

At Home And At Work

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you have made known to us your will, your design for us, that you teach us how to live wisely in the world you've made.

Father, please speak to us now, and by your Spirit, give us heads that can understand your word and hearts that are willing to change and follow you.

For we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen. So we're in this series in the book of Ephesians, and one of the things that we're learning in Ephesians is life is a peach and not an orange.

Okay? So that the things, what we want to do in life is we treat life like an orange, a satsuma. We have segments to our lives, and we kind of think, God is interested in some of this, but he's not really relevant to all of it, or he's not so bothered about other bits.

Maybe we think he's more interested in what we're doing when we gather on a Sunday, when we sing, when we look at the Bible. But when it comes to getting home and putting the bins out, or going cycling, or going to the cinema, that doesn't concern God, or what I believe about God doesn't really change that.

[1 : 22] Well, we've had three chapters in Ephesians, the first three chapters, that have overwhelmed us with God's great plan for his cosmos. And central to those plans are the church, what he's doing among his people.

The church is the big thing that God is doing in the world today. That's what we've seen. For his glory. He is taking people who put their trust in Jesus Christ, and saving them all by his grace, to be a united people, a glimpse of the future, where he's taking the whole world united under Jesus.

And now he asks us, in the second half of Ephesians, as his people, to live that out together. And it affects everything. There isn't any segment of your life, if you're a Christian, over which Jesus Christ doesn't say, that's mine.

That's mine now. Please do it for me. So in chapter 4, we looked at how we treat each other as a community. And there were these big counter-cultural demands, like, be kind to one another.

Be kind to one another. Speak the truth in love to each other. Then in chapter 5, it was about how we live in the world. Imitating God.

[2 : 36] Living a life of love for other people. Now in chapter 6, we're looking at in the home. The first century household, where there would have been slaves, as well as a family.

If you've been with us, you'll remember that in chapter 5, verse 18, if we just look back there, there was this command, be filled with the Spirit. Don't get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit. And then Paul has described the Spirit-filled Christian in different ways.

He said that we sing to each other and to God. We're thankful to God. Then verse 21, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. And that was like a hinge into this section where we look at different relationships in the household.

We looked at marriage, the marriage relationship the last couple of weeks. Now we're looking at children to parents and then slaves to masters. So first of all, the Spirit-filled Christian at home.

Paul addresses children and then parents. If you just have a look at verses 1 to 3 again, he looks at children. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

[3 : 43] Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. So Christian children are called to obey their parents as part of their obedience to the Lord.

And we need to help our children in our church family to see that that's a grace-filled command. It's the same with all the commands we're going to look at today.

But children, I think, are especially susceptible to misunderstanding why God gives us commands. It's not keep the rules to get into God's good books.

And some children believe that because they're natural Pharisees. They love the rules so that they can keep the rules and it helps them look down on other children.

And they feel self-righteous. And we need to keep helping our children be conscious of their own sin. So that as they're exposed to that, they realize how much God loves them, that he sees that sin and it matters to him, but he sent Jesus to die for it so that they're free now to live a life of grace.

[4 : 54] They should want to obey their parents, not so it makes them proud as a rule keeper, but out of thanks to God that he's forgiven them for being a rule breaker.

And some children are like that. They're natural Pharisees. Other children, we perhaps find it more easy to worry about, are the natural rebels. And it's easy to panic about that with a child.

They're just disobedient. They always want to break the rules. But it can be really exciting to have a child that's rebellious, that breaks the rules, because what's really exciting about that is that if a rebellious child can grasp the gospel, can grasp what God's done for them in the Lord Jesus, and they start consciously trying to obey mum and dad, because they know God loves them, you have an obvious gospel transformation in the life of a child.

So as Christians, we don't want good kids. We don't just want them to be good. We want godly kids. Kids who know they're sinners, but they know they've been saved and forgiven, so that they obey God.

And because they obey God, they obey their parents. They're consciously thinking, I want to do, I want to tidy my room, because mum asked me to, not because it makes sense to me, but because I know how much Jesus loves me now.

[6 : 16] And mum asked me to tidy my room. Then we move on from children. There aren't many children still with us, so we're going to move on quite quickly, on to parents. I've put the point on our sheets. The Christian parent, educate, don't exasperate.

Have a look with me at verse 4. This is where we're going to spend most of our time this morning. Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

It's interesting, isn't it, that Paul goes from parents, he describes in verse 1, parents, to fathers in verse 4. Dads are given the primary responsibility.

Men, if you're a Christian, and you're a dad, you're a pastor, you have a congregation, and your congregation is your household. That, we were looking last week at how the husband is called to lay down his life sacrificially with an ambition that his wife grows in her faith and hope and love.

Now, we're seeing that dads are to do everything they can to make sure their children understand what Jesus has done for them, what he's offering them in the gospel, what he asks from them in saving them.

[7 : 28] There's a Christian song for kids. I don't know if you know this song, Press on Mums, it's called, and there's a verse for mums, and there's a verse for dads, and there's a verse for kids, and the verse for dads says this, Press on dads, love your wife, serve your children, set the pace.

Press on dads, seize the moment, show them Jesus, run the race. So Paul addresses fathers here, and it should be a challenge to the dads in our church family that we need to step up, but it shouldn't make any single mums here or any mums feel that their role is diminished or that they feel inadequate at all.

That's not the intention. It's a challenge to dads, but parenting is a team project. It's a team project where there are two parents in the household working together to nurture their children and pray for them and parent together in a united way, but also, please don't switch off here if you don't have children or you have kids, but they've grown up, because it takes a church to raise a child, and Kathy and I, my wife and I, are among many in our church family who would say that we value so much the way that other adults are helping us to parent our kids, getting alongside our children, taking an interest in them, praying for them, not parenting them, praying for them, interacting with them, loving them, and seeking to support us as we parent them.

It's invaluable. It takes a church to raise a child. It's a team project. So let's get into the nitty-gritty, but as we do that, let's just remind ourselves, headline, at St. Silas, we're all about the grace of God.

So please don't listen to the teaching here as I talk about verse 4 and as we think about it together, and feel condemned. If you're a Christian, God assumes there's no condemnation.

[9 : 21] As we share bread and wine together later, we'll be reminding ourselves Jesus has paid for all our mistakes in the past. We're not to listen to this and feel terrible with our regrets.

And yet, at the same time, we need good teaching on parenting because God wants us to be assured of his love for us in Jesus, of his forgiveness, and yet he wants us to think, today is a new day.

How do I best do God's will as a parent from now on? So first of all, what not to do, we're told not to exasperate our children. Do not exasperate your child.

How could a parent exasperate their children? I've got three ideas. First, you might exasperate your child by over-disciplining them, by being too critical of them, by failing to encourage them.

I constantly have to remind myself, often when I've made the mistake, how sensitive our children are. I think of a friend who's got three children who are a bit older than mine, and he said to me, one of the big things he had to learn about his children was because every child is different, you don't treat every child the same.

[10 : 34] You treat every child fairly. You have to treat every child fairly, but you don't treat them the same. You might exasperate them if you lose your self-control with them.

You might exasperate them if you're inconsistent in how you exercise discipline or set boundaries. If you impose expectations on them that are unreasonable.

If you have regrets about your own life and you turn your ambition for your children into sort of compensating for them. Over-discipline. And I suspect that's what Paul has most clearly in mind.

Again, please don't feel condemned. If I asked every parent to stand up here in the room and I said, sit down if you've never lost your temper with your children, I don't think anyone would sit down.

Okay? It's a safe place to be a sinner, St. Silas. But we need to be careful not to exasperate by over-discipline. Secondly, though, you might exasperate your child by under-disciplining them.

[11 : 35] That is, if your child grows up thinking, because of the way you parent them, that they're the center of the universe, that they are the princess on board in your family, if they grow up without any boundaries, if they grow up always getting their own way at home, they will be exasperated when they go out into the real world and their employer or their teacher or their future spouse doesn't let them get their own way like that.

It's unbelievably good timing that we're looking at this as we have a parenting course next weekend. Sign up, be there with Ann Benson. There'll be loads on Saturday morning that she'll explore about loving and nurturing and disciplining our kids and enjoying raising them and then time with the parents of teenagers next Sunday come along.

Let me just add a third point about exasperating your kids. I guess Paul wouldn't have had this directly in mind but one of the ways we can exasperate children is by failing to build a good relationship with them as a parent and one of the big threats to us in that in today's world is with screen time.

It's with our smartphones and I guess any parent can be guilty of that but I just want to make an observation that when I take our girls swimming to swimming lessons if I just look at the viewing area in the swimming baths this is just my observation often the mums are watching the kids swim to encourage them and the dads are all on their phones and I remember one week one of our daughters getting out of the pool and saying dad you didn't watch me because I saw you were on your phone it's a massive danger Lent starts on Wednesday I was talking to a friend who was a pastor last week he was saying that for Lent in his church they're having a fast from smartphones from the internet now perhaps you don't want to do that but I just wonder if you're a parent and you're conscious that at times in the family home or where you're with your children you're on your phone when you really afterwards think I should have been engaging with my children could you treat Lent as a time to try that and think

I'm going to put my smartphone by the door when I come home and I'm not going to look at the internet or check my emails on it when I'm with my kids because I'm going to focus on them maybe you could try that so verse 4 fathers do not exasperate your children but positively as parents we're given this wonderful and terrifying responsibility instead verse 4 instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord now to think about this I'm going to draw on some teaching done by a guy called Matt Chandler who's a great pastor in America at Village Church in Texas he's done a series and he's done some writing on family discipleship so this is not original ok this is what I can do I can read during the week and I can disseminate that's what we're doing here are three things that I think are fundamental to this command to train and instruct our children in the Lord modelling time and moments so first of all modelling that's how we train people isn't it in life we train by modelling and we're doing this all the time with our kids we're all discipling children in something so there are people who look at verses like this in the Bible perhaps non-Christians and say typical the Christians religious people they're always trying to indoctrinate their kids you shouldn't do that now as Christians we know that faith in Christ is a personal choice we can't compel our children to believe we're not forcing them to believe but it's worth saying that secular people indoctrinate their children you can't help it no child grows up in a vacuum so the secular humanist parent might say to their child we want you to be free to explore every faith and work out what you believe that's your freedom but in reality they will model in their home every day very clear ideas about what's right and what's wrong about what this family values about whether there's a God and whether he's relevant to their lives it's inevitable they will model every day in their household

[15 : 49] Jesus is not Lord he's not so none of us should make the mistake of thinking I'm not discipling my kids we're all discipling our kids all the time we went on a holiday to Aviemore not so long ago and obviously when you go to Aviemore there's great scenery everywhere one afternoon I took my family into the dingy back room of a pub in Aviemore because Middlesbrough were playing against Norwich City in the playoff final in making that decision I was discipling my kids I was saying to them in this family what happens on that big screen for the next two hours is more beautiful than anything you'll see out there that's what I was saying if those men in red put that ball in the net that's what will make this a great day on our family holiday forget the mountains for two hours I was modelling something and we lost and it was miserable it was a stupid model that is a stupid model right for family life okay in contrast

I remember a guy saying to me my dad was a blue collar worker he was a quiet man he was never up front at church but what I remember about him more than anything else was that he was a bible man early every morning you'd find him on his own with his bible open because Jesus came first and that's what I knew about my dad if we want our kids to put Jesus at the centre of their lives we have to make sure that they see he's the centre of our lives we have to nurture our love for him so that when it comes to how we spend our time or how we spend our money our kids know Jesus comes first for mum for dad and that includes that our children need to realise that Jesus is more important to us than they are we love them we'll always love them we love them unconditionally but our kids are not God and there are times when it's important for our kids to experience in our families the sacrifice of being Jesus people that they will be frustrated that dad or mum isn't around because they've gone to the evening service on a Sunday or they're not there because they've gone to the central prayer meeting because

Jesus comes first for dad they might be frustrated that there are people around the dinner table on a Sunday that they don't know but they're learning it's because we're Jesus people and he comes first now modelling does not mean we have to be perfect reassuringly one of the mottos that I have for ministry that I think applies to parenting as well is that people should see Christ in me not as a picture but as a window do you see what I mean in that I'm not pretending that I'm Jesus to you guys or to my family but what I need them to see my family is that I depend on Jesus every day they see through me to him so that includes saying sorry when I've done the wrong thing for my kids I need to say sorry to them I need to ask them for forgiveness and they need to see me praying asking God for forgiveness I remember once with one of our girls she'd been really really naughty I won't say which one she'd done something really naughty and I got too angry with her about it okay and I went back later and I said sorry and later in the day we were praying and I said okay let's do our sorry prayer so let's have a sorry prayer and I said okay

I'll start because I had to say sorry today didn't I so I'll start so I said a sorry prayer I said Father God I'm sorry that I got too angry today with one of my daughters please forgive me thank you that Jesus died for me so that I'm forgiven please help me to be a better dad amen okay your turn obviously what I was hoping for was something similar and I got something similar I got this I got okay dear Father God I'm sorry that Daddy got too angry with me today please forgive him and help him to be a better dad amen okay it wasn't quite what I was looking for but we did achieve something in that evening which is that she saw that I depend on Jesus and she needs to see that every day so that's modeling secondly time time is this let me define time time is creating intentional time built into the rhythm of your family's life for the purpose of thinking about talking about and living out the gospel we're all busy but this is about being intentional with the time that you've got thinking where are the points look ahead plan where are the points this week when you could talk about think about and live out the gospel as a family could you plan to do it in a car journey when you're going to be together anyway just make a note we will do that we will talk about Jesus together could you plan when one of them is playing tennis and you've got another child with you and you've got some one-to-one time or when you've just woken up on a Saturday morning and there's a little moment of time before breakfast or when you're sitting down for a meal together as a family are you reading the Bible with your children encouraging them if they can already read to read the Bible every day for themselves giving them notes so they can do that every day are you doing it with them every day if they're too young to read themselves or if they're already doing that still finding time that as a family you do something together each week and one of the things that holds us back is we think oh I'm just not very inventive

I'm just not sure what to do but there are loads of ideas there are loads of great resources out there there's a great book Table Talk I just looked for it on the bookstall our copies have gone Table Talk from the Good Book Company just gives you really easy family time it's got the questions there you discuss them together they've got a video on the website of a family doing it it's chaos the video it's really reassuring have a go you could just make sure that you know what they've done in KidZone so that you can talk to them about it and when you say what did you do in KidZone and they say I don't know you say well I do you did about God being a shepherd didn't you what ways do you think God's a shepherd and they say I don't know and you say well I was thinking about this okay to help them and get talking and I know sometimes it's chaos believe me lots of our family devotional times end in absolute carnage and my friend well I heard recently of a guy who said that he goes around his children before family devotional time and they every single child has to read out the same rules one after the other

[22 : 49] I will not go to the toilet for the next 10 minutes I will not ask any questions that have nothing to do with this okay obvious questions every child has to read it in turn the stories I could tell about our family time but I won't okay but here are a couple of ideas that I took down from Matt Chandler recently I've put his resource I've put a link to it in the notice sheet we tried the ABC of praise alright we just sat down together for food for a meal but we each had to think of something to thank God for beginning with the letter A then we moved on to the letter B and C we're trying to cultivate in our children's hearts thankfulness towards God there are great resources available get your diary out when could you make time this week after modelling and time thirdly moments moments is this you haven't planned it but you just pick the low hanging fruit from everyday life and you turn those moments into an opportunity to talk about the gospel

I remember being with a friend who's a dad and his son was crying about something and he ran up to his dad for comfort and his son picked him up and after his son had calmed down a bit he wiped his tears from his face and he said that's what Jesus is going to do for all of us one day he's going to wipe every tear from our eyes he just took the moment the low hanging fruit and used it for God have you ever looked at the night sky look at the stars with your family could you say isn't it amazing how many stars there are imagine how Abraham must have felt when God said to him that's how many people are going to be my people through Jesus that's how many children you're going to have or could you say to your child isn't it amazing how we can see the stars and they're so far away and God says that when we hold on to God's word and the people around us don't we shine like stars in the sky use the moments and maybe we can't think of them but maybe we just we can just think

I'm just going to pray with my kids when they come to me about something that matters so if your child has an issue at school they're worried about someone getting bullied at school and they talk to you about it or they're worried about a friendship at school that you can just say can I pray let's pray so they see that God is real to you in the moment as you take it so we've broken down into a few key elements what it might look like to raise children in the training and instruction of the Lord time's against us but secondly and more briefly we're going to think about work work really matters as a Christian I'd love to do a series we'll do a series at some point in our Sundays on work but we had one not so long ago at St Silas so we're just going to look more briefly at these verses there's a command for slaves and there's a command for masters now it's worth saying it's important to say Paul is not condoning slavery here he condemns the slave trade in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 8 and he's just dealing here with the first century reality of social structures that they were slaves they weren't they weren't the same as the forced slavery that we think of that in more recent history the last few centuries and African American slave trade it wasn't the same as that but nonetheless

Paul isn't condoning what was going on and even though none of us is a slave today in the first in the 21st well in the first century sense there are good things we can learn about what he tells slaves to do for us in the workplace so first of all obey your boss as you would Jesus I don't know what your boss is like you might have a great boss and that's an easy thing you might have a boss who you feel is nothing like Jesus and doesn't notice what you're doing but have a look at verse 5 slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart just as you would obey Christ and here's the countercultural challenge obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from your heart and it's not just for an earthly reward for money or respect or prestige the reasons people go to work in our culture he says serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord not people because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do whether they are slave or free do you see how challenging that is even when your work is going unnoticed by your boss or the people around you you can remember that the Lord is watching he sees what you're doing and he will reward you because you're doing it for his glory and he is pleased with you

I remember at the law firm I worked at that the culture there was so much a culture of face time of being seen there that if you went out for a drink with friends and you were going back to the office or if you just went home early one day people would leave their jacket on the desk chair and leave the desk lamp on so that as partners walked past later into the night they would see that and think oh they've just gone off but they're coming back they're going to be at work later so it was all about being seen to be clocking up the hours not the Christian in contrast there's the story told of minister in the 19th century Charles Spurgeon saying to a servant girl what difference has it made that she become a Christian and she said now sir I always sweep under the mats what would be the equivalent for you in your working life of sweeping under the mats doing what no one else will see but it's a good thing so you do it for God's glory then Paul turns to masters and a good number of us at St. Silas a good number of you are managers of people you're employers of people you have teams working under you the principle is serve your workers as you would

[29 : 00] Jesus look at verse 9 with me explosive at the time verse 9 and masters treat your slaves in the same way in other words your status before God is the same as the slaves who work for you treat them as he expects them to treat you in verse 5 we heard they have to treat you with respect and fear with sincerity of heart treat them with respect and fear and sincerity of heart carrying on in verse 9 do not threaten them since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and there is no favoritism with him Jesus used his authority over us for our good and our attitude towards people who work for us should be the same for people who work for you maybe that would include taking an interest in them so that unlike the other people at your level at work you know the names of the partners and spouses of the people who work for you and you know the names of their children because you are interested in them could you praise and encourage them when things have gone well for the whole team to recognize their role when things go badly could you recognize where you're responsible for that take responsibility yourself for the failings encourage them with the successes because you want to see them flourish do you see what a wonderful picture this is of the workplace as Christians redeem it for the Lord Jesus

I remember looking at these verses with a Chinese lawyer when we were both working in Beijing and we were reading the Bible together and he had not long been a Christian and we looked at these commands and we thought about work and he said to me Martin I think if this is true every employer should want all their workers to be Christians and if this is true every worker should long that their boss would be a Christian and we can do this if we're fixed on Jesus Christ we can be the best workers in Glasgow and the best bosses in Glasgow because our eyes are fixed on our heavenly master who is perfectly just and sees what we're doing who loves us and gave himself for us and came to serve us to make us right with God let's pray together have a moment of quiet just to reflect on God's word heavenly father we thank you so much that your compassions are new are new every morning and that you have looked on us and loved us and saved us not because we are good parents not because we are obedient children not because we are good workers you saved us not because of any righteous things that we've done but because of your mercy and grace so that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ father God we pray that more and more by your spirit you will write these truths in our heart so that you transform us to be the best parents we can be to our children the best workers we can be to our bosses the best employers we can be to those you place under us we ask these things for your glory and in Jesus name

Amen