

It is hard to imagine.....as we look out on all the **snow** on the ground.....right now..

That (Lord willing) ...in just 4 short months... **flowers** will be in full bloom.....
gardens will be green with vegetables....**lawns** will be lush and inviting....

The landscape of our countryside.... that is **now** covered with **motionless** ICE....

Will be (by God's regenerating grace)... **FLOURISHING**....with **life** and bearing fruit for us all to enjoy!

As we have made our way through Ephesians 5.... we have seen God's plan for creating families (in Christ Jesus) and ordering them so they can likewise **FLOURISH**.....

He takes **people** (like you and I) who were DEAD in trespasses and sins.....
FROZEN solid and in **bondage** to selfish ambition and pride and every evil thing....

And regenerates them through the GOSPEL... so that they can **LIVE!** So that they can be planted in the Garden of God and **FLOURISH**.....

He takes families.... who are still **unthawing** from their sin..... some of them have severe frostbite....

Gradually... day by day... as they apply this gospel to their lives..... and as they allow God to **re-order** their families according to His design.....

He brings **healing**... and grafts them further into Himself... so His life-giving **sap** can rejuvenate and grow them up in Christ Jesus....

So that they can bear offspring ... (both spiritually and physically)**disciples** who likewise prosper in God's grace... learning to center their lives on this gospel....

Today....(as we enter Eph. 6) we want to examine the PLAN God has for helping **children**... within our families... and within our church.... to **FLOURISH**.

Children Who Flourish

One way to grow a garden..... would be to simply buy some plants or seed packets at the store in the spring and plant them **haphazardly**....in the ground.....

Or....Worse yet... just toss them up into the air... allowing whatever the CURRENT (and most popular) wind direction is to carry them where it wishes....

Or.... based on wisdom.....

you could plant **corn** in hills..... with the hills far enough apart so that the plants have room to reach **full size**.....yet close enough to **pollinate** each other....according to their DESIGN...

You could plant beans in rows....with some type of structure for them to climb up on so the beans don't rot while they are maturing.....

If you want your garden to FLOURISH..... plant it intentionally according to design....

God has DESIGNED the human family to FLOURISH by His grace...

He WANTS to fulfill promises like this one to your family:

Psalm 128:3-4

"Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD."

It brings God MUCH glory.... when He is able to fulfill the promise that He has made a reality through the gospel....

It is God's desire that THIS would be true of our children:

Isaiah 61:9

"Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed."

Don't you want that for OUR children?... for the people who come to know the Lord through our ministry..... and for all the descendents of God's people??

I do!...

- But HOW do we get there???

God has been showing how here in Ephesians....

He has given us the original design for the family.... and our working job descriptions

You recall:

- We started out a few weeks ago discussing the role of the **wife** in the home.... that she is to (by the grace of God) submit to her husband....in everything...
- We talked for two weeks about how husbands are called to **LOVE** and cherish their wives..... by loving them

exclusively....
sacrificially....
with a view towards their future....

How God will hold the husband responsible for nourishing her... and to guide her into what will make her prosper in every way....because He has made the TWO – one flesh.

Today.....we are going to see how **children** are to fit into and function according to the plan of **God's garden called the family**....and the context in which Biblical parenting should be carried out...

Ephesians 6:1-4

" Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "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."

Whenever you go to public park or a beach..... one of the first things are greeted with is a sign that posts a list of **RULES**..... right?...

I have to admit..... in my flesh..... I **dislike** those signs.....

In my flesh... and specifically in my selfishness...and pride.....

I don't want anybody telling me when and where I can surf..... or that my dog needs to be on a leash.... or that you can only fish from 7 – 9 pm.....

In my **flesh**... (when I am **not** walking by faith)....I see those rules under one category..... **RESTRICTIVE**.....joy killers...

I am certain..... that for **some** of you young people.....that is exactly the way you see commands like this one in Scripture.....

Moreover.... that is the way you see your parents in general.....as people out to ruin or take away every **last bit of fun** in your life.....

I want to urge you today..... to try and step back from your circumstances....

And just hear what God has to say to directly from His Word.....

so that (by His grace) you can **TRUST in the goodness** of the God who gives you these commands (and, even better) in the **surety of the PROMISE** that accompanies them...

Kids if you are going to FLOURISH... as God intends you to.... the first half of the responsibility belongs to YOU.....

Children Who Flourish

1) Assign God's Weight to Their Parents

When God was standing on Mt. Sinai... giving the 10 commandments..... not a single person in the vicinity was **indifferent** to what He was saying....

Most of them were **trembling** with FEAR... because of the AWESOMENESS of Who was speaking....

- Remember what it was like? Earthquakes and flashes of lighting and a very loud trumpet blast!

In fact... the people told Moses..... we will listen to **you**..... but we are afraid to hear from GOD again... lest we DIE in the process!....

Moses.... was God's spokesman..... when Moses spoke the commandments of God.... the people understood... He was GOD'S man..... **for their good**.....

In the same way.....both before you come to know Him personally through Jesus Christ... and afterwards (as long as you are under their authority).....

God has put your parents in the Position of Being **His mouthpiece** for your daily life.

In our passage Paul asks children to obey their parents **BECAUSE**... one of the 10 Commandments God first gave to His people says.....

Exodus 20:12

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Follow with me kids.... because understanding what God is saying here will help you not only to obey Him.... it will **encourage** you in realizing that He understands exactly how your mind and heart work.....

The Hebrew word – which we translate HONOR....literally means to **give WEIGHT to....**

.... to assign the highest **value**.....

Are you aware?..... Every thought that passes through your brain.... comes with an **assigned value**...(or WEIGHT) which **you** have attached to it....

Everything you hear..... (including what I am saying right now)..... is **weighed out** by you... and given a certain degree of **WORTH**.... or weight....according to what you think of the source.

Example: If you are sleeping in a house that is next to a railroad crossing..... Within the first week you are there.... your mind will have learned to virtually ignore that LOUD train horn as it blasts.....

Most of you won't even wake up in the night.....

Why not? That horn is designed as a warning to save the life of anyone in the path of that train.....

But because you have become convinced you are NOT in danger....

You have **UNWEIGHTED** the value of that noise in your brain....you now dismiss it as **meaningless noise**...

Some of you have done the same thing to your parents.....

You think they are so **lame**..... or **clueless**..... or that their views are totally irrelevant

You have UNweighted the value of their words almost entirely.

Hear me.... God is not asking you to ASSIGN His weight to their words because they **are** cool..... are especially insightful.....or even wise....

- He is asking you to ASSIGN the full weight of God to their words because He has made them to be **YOUR** parents....

I am asking you to BELIEVE that He has done that for **your GOOD**.... whether you can see it or not.....no matter how it FEELS right now...

I am asking you to believe that the God who loves you so much He sent His SON to die in your place..... has put you under the specific set of parents He wants you to have.... in order that in your TRUSTING Him enough to obey **them**.... He will cause it to go WELL with you.

What the enemy of your soul wants you to do..... is exactly what some of you are doing....

Rather than Assigning GOD's weight and authority to your parents.....

You give it to your **FRIENDS**..... who you want to accept you...

Or you illegitimately WEIGHT the words of what is popular in the culture.....

Give you an example of this:

The other night I walked in and my kids were watching American Idol..... I don't really like that show (for a number of reasons)....

But the main reason is that if Simon Cowell (or whoever the judges are now) decide that some guy or gal can sing.....

Then... **THAT** settles it! ALL of America should now believe that this person **MUST** certainly be among the most talented human beings in the country....

Let me ask you a question.....**Who** gave Simon Cowell that kind of authority?

Was it President Obama? After all the show is called AMERICAN idol....

No... **YOU** give his words... his opinions that kind of authority because you WEIGHT them according to Popular Opinion....

You do the same thing with those who you consider people of INFLUENCE among your friends ...

If someone whom you want to be like.....decides that a certain movie.... or video game is a AWESOME.....

Your mind automatically... spawns a desire for YOU to have that game....or at least be able to PLAY that game..... because of the WEIGHT you have assigned to **their opinions**....

You have put OTHERS in the place exclusively designed for your parents....

God is calling you to REPENT of that **misplaced authority** as falling short of what He commands you to do....

As MISSING the mark.....And ASSIGN the very weight of GOD to your parents... **alone.**

Some of you.... if you have been struggling with obeying your parents..... can START by giving thanks to God for them....even now.....

Imperfect as they are they are **His** means of blessing you...and drawing you to Himself....

That is what it means to HONOR them. Out of that honor will flow a respect.... and a reverence....

So that **when** they SPEAK.....

And say.... its time to get started on your schoolwork..... or it is your turn to load the dishwasher.....

- Your mind will already be **PREDISPOSED** to heed their commands..... because you have given them the Weight of God's DIRECTORS... for your life.

Curtis Vaughan - obedience begins with a **readiness to hear**

In the same way that the FEAR of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....

Honoring your parents POSTURES you to obey them.....

You won't have to wrestle incessantly with your flesh.... you will have already DECIDED... when my parents speak.....

I am ready to hear **God** DIRECTING me... through them....

So when Paul says:

Ephesians 6:1a

" Children, **obey** your parents **in the Lord**,

He is calling you to understand that (**unless** they are asking you to **sin**).... to obey your parents....**is** to obey the LORD.

That is why He told Israel to put to DEATH a young person that consistently DISOBEYED and DISHONORED his parents...

Your flesh thinks that God telling you to OBEY your parents is RESTRICTIVE..... but God WANTS you to know that is a **FREEDOM** He has created for you to enjoy while you are young!

You don't have to go around wondering..... (like adults often struggle with).....

What is God's will for my life?.... am I supposed to this... or that.....How can I please Him...

ALL you have to do is happily trust God enough to honor your parents as His spokesmen over you....and you will find grace to obey them.

In fact... especially for young children..... your CENTRAL responsibility before God... is simply to happily follow whatever your parents decide is best for you at any given moment....

and you can ENJOY the freedom that you are right in the center of God's will for you....unless they are asking you to **SIN**...

The REASON.... (Paul says).... is that this is..... **RIGHT**...

In other words..... **God has ordained** parental direction as your turn by turn GPS which God uses to keep you in a place where He can BLESS you....

Ephesians 6:2

"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with **a promise**),"

God gave His people Israel 10 Commandments.....

But this is the **ONLY** one.... that comes directly with a PROMISE attached to it.

The PROMISE is a **pledge** from God....that He will **REWARD** you for your obedience to your parents....

both now.... and in the age to come....

Here is WHY I want you to obey those parents I have given you:

Ephesians 6:3

"that it may **go well** with you and that you may live long in the land."

Do you want to FLOURISH?

Do you want to know God's hand of blessing on your life....

Obey your parents in the Lord..... assign to their words the very weight of GOD...

He says if you do that it **WILL** go well with you.... He WILL do good to you.....

To the **degree**.... to the extent that you honor and obey your parents..... God will cause your life to flourish...

That may not SEEM like it... in the short run.....

Remember **Joseph**?

He was fully obedient to His father.... taking supplies to his brothers... they threw him in a well....sold him into slavery..... for YEARS... he suffered because of their evil... but in the end..... God made him King over his people.....He became something of a Savior to them....

So He could say to His brothers.... what you meant for evil.... GOD meant for good.

By teaching Joseph to obey his father at an early age.....

God blessed Joseph with a lifelong pattern of listening to and heeding the Word of God Himself...

Likewise for you....Honoring your parents in your youth... will establish a **HABIT** of obedience that will translate directly to how you relate to and obey God as an adult.

Kids... please know that God knows just how **HARD** this can be.....

Our whole nature rebels against anyone in authority over us.....

We parents KNOW just what a moment by moment struggle it is for you to cheerfully obey us.....

I had one of the most precious moments with one of my children this week..... I was asking them to obey us in something they did not want to do.....

And they said... Dad it is so **HARD**....

I **know!**..... and I am so GRATEFUL for how you are trying to TRUST God for grace to believe that we will decide what is best for you!

God knows... how hard it is.....

In fact...

your **FLESH** will fight you in this every inch of the way....

But please KNOW that God is with you in that struggle.... He is FOR you!

- **This** is HIS means of TRAINING your heart in your youth.....

So that you can have a whole LIFETIME that is **characterized by** submissive obedience to HIM!

That is how God can say to parents:

Proverbs 22:6

"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Children Who Flourish ...take **responsibility** to assign God's WEIGHT to the directions of their parents...

Second responsibility lies with the parents and PARTICULARLY with the Dads...

Children Who Flourish

2. Have Fathers Who Lead Lovingly

Proverbs 31 alone is proof that God uses the mother in CRUCIAL ways in bringing up children....

So this is not a slight on Mom's at all.... we could not build homes without you....

We WANT our children to rise up and call you blessed!

But this text (in the context of demonstrating godly order in the home) shows us that DadsYou have been charged...

not only with shepherding your wife.... loving her sacrificially... but also with leading your children in such a way that you don't make OBEYING you **harder than it needs to be**...

Ephesians 6:4a

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger..."

God has entrusted you with the job of shepherding these little children.... these older children... these teenagers.... in the EXACT same way He leads you....

With **patience**... with **wisdom**... and with **grace**.

God does not place undue restrictions on you... just to show you who is boss.

He gives you His commandments to lead you in the good way.....

God does not give you more than you can possibly bear.....tying up heavy weights on your shoulders.....that's what Pharisees do....remember?

He does not make such unreasonable demands upon you....that you feel you can **never do enough** to please Him.....

- God meets you DAILY... right where you are at..... and graciously leads you to the path of truth and obedience...

Curtis Vaughan – “Many a child has reached the point where he feels he cannot possibly please his parents and therefore decides that he need not try.”

That's exasperation...

Not ALL anger that children experience is the Dad's fault..... kids can get angry simply because things are not going their way....

Let's just make sure we use God our Father as our model in how to lead them.... so that we do not get them to the end of their rope... where they have no where else to turn...

Colossians 3:21

"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become **discouraged**."

Father's are also responsible forthe **positive** end of this commandment:

Ephesians 6:4b

...but bring them up in the discipline and **instruction** of the Lord."

Our parenting goal... first and foremost... is to bring our kids to the LORD.

You can not do that... unless.... **you** are walking in fellowship with the LORD....

It is as they see you living in the good of the gospel..... repenting when you sin..... receiving God's forgiveness.... and celebrating His resurrection power at work in you.....

That you have a **context** for LEADING them into a relationship with your God.

Leading them into that relationship includes being God's instrument for DISCIPLINING them when they sin.

In lovingkindness..... not in **anger**.... (that will do nothing but make them angry)

We are to be as CONSISTENT as we can... in applying **adequate consequences** for disobedience and rebellion....

The Bible teaches....that includes spanking them when they are young....

Then... quickly assuring them that this proves one thing..... that **both of you** are in the same boat....

Both of us... are sinners who need a Savior.....

GOOD NEWS Jesus did not come to call the righteous.... but sinners....we QUALIFY!

Parents God is not looking only for PERFECT... model parents... who books could be written about and sold.... because you have done everything right!

He is looking for HUMBLE teachable servants of God..... who repent when they sin... and turn back to walk with the goodness of their risen Savior....

So they can **FEED** the offspring of the Lord.... His Holy Word.....day by day....

Until they **grow up** to **WANT** the God of their Fathers.....

So they can FLOURISH in His Kingdom forever.....in holiness and peace.

Dad... does your heart need to be turned BACK to your children?

Has some other activity DISPLACED you shouldering this responsibility to LEAD them lovingly.... just as God Fathers you?

Grace to repent....run into the arms of God.... so that you can go back to them.... ask forgiveness.... and take a step towards fulfilling the most important calling you have...

Psalm 144:12

"Let our sons in their youth be as grown-up plants, And our daughters as corner pillars fashioned as for a palace;"

God.... by your mercy... cause our children to FLOURISH in your Kingdom Forever.