daring that day, so I asked again, "Ok son, what do you like least about your mom?" Zach thought for a long minute, and then he said, "Dad, everything mom does is good!"

*That's a son who honors his mom.*

Here's the key when it comes to teaching kids to *honor* their parents - nothing you do will yield results if the parents don't act and speak in an *honorable* way.

Don't be a parent who says, "Do what I say and not what I do." That's a recipe for disaster. Parents are an example whether they want to be or not. In family life values and truths are more *caught* than *taught*. Every parent influences their child for better or worse.

I have an nasty habit. When I'm in the yard I like to spit. I enjoy a good spit! Kathy hates it, but I don't even think about it - over the years it's become a habit.

I'll never forget the day many years ago now - I was rounding the corner with Zack, Natalie, and Nick. Zach spit. Nick spit. Then my precious, little princess clears her throat of saliva and Natalie blows out a wad of spit.

Now fast-forward 25 years. A couple of weeks ago Quincy was at the house, *and guess what he does?* He says, "Look, G-Daddy, I spit." Low and behold, I've passed on my bad habits to the third generation.

*Hey, what are you teaching your kids?* Whether you desire it or not, a child will mimic his parents. If you want your kids to honor you, act in an honorable way!

Except for the church, a parent doesn't get a lot of help from the world when it comes to fulfilling their purpose. *Media moguls, advertising agencies, film producers, video game creators, music labels* aren't interested in teaching your kid obedience and respect.

Just the opposite is true. They spend millions of dollars advocating rebellion and disdain for authority.

Your children's classmates and peers – even the public schools - aren't helping either. Other than the church, parents are operating in a hostile environment.

Parents today need purpose and determination!

It reminds me of Deborah Kemp's ordeal. It began when she rolled her car up to the self-service pumps.

Her 6 year-old, daughter, Ashley, was sleeping in the backseat. When Deborah walked around her car to pump gas - suddenly, a man climbed into the driver's seat of her vehicle. He was trying to steal her car...

The 34 year-old mom said later, **"I didn't try to be a hero. I was just concerned about my baby... that was part of me in that car."** As the man drove off, Deborah somehow managed to grab the door, and cling to the steering wheel through the window. The thief drove several blocks dragging her knees on the pavement.

Drawing on a hidden reservoir of strength Deborah was able to hang on - and as the car was still moving, she managed to pull the thief out of the vehicle.

When the would-be thief hit the ground, Deborah grabbed her Club - the anti-theft device she kept under the front seat - and started beating the bad guy.

Witnesses say the man was apologizing and begging Deborah to stop as she *clubbed him with the Club.*

The moral of the story... ***don't mess with a parent!***

Debbie Kemp - skinned knees and all - is one parent who's willing to put up a fight for her family!

And this is what every parent needs to do. We live in a world full of disobedience and disrespect - and it'll rub off on your kids if their parents don't put up a fight.

Our world is a hostile place to raise kids. *We need a purpose...* and tools to accomplish that purpose. And that's what we'll talk about next week - ***a parent's tools.***

In closing, it was May 30, 1982 when God gave Kathy a prophecy. She was at a prayer meeting of pastor's wives, when God spoke through one of the ladies , "By this time next year you'll have a child."

My firstborn, Zach, came into the world exactly 364 days later... on May 29, 1983. Prior to that amazing prophecy, Kathy and I had tried for two years to have a child, but with no success. That's when God saw fit to open my wife's womb - *and I mean wide open...*

I tease her, "*Barren Karen became fertile Myrtle.*" What we couldn't start... we couldn't get stopped!

And four kids later there was no doubt God intended for us to be parents... There are few pursuits in my life that I can say with certainty were sanctioned by God!

I've never been given a divine mandate to work in my yard, or play golf, or piddle on my computer.

I've never heard, "*Thus saith the Lord, read the newspaper.*" But I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, I was called by God to parent my kids! *And if you're a parent you've been called by God to do the same.*

But here's a question... *have you been parenting by default?* Or do you parent your child with God's purpose in mind? Just birthing a child doesn't make you an effective parent. *The difference is a purpose!*

We've got only one shot! Parents, let's do it right! *Are you teaching your children obedience and respect?*