

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, September 20, 2020**

WHATEVER YOU DO (9): PARENTS

Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4

“Whatever you do,” the Bible says in Colossians 3:17, “whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” And just a few verses later, in Colossians 3:23-24, we read: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.... It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Whatever you do. In any and every area of your life – in your personal life, your family life, your vocational or professional life, your recreational life, your intellectual life, your spiritual life, your church life, and in any and every relationship in your life, let every detail in your life – words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of Jesus. Whatever you do.

This, of course, applies to parents in their God-given mission to raise their children “in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

We talked last Sunday about God’s word to children: the commandment to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” and it “pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20), and to “honor your father and mother” as long as you live (Ephesians 6:2; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). Today we turn the spotlight on God’s word to parents. But I hope you will see that this message is not just for or about parents.

Let’s look together at God’s Word as it comes to us in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. For those at home, the words will be on your screens. For those here at church, the words are printed in your bulletin. Let’s give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God’s Word.

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In addition to these words of Moses, here is what Paul says directly and specifically to fathers (but it is equally applicable to mothers – to moms and dads alike):

Colossians 3:21: “Fathers [Parents], do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.” (NIV)

In the ESV it says: “Fathers [Parents], do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

The Message, in its more colloquial language, says: “Parents, don’t come down too hard on your children or you’ll crush their spirits.”

The parallel verse, in Ephesians 6:4, says: “Fathers [Parents], do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (NIV)

The ESV says: “Fathers [Parents], do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

The Message paraphrase gives it this flavor: “Fathers [Parents], don’t exasperate your children by coming down too hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master (Jesus).”

If you put the teaching of these passages in Deuteronomy 6, Colossians 3:21, Ephesians 6:4, and others like them together, you can come up with a biblical formula or recipe on what to do and what not to do in your mission to raise up godly children who will love and trust and follow the Lord Jesus, who will grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus their whole lives, who will serve God’s purposes in their time and place for as long as they live. That is the ultimate goal, isn’t it? That is the main thing, isn’t it?

I’m talking to parents specifically right here. Our mission as parents is to raise up the next generation – our children – to know and trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior of sinners (including both them and us), and the Lord – the King, the Sovereign – over all things, including every detail of our lives and every aspect of life in this world. Our mission, first and foremost, is to point our children to Jesus, who alone has the words and the power of eternal life (John 6:68). “For salvation is found in no one else; salvation comes in no other way; no other name has been or will ever be given to us by which we can be saved, only this one” (Acts 4:12, NIV, *MSG*).

The most important thing you can ever do as a parent is to point your children to Jesus. The most important thing you can ever do as a parent is to bring your children to Jesus. The most important thing you can ever do as a parent is to show your children Jesus. You can’t make your child a believer. You can’t make your son or daughter a follower of Jesus. You can’t give the gift of saving faith to your child. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. But you can preach the gospel to your children. You can teach them about God as He has revealed Himself, His will, His ways, His promises, His love and grace, His attributes and character, His mighty acts in creation and history, and His saving work on our behalf in and through His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

In her book *Give Them Grace*, Elyse Fitzpatrick says that the reason some kids who grow up in Christian homes stray from the faith is that they have missed the point of the gospel. Somehow, they have gotten the idea that the point of the gospel and of the Christian life is simply to be good – to be a good person. If I’m good; if I’m nice (not mean) to other people; if I don’t do bad things or hang around with the wrong crowd; if I try to do my best and help other people; then God will be pleased with me and Jesus will forgive my sins.

That, of course, is a terrible misunderstanding of the gospel.

The gospel is not about making us nice people who just naturally get along with others and fit into our culture.

The gospel is about saving sinners (us!) who are totally powerless to do anything to save ourselves and make ourselves right with God.

The gospel is about what God has done for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ in His incarnation, life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection from the dead. For us.

The gospel is about trusting in Jesus to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. The gospel is about God's grace that comes free of charge to people who don't deserve it and never will. Like me. And you.

The gospel is about a relationship with God – a personal relationship with the only true and living God, the God who has no equals and no rivals.

The gospel is about the life-giving and life-changing power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes in Jesus and surrenders to His sovereign and gracious rule.

The gospel is about how God loves unworthy, rebellious sinners (us) and what He has done to show us His love.

It is about the power of God to change our hearts, to renew our minds, and to turn rebellious sinners into beloved, cherished children of our Heavenly Father, who will never, ever stop loving us.

This is the gospel our children need to hear. This is the gospel our children need to see. This is the gospel our children need to know. And, by God's grace, it is the gospel we want our children to embrace. It is the God of the gospel we want our children to embrace. Personally.

Two authors, Rob Reinow (not to be confused with Rob Reiner), in a book called *When They Turn Away*, and Roland Warren in a book titled *Bad Dads of the Bible*, compare the role of parents to that of Sherpas who serve as guides for mountain climbers trying to make it to the top of Mount Everest.

By the way, there are plenty of "bad dads" in the Bible. Jacob is one. The obvious favoritism he showed toward Joseph ticked off his 11 other sons and provoked them to conspire against Joseph to sell him into slavery. And yet ... God redeemed the situation and used Joseph as His instrument to provide for all of Jacob's family as well as the people of Egypt in the time of the great famine.

Eli is another "bad dad" in the Bible. He was the high priest of Israel in Shiloh to whom Hannah brought her son Samuel after she promised that if God would bless her with a son, she would dedicate him to serve the Lord for his entire life. Samuel grew up in the tabernacle under the tutelage of Eli. But Eli neglected the proper training and discipline of his own sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who made a sacrilege of their priestly office, incurring God's judgment against them. God declared His judgment on Eli and his whole family because Eli knew what his sons were doing and did nothing to discipline or restrain them.

Another member of the “bad dads” club is David. He had many good, godly traits. Though he was a good king, he was not a good father. Sometimes a child or children may rebel against godly parents. In David’s case, though, Absalom’s rebellion against his father David was the son’s response to the dysfunction David had allowed in his own household, by failing to step in and deal with the inappropriate relationship between David’s son Amnon and his daughter (Amnon’s half-sister) Tamar. You cannot justify Absalom’s revenge against Amnon or his attempt to overthrow his father as King. But David bears responsibility for his failure as a parent.

There are other examples, of course, as well as examples of good dads – and moms – in the Bible. The bottom line is that, as we saw with marriages in the Bible a few weeks ago, there are no perfect parents in the Bible. No perfect mothers or fathers. The only exception is God the Father. The only perfect father or mother who ever was or ever will be is God Himself, who has revealed Himself to us as our Father in heaven who loves us with an everlasting love and showers us with His grace for every circumstance, every predicament, every calamity, every disappointment, every sorrow, every joy, every opportunity, and every occasion, without fail. God *loves* you just as you are. He does not want to leave you as you are. He wants to change you by the power of His love and grace. Unlike a dad or mom or parents who may have disappointed you, the love of your Heavenly Father for you will never change. It is for real. It is true. You don’t ever need to worry that God will change His mind and stop loving you. It won’t happen. And God’s grace *is* sufficient for you. It always will be.

Whether you’re a parent or not, regardless of how old or how young you may be, maybe you need to be reminded of the love of your Heavenly Father today.

Maybe you need to be reminded of the truth and beauty of the gospel and all that Jesus has done for you.

Maybe you need to be reminded that even if you feel like a failure in some way, you are loved and accepted by God. We all need to be reminded of these things.

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Let’s go back to the analogy of Sherpas. Roland Warren points out that “Mount Everest, the earth’s highest mountain, has two standard routes used by most climbers. Both routes present a number of dangers, including frigid temperatures and monsoon-category high winds. In addition, climbers have a limited number of months in the year to make their attempt, along with very tight (windows of) time ... during the day to safely ascend and descend the mountain. But the most dangerous obstacle, and the one that has caused most of the climber deaths, is altitude sickness. In its most severe case, it causes fluid on the lungs and swelling on the brain that will leave [you] so disoriented that [you] can’t think clearly. If this happens to you on Mount Everest, it means almost certain death.

“So, it’s not surprising that even the most experienced climbers don’t try to tackle Mount Everest alone. They hire special guides called ‘Sherpas.’ The Sherpas are a unique people who, for generations, have inhabited the Khumbu Valley ... surrounding Mount Everest. Because they have lived there for so long, they have developed a genetic ability to function at

very high altitudes. Most people have noticeable breathing problems above 8,000 feet. But [the Sherpas] have an ... endurance up to about 23,000 feet. Since the Sherpa guides have trekked (up and down) Everest many times, they are experts when it comes to knowing the weather patterns and the best times to climb.”

Not only this, but the Sherpas can help climbers take in the beauty of Everest as well. It is not all danger. It is not all labor. There is delight as well, with “breath-taking peaks, vistas and valleys [you] can only see from [the] heights.”

The point of this discourse on Sherpas is that parents are like Sherpas who are to serve as wise, loving, trustworthy, God-honoring, Christ-exalting, gospel-centered, grace-filled, Bible-teaching guides for their children, to show their children (*our* children, *your* children, and the children of our church) the way God wants them to go – the way to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Children need parents to point them to Jesus. Children need parents to nurture them, to instruct them, to discipline them, to teach them the gospel and the great doctrines of our faith.

Climbing the mountain to adulthood is an adventure filled with many dangers, toils, and snares. We can’t leave our kids to find the way up the mountain on their own.

If you’re a parent with a children at home, you are like a Sherpa. We don’t have time today to talk through the specifics of what these Bible passages say about what to do and what not to do in seeking to raise your children in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. So, God willing, we’ll come back to these Scripture passages and talk more about it next Sunday.

I want to leave you with a word of encouragement from Mark Batterson, pastor of the National Community Church in Washington and the author of a bunch of books. He has just written a new children’s book along with his daughter, Summer Batterson Dailey. It is called *God Speaks in Whispers*. In a blog post about the book, Batterson says: “You’ll never be a *perfect* parent, but you can be a *praying* parent.” He’s right: You will never be a perfect parent. You will never be a perfect grandparent. You will never get it totally right as a parent. But you can be a praying parent. You can pray for your kids and your grandkids. You can pray for them to come to know and love and trust in Jesus. You can pray for them to follow Jesus. You can pray for them to serve Jesus and His kingdom purposes in their generation. You can pray for them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, because they know the God of the gospel. You will never be a perfect parent, but you can be a praying parent. You can be a loving parent. You can be a grace-filled parent. You can be a parent who points your kids to Jesus.

The same is true for us all in the church. We will never be a perfect church, but we can be a praying church. A loving church. A grace-filled church. A gospel-centered church. A church where children learn and experience the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the truth, beauty, and power of the gospel.

Whatever you do, whatever role you play, whatever season of life in which you find yourself – *whatever we do*, may these things be true of us. Lord, let it be so. Amen.