

## **Walking Worthy in Families – Ephesians 6:1-4**

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### I. INTRODUCTION

As we begin today, I'd like to invite our young people to join me up front. The first part of my message is especially for you and I'd like to get you up here a little closer to me so we can have some heart-to-heart time and I can get some feedback from you. So if you're between the ages of 4 and 12 or thereabouts, come on up!

While they're coming up, why don't the rest of you turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 6, the final chapter of our journey through this powerful book! Today, we'll be studying verses 1 through 4 and I've called our message, "Walking Worthy in Families." If you'll remember, this concept of walking worthy was introduced to us by Paul in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 to 3, the beginning of the practical application section of Ephesians. In those verses Paul implores each of us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we've received...a walk he tells us is only possible as we come to true heart humility, recognizing that we can't do it on our own and learning to rely on and walk by the Holy Spirit rather than our own talents and abilities and willpower.

Many of our messages since then have been focused on the practical implications of what it means to walk worthy. We've looked at walking worthy in humility and gentleness and walking unified in the body of Christ. We've learned how walking worthy involves taking off the old self, growing young again in our ways of thinking and trusting, and putting on the new self. We've looked at 7 guidelines Paul gives to us as we learn to walk worthy in the new self. We've learned that walking worthy involves imitating God, living as children of light, and making wise use of our time. And most recently we've looked at what it means to walk worthy in marriage.

Today, we'll examine what walking worthy looks like in other family relationships, specifically between parents and children. Then in a couple weeks, Paul will show us how we can walk worthy in our jobs and as employees or bosses. Then, Lord

willing, we'll finish Ephesians by learning the underlying secret of it all, which is found in learning how to put on the armor of the Lord and truly walk by His power in all things.

So, now that you're all up here, I want to ask how many of you are familiar with the law of gravity? Who can tell me what the law of gravity is about? TAKE RESPONSES.

Well how about this explanation I found of the law of gravity: Newton's law of universal gravitation states that any two bodies in the universe attract each other with a [force](#) that is [directly proportional](#) to the product of their masses and [inversely proportional](#) to the square of the distance between them.”

That's helpful isn't it? Well let's leave out the “law” part and just try to figure out what gravity is? Here's a definition I found: Gravity is the force of attraction by which terrestrial bodies tend to fall toward the center of the earth. Still some big words, but we're starting to get somewhere. I think we can safely say that gravity is what causes us to remain on the ground or fall to the ground if we're in the air. It's why we don't just float off into space and why if we jump, we always return to the ground.

Well, I want to ask you today: what would happen if you decided that you didn't like the law of gravity and just weren't going to live by it anymore? In fact you were going to just ignore it completely. Now one day you found yourself on the edge of a cliff enjoying a beautiful view. You saw an eagle soaring high up in the sky riding the wind currents and making it look so effortless and majestic. You imagined how amazing it would be to be an eagle and to be able to soar to amazing heights, leaving the earth behind and going wherever you wanted. You had learned about the law of gravity in school, but you decided you didn't like it and that nothing was going to hold you back from flying up into the sky like that eagle. So guess what you did? You stepped off the cliff and started flapping your arms. And what do you think happened to you? Did you soar into the sky like the eagle? No. You fell to the ground to your death.

You see, our God created and designed this universe and built into it certain rules and laws and truths that govern everything that happens here. These rules and laws are unchangeable and when we decide to ignore them, things just don't go

well for us. We can say we don't like them, we can decide we're not going to follow them, or we can try to ignore them. But what we can know for sure is that none of that will change the fact that they are true and that there will be consequences when we ignore them or decide to toss them aside. Some consequences may be minor and only cause small problems for you, but others can have serious and even life threatening consequences as we saw in the law of gravity example.

So why am I telling you this? What does this have to do with what we're studying today in the book of Ephesians? Well let's read our passage today in Ephesians 6, verses 1 to 4, and then I'll get around to explaining it shortly:

***6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.***

May the Lord bless the reading of His Word.

## II. CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS

### A. The command and what it means

Well, after hearing the first couple verses of that passage, you can probably see now why I brought you up here today, since the first instructions Paul gives to us today are for you. Are any of you guys children? Well then there can be no doubt that Paul is talking directly to each of you. And my guess is that each of you have heard this command before. Am I right? Have your parents ever told you that the Bible says you are supposed to obey your parents? They probably remind you of that all the time, don't they? Well, it's a pretty simple command, isn't it? Children, obey your parents in the Lord.

So what does it mean to obey? TAKE RESPONSES. It sounds really simple, doesn't it? Do what your parents ask you to do. You see God has appointed your parents to be in charge of you until you're a grown-up. And I want you to imagine what life would be like if he hadn't done that. What if when you

were born you were just laid on a bed and left to take care of yourself? You wouldn't last long would you? There would be no one to feed you, no one to keep you warm, no one to change your dirty diaper, and there would be no way for you to even move around as a newborn baby. So I think you can all understand your need for your parents at that age.

But the problem comes when you get a little bit older and start getting ideas of your own and start wanting to do what you want to when you want to do it. Then what happens is that you start thinking that you don't need your parents quite as much and obeying them becomes a real challenge sometimes, doesn't it? And some of the biggest challenges with obedience are what I'll call timing and attitude.

Is it important when your parents ask you to do something that you do it right away, or are you still following God's command to obey when they have to ask you 3 or 4 times and then the only way they finally get you to do it is when they raise their voice and start threatening you with consequences? What about your attitude? Are you obeying in the way God wants you to when you roll your eyes or stomp through the house or complain the whole time? Timing and attitude are very important parts of obeying your parents in the way God designed, aren't they?

But even though sometimes it's hard and frustrating to obey your parents and have them telling you what to do, did you know that it's still a really great thing that God has put your parents in charge of you until you're fully grown-up and ready to leave home? In fact their care of you is almost as important and essential now as it was when you were a little newborn baby. Your parents have an extremely important job to do on your behalf from the time you're a little baby until you turn 18 years old and even beyond.

How many of you think you already know it all and can pretty much take care of yourself and wish your parents would just let you run your own life? Well guess what? You're wrong. And when we as parents were your age, we didn't know it all either. And we still don't know it all. In fact one of the great things you'll learn as you grow older and that hopefully your parents will be diligently helping you to understand, is that none of us will never know it all and the sooner we realize that and learn to walk in humility and dependence

on God instead of ourselves, the better our lives will become. In fact one of the most important jobs I can do as a dad is to help my kids understand that they cannot be good and cannot handle life and cannot make good decisions on their own. When they come to that understanding, I need to encourage them to get to know God, talk to him, and learn to let him give them what they need to make good choices and live a successful life that brings glory to him.

You see, God has put your parents in charge of you and has asked you to obey them, not because he just likes to tell you what to do, but because he knows you need guidance and protection and love and someone who can introduce you to Him, help you learn what's right and wrong, teach you the dangers and consequences of bad choices, and train you to function well in the world to which you will all too soon be forced to enter on your own. But if we have as parents have done our jobs well by God's power, you actually won't be alone when you leave home, because you will have come to know Christ and He will walk with you wherever you go in the world and provide you with everything you need to face whatever life brings your way.

In fact, that is our highest priority as parents: to help you know our Savior, Jesus Christ, and walk with Him all the days of your life and for the rest of eternity. As Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5:

***But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.***

As good parents, our highest goal is always to point each of you to Jesus Christ, where you can become new creations, experience the deep and personal love of Christ, and learn to love others as you have been loved.

B. Why you should do it

So it's clear from the Bible that God asks you to obey your parents. But does God also tell you why you should do it in Ephesians 6, verse 1? He certainly does, and the reason he gives is very simple and straightforward. He simply says that children should obey their parents because this is right. And this is what brings us back to that opening illustration I gave you about the law of

gravity. Because in looking at the meaning of the word translated, “right,” we find that it means something that's in step with divine laws...something that agrees with how God has designed the universe to operate.

In other words, in God's design of the universe, one of the laws he has established (similarly to the law of gravity) is that life operates best when children obey their parents. When they don't obey their parents, things just don't go well. Just as a person who decides to ignore the law of gravity will either seriously injure themselves or possibly even die, children who decide to spend their life disobeying their parents, fighting against them, and doing the opposite of what they're asked to do, will suffer serious consequences and hurt themselves and others badly in the process.

***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right...*** This is the way God has designed life to operate. Obeying and cooperating with your parents is the best way for you to stay safe, learn how to live your life successfully, and keep a close relationship with the Lord. But are your parents perfect? Absolutely not. Your parents make mistakes, they don't always have perfect insight into who's right and wrong in arguments with your brother or sister, and they may sometimes be too busy or distracted with their own goals in life. But guess what? They love you deeply and want what's best for you and they have a really big job and responsibility to take care of you and guide you. Whether you like it or not, for this period in your life God has put them in charge of you and he asks you to obey them in the Lord.

And that little phrase, “in the Lord,” is something you shouldn't miss. It can be really hard to obey parents sometimes...to give up what you want and stop what you're doing, in order to do what they're asking you to do. Each of us has things we like to do and we have plans for how we want to spend our time and, let's be honest, we often think we know better than our parents. But still God asks children to put those things aside and obey. God also asks us as adults to do the same when he asks us to do something. And, as always, whether we're adults or children, the only way you learn to obey is “in the Lord.” When you learn to talk to God, asking for strength, asking Him for the ability to make the hard choices and win the battle with your old self, then you will start being able to consistently obey your parents.

Young people, I want to challenge you to get to know God. First, make sure you've accepted Jesus as your Savior, and then make it your goal in life to know him. Start reading a little bit of the Bible each day or ask your parents to read it to you. Get in the habit of talking to God as you go about your day. When you find yourself not wanting to obey your parents, ask God to help you do it. Recognize that the part of you that doesn't want to obey your parents is your old self, the self-centered person you were before you came to know Jesus Christ. It's the part of you that Satan is trying to bring back to life and put back on the throne of your life. When you see it rising up, go to God, asking him for the strength to do what's right. Keep God on the throne and yourself off.

### III. CHILDREN, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER

#### A. The command and the promise

So let's move on to verse 2 in Ephesians chapter 6, where we find Paul's second command to children. And this command also applies to me and each of your parents as well. The command is this:

***Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.***

Now this is a very old commandment, one which was given to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. You may have a cross reference in your Bibles to Exodus 20, verse 12, because that's where this command was first given. This command to honor your father and mother was number 5 of the 10 commandments, and as Paul mentions, the first commandment that came with a promise. And in fact when you look back at the 10 commandments, this is the only one that came with a promise. And that promise is: ***so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.***

That sounds like a pretty good promise, doesn't it? But does this mean that if we honor our father and mother we're guaranteed to have a good life and live to a ripe old age?

Well, let's not be hasty and jump to conclusions without carefully examining what is actually said here in Ephesians and back in Exodus. As we look at verse 3 in Ephesians chapter 6, I want you to notice a key word that is used twice in the verse. That word is, "may." This same word is used in the Exodus passage...***so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.*** What Paul is saying here and what God communicated in the 10 commandments is that by honoring your father and your mother you're making it possible for things to go well in your life and for you to be able to live a long life.

Notice it doesn't say: so that it will be well with you, and that you will live long on the earth. There's a big difference between will and may, isn't there? It's kind of like the difference between your mom saying, "We'll see," and "Yes, I promise we will do it." "We'll see" in my house definitely didn't mean it's a sure thing and we will absolutely do it...but it did leave me with the hope and possibility that it could still happen.

So what we can take away from this promise about what may happen if we honor our father and our mother, is that if we don't honor our father and mother, we're setting ourselves up for hard times in our lives and the length of our lives on this earth could even be affected. Dishonoring your parents in Old Testament times was a serious crime and came with very stiff consequences. This call to honor our parents is another one of the key components or divine laws that God has built into our universe. You can ignore it, but things are not going to go well for you if you do.

B. How do we honor our parents?

So what does it mean to honor someone? Well in looking at the biblical meaning of the word translated, "honor," what we find is that it involves showing someone you value them and regard them as worthy of respect. So considering that idea, what do you think are some ways you can honor your mom and dad? TAKE RESPONSES.

Well, in studying Scripture I found that one of the primary ways children can show honor to their parents is by obeying them. And the same is true when we think about each of our relationships with God. The best way to honor



God and show respect for him is to believe his Word and follow his instructions. If we read the Bible and hear about how God teaches us to live our lives, but then just do whatever we want and ignore his instructions, we're dishonoring him and showing him by our actions that we don't respect him or trust what he says.

And when I think about "kids these days" and the ways they commonly dishonor their parents, I tend to think of things like rolling your eyes, talking disrespectfully or yelling at your parents, ignoring them when they ask you to do something, sticking your tongue out when they're back is turned, or finally doing what you're asked to do but stomping, complaining and moaning while you do it. These are the timing and attitude issues God wants to teach you to give up. When you choose to honor your parents instead and do what they ask you to do cheerfully, he will reward you and bless you and you will have a lot more peace and happiness in your life and in your house. And you'll spend a lot less time being in trouble and suffering the consequences of disobedience.

#### C. Not just for kids

Now before we leave verses 2 and 3, I want to remind those of us who no longer live with our parents, that while we may no longer be required to obey our parents, we are always called to honor them. This command to honor your father and mother is given to all of us, no matter how old we are. As we've seen already, it's one of the 10 commandments. No matter what experience we may have had with our own mom and dad over the years, we need to find ways to treat them with respect and honor, take care of them, and acknowledge the sacrifices they've made on our behalf. This is very important to God.

#### IV. FATHERS, DO NOT PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN TO ANGER

Well, all of you up here in front will be happy to know that now I get to start preaching more to your parents, instead of you. But I still want you to listen closely, because I want you guys to understand the big and challenging job that's been given to your parents. And maybe in understanding what God is

calling them to do on your behalf, you'll learn to cooperate more with what they're trying to accomplish for your good.

#### A. The command and what it means

So we're in verse 4 now, of Ephesians chapter 6, and we find that it's specifically directed to fathers. God has specifically appointed dads to this task, but I strongly believe mothers have a big role in it as well. This is especially true in families where dad is out of the picture or maybe isn't walking with the Lord.

Paul gives these instructions in verse 4:

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

So the first command given to fathers is something they are not to do. Fathers are told not to provoke their children to anger. Now when I think about this idea of provoking someone, I immediately think of brothers and sisters. I know I'm supposed be talking to fathers, but I want to ask any of you young people who have brothers or sisters if you've ever been guilty of trying to push their buttons? How many of you know what it means to push somebody's buttons? I'm pretty sure we all have a very good idea about what pushing somebody's buttons is about. It's about intentionally trying to frustrate or irritate someone in order to make them angry or get "a rise" out of them. And there's just something about brothers and sisters that makes pushing their buttons seem really fun and entertaining.

When I was about 6 years old I remember doing some pushing of my sister's buttons. My mom had laid down the rule that none of us were ever to call anyone else a liar. Evidently we'd been doing this a lot and she was tired of it and determined to put a stop to it once and for all. Now my sister had made this really cool craft and she brought it to my mom to show her how neat it had turned out. I must've been really jealous about how cool it was or maybe I just wanted to push her buttons, because when she brought it to mom I started insisting that I had made it. That of course made my sister very upset, and she immediately shouted out, "Liar!" Unfortunately my mom had just

made the new rule and the consequences for calling someone a liar had been proclaimed as getting your mouth washed out with soap. So guess what happened to my sister? She got her mouth washed out with soap and somehow she never forgot that experience. And truly I did feel very bad and guilty for what I'd done, and I think I learned something in the process.

But this example gives us a little picture of what's involved in provoking someone to anger. To provoke someone to anger is to do things that inevitably lead to anger and frustration. But I don't think the provoking that's spoken of here in verse 4 is necessarily intentional. A few fathers, to be sure, are deliberately unreasonable, impossible to please, and enjoy making the lives of their kids miserable, but most fathers who are provoking their children to anger probably don't realize they're doing it. And yet, somehow in the way they're relating to their children, they're putting them on a road that inevitably leads to anger.

#### B. How to not provoke your children to anger

Well fortunately, Paul gives us some additional insight that provides fathers with what they need to make sure they're not provoking their children to anger. Notice that keyword, "but," in verse 4. With that word Paul is introducing the alternative to a parenting style that provokes children to anger. He tells fathers that instead of provoking their children to anger, they are to ***bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.***

I had the opportunity a few years back to go to an AWANA training in Boise and one of the sessions was on this very verse. Larry Fowler shared how this verse really opened his eyes to the active role that parents, and especially fathers, are called to take in training up their kids in the Lord.

What he found in studying this verse is that when fathers don't bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, they are thereby provoking their children to anger. In other words, what will cause children to develop anger toward God, their parents, or maybe just life in general, is when fathers don't bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Neglecting this, being passive about it, or leaving it others, will tend to provoke children to anger in their lives.

## V. FATHERS, BRING YOUR CHILDREN UP IN THE DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD

### A. The call to focused and deliberate action

So we see that fathers are called by God to bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This indicates first that fathers are called to focused and deliberate action as they parent their children. Fathers are called to take responsibility for the discipline and biblical training of their kids. We don't get a picture of just a laid back, passive approach to biblical training and instruction, where dads just make sure their kids go to church and AWANA each week. Instead, we get a picture of dads actively doing the discipline and training themselves and living out the truths of God's Word in their own lives.

Going to church and AWANA can be important parts of this process, but dads are called to bring God's Word into the home and daily life and incorporate it into the fabric of the family. They are to bring their kids up. This phrase, "bring them up," in the Bible literally means "to nourish up to maturity." So dads, we're called by God to nourish our children in the Lord, actively working on their behalf to bring them up to maturity in him....A very challenging job, but one that we can do by God's power within us!

### B. What is discipline

So what is meant by, "discipline," in verse 4? We're told to bring our children up in the discipline of the Lord. The Blue Letter Bible defines the discipline spoken of here as: "the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment)."

This idea of discipline gives us a broad picture of the whole training and education of our children in biblical truth and wisdom. It incorporates setting up moral boundaries and guidelines based on God's Word, being encouragers of our children...spurring them on to growth in knowing and loving God...helping them develop good character...teaching them how to study the Bible and apply it to their lives...correcting them and disciplining

them when they make mistakes and go down wrong paths...showing them how to pray and depend on God's strength for the challenges of life. And in order to do this successfully, fathers need to be knowing and seeking God themselves and living their faith out in practical ways for their kids to see. We can talk all we want about how we should be living our lives, but if we're not doing it ourselves, our kids won't either.

### C. What is instruction?

So how does the word, "instruction," in verse 4 differ from discipline? Paul also tells fathers to bring their children up in the instruction of the Lord. Well the Greek word here is *nouthesia*, and is defined as admonition or exhortation. It specifically focuses on the things that are wrong and call for warning. The instruction spoken of here is tied in closely with warning our kids about dangers and wrong paths, rather than just teaching them truths and passively leaving it there.

The example shared in Vine's Expository Dictionary to help us understand *nouthesia* is the priest, Eli, in 1 Samuel. If you'll remember Eli had two sons who were labeled as worthless men. They disrespected the Lord in all their priestly duties and led lots of other people into sin with them. It got so bad in fact that God eventually put them to death. And in 1 Samuel 3:13 we see where Eli had made a serious error in instructing his sons. The verse says:

***For I have told him [Eli] that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.***

Do you see what Eli's error was in bringing up his sons? He taught and trained them, but he failed to rebuke them. He failed to aggressively confront sin in their lives and teach them the consequences of their sinful actions.

And dads, we must remember this as well as we bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't be a passive dad who's most concerned about being friends with his kids and ends up standing by while they destroy themselves with bad choices. Be aggressive, deliberate, and

love your kids enough to confront sin in their lives and provide adequate consequences to keep them on the right path. Give them consequences now before they get out into the world on their own and experience the much more devastating consequences that will come if they haven't learned to walk with the Lord and make the choices that will lead to success in life.

## VI. CONCLUSION

If there's one thing I could hammer home today for dads and moms as we close, it's that God calls each of us to be active and deliberate and intentional in bringing our kids up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't leave that job to somebody else. You are the ones God has called and equipped to do it most effectively and by doing it you will be protecting them from the anger and hopelessness and desperation that characterizes so many in our world today. You will be showing them the way to life and hope and peace and meaning wherever they go in their lives.

And remember, you cannot do this job without drawing near to God yourself and letting him reach into and transform every part of your being. Words are just words. But words coupled with action and flowing out of an authentic relationship with the Lord are powerful and life-changing and able to give your kids what they need to grow up to maturity in the Lord.

And kids, thanks for your patience today! I know I get a little long-winded sometimes, but I hope you've gotten a better idea of the importance of obeying and honoring your parents, and that you can now see the big responsibility your parents have and what they're trying to accomplish in your life as they guide you, protect you, discipline you, and teach you about God. Remember to obey and honor them in everything and God will reward you and bring blessing to your lives. Don't be like people who try to ignore the law of gravity and end up seriously hurting or killing themselves. Get in step with God's plan and design of the universe. Obey and honor your parents and your life will go so much better! Get to know God and ask him to give you the power to do what's right. That's the only way any of us will ever be able to walk worthy in life and in our family relationships.