

Being a Godly Father

by Zac Poonen

A father's responsibility is to represent Christ to his children and teach them to obey God's ways, and to bring them up in a way that honors God.

Duration: 59:46

Scripture: Malachi 4:5-6, Matthew 18:19, John 1:18, Ephesians 6:4, James 1:5-6

Topics: "Godly Parenting", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being a godly father, highlighting the need for good examples in a world where such examples are scarce. It delves into John 1:18, showcasing Jesus' role in revealing God as a father and the responsibility fathers have to represent Christ to their children. The sermon also explores the significance of discipline, instruction, and the balance between kindness and severity in parenting, urging fathers to be filled with the Holy Spirit for guidance. It addresses the restoration of relationships between fathers and children, the impact of single mothers, and the power of seeking wisdom from God in parenting.

Transcript

So my subject today is being a godly father, and there's a great need for that in the time in which we live, because there are very few good examples in this area. I want to turn to John chapter 1 and verse 18. Jesus came, not only to die for our sins, but to reveal God as a father.

So I want you to look at this verse and see how it applies to us as fathers. No one has seen God at any time, and Jesus came into a world where people didn't know what God was like. There were a lot of religious people in the synagogues preaching about God, but it is also a wrong picture of God as a tyrant, or a judge, or a policeman, or something like that.

Jesus came to reveal that God was a father, and the only begotten God, that's Christ the son of God, who's in the bosom of the father, he has explained him. Our children have not seen God either, just like this verse says, and we are now to represent Christ to them, and reveal and explain God the father to them. Jesus said, as the father sent me, so send I you.

He came to explain the father to a generation of people who didn't know God properly, and that's our calling to our children, who know nothing about God, and the first understanding they have is from what they see in their parents. So that's why it's a very serious responsibility, and most parents take it so lightly,

unfortunately, and that's one reason children go astray. So that's where we've got to begin, and take our responsibility seriously.

Towards the end of Jesus' life, he said in John 14, and verse 9, he said, he who has seen me has seen the father, and that's how perfectly he represented the father, and we should be able to say that to our own children, that if you've seen the way I've brought you up, and the way I speak to you, and the way I behave, and the way I've conducted myself, you should have seen something of what God is like, and that's the way our children can come to God. And so you see, fathers have a tremendous responsibility. In our attitude to children, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 18, and verse 5, Matthew 18, and verse 5, he called a child to himself, he said, whoever receives one such child in my name, receives me.

I don't know whether you believe that, that when you receive a child into your home, or even welcome a little child, when you meet a child anywhere, in church, or anywhere in your neighborhood, you're receiving Jesus. Whoever receives a little child is the closest to heaven on earth, little children, and you receive that child in Jesus' name, you receive me, Jesus said. Earlier, he had told his apostles, if anyone receives you, apostles, in my name, they receive me.

But there are not so many apostles around for us to receive them, there are very few, but there are plenty of children. You receive an apostle in Jesus' name, you receive Jesus. You receive a child in Jesus' name, you receive Jesus.

So this is to be our attitude toward all children, our own, and other people's children. A person who is like Jesus will love children, like Jesus did. If you don't love children, you've got to become like Jesus, who loves children, who welcomes children, who receives children, and that's the example we follow.

Now coming back to the Old Testament, I just want to go through a Bible study with you on being a godly father, and I want to begin in the Old Testament with the man whom God chose to be the father of the nation of Israel, Abraham, and who is also called in the New Testament the spiritual father of faith, of Christians. Genesis chapter 18 and verse 7, maybe verse 18, Genesis 18 and verse 18, the Lord said Abraham is going to become a great mighty nation through his children, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed, not just the Jewish nation, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. What was the reason? How did God prepare Abraham to be a blessing to the nations of the earth? There's something we can learn there for ourselves as God seeks to make you and me a blessing to other people.

We go to the next verse, for, for means because, relating to what we just saw, I have chosen him. Why did God choose Abraham? Not to be a blessing to the nations of the earth first of all, that would come later, first, to command his children and his family after him, to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, and when he does that, the Lord will be able to bring upon him all that he has promised. So what was he called for? To command his children, and the word command is a military word.

He wasn't going to give suggestions to his children, he was going to tell them this is what you've got to do, and in the military if you're given a command you obey immediately. That's how Abraham taught his children, you know how turn left or turn right on the parade ground, they don't think about it, they just act immediately. That's how Abraham taught his children, to walk in the ways of the Lord.

What an example, so that God could bring upon Abraham all that he has promised. There are a lot of things God has promised us, but he's going to first test you with your children, whether you learn to command your children to obey and walk in the ways of the Lord. And one example of this we see is when

we see Abraham taking his son Isaac up to the top of Mount Moriah.

Now we see that as a wonderful example of a man who was obeying, willing to obey God to the uttermost. Imagine when God told him to sacrifice his son, he obeyed, he took him, he went to the foot of that mountain and made Isaac carry all that wood up to the top. Isaac must have been around 25 years old or so, to carry all that wood up to the top of the mountain, he wasn't a little boy.

And Abraham was this old 125 year old man walking with his young strapping muscular son going up to the top of the mount, and on top of the mount after that he made that stone altar. Isaac didn't know what they had gone up for. He asked his father, where's the lamb? So God will take care of that, he'll provide.

And when he goes up to the top, Isaac gets the surprise of his life when Abraham says, you lie down on the altar, you're going to be the sacrifice, I'm going to kill you because God's told you, told me to kill you. You know what he does? He lies down. How many of your 25 year old children would obey you if you asked them to do that? You see why God blessed Abraham? He brought up his children, his son, in such a way that Isaac says, well dad, I don't like this but if God's told you to do it, I'm ready to obey.

There we see not only Abraham's obedience but Isaac's obedience. And in Isaac's obedience we see how God, how Abraham brought up his son. Are you surprised now that God blessed Abraham so much? Do you see how much is dependent on the way a father brings up his son, his children? Right there in the beginning of Scripture.

In contrast, you see bad examples in Scripture too. Turn to 1 Samuel and chapter 2. Here we read of the high priest Eli and his sons. Eli was the leader of Israel, there were no king in those days, there was no king there.

The high priest was the top man, the top religious man, the head, religious head of the nation of Israel, who was supposed to be an outstanding example to the nation. And he knew all about Abraham, the way Abraham brought up his sons, he'd read what Moses had written in the five books. And how did he bring up his own children? It says in 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 12.

The sons of Eli were worthless men. They were young men, maybe in their twenties or thirties, worthless. They did not know the Lord.

What did they do? It says in the succeeding verses, they would go to the place where the offerings were made and send their servants there to collect the best part of the meat, steal the offerings of the Lord, which people came and brought there, and they would go and find young women there and commit adultery, take advantage of their position of leadership in the tabernacle and exploit young women sexually, because their dad was the top leader. That's happened so much in Christian circles too, it's just a repetition of Eli's story all over again. And what does Eli do when he hears about this? When he heard about how his sons were sleeping around with the women at the tent of meeting, he says to them in 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 23, what is this I hear? Why do I hear such things? Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons, this report is not good, that the Lord's people are circulating.

He's more bothered about what he hears, what he hears, what am I hearing? This is not good, this is not a good testimony. Is that the way you rebuke people who are committing adultery in the church? He did not rebuke them and put them out of the ministry immediately, he didn't do that. How does God, what does

God say about that? See 1 Samuel 2 verse 29, you have honored your sons, in the middle of that verse, above me.

God says, you care more for your sons than for me. You don't care for my standards, you want to please your sons, and that's why God put Eli out of the ministry, the man died and his entire descendants were removed from the ministry altogether. God removed them.

If Eli wouldn't do it, then God would do it. And then in the next verse, verse 30, God says, because, in the last part of that verse, this is a word that you've all probably heard, those who honor me, I will honor, it's a very well-known verse among Christians, 1 Samuel 2 verse 30, the last part of that, but what many don't realize is it is spoken in relation to honoring God above your children. It's in that context this verse comes.

You learn to honor me by bringing up your children in the fear of God, and I will honor you. But those who despise me will be lightly esteemed. In the next chapter, we read about Samuel, a little boy, who grew up in the temple, and whom God spoke to.

And he went to Eli, the old man, and he was hesitant to tell Eli all that God told him. But when Eli asked him, what did God say, he says, yes, the Lord told him he's going to judge your house forever, because your sons brought a curse on themselves, and you did not rebuke them. 1 Samuel chapter 3, and verse 13, you did not rebuke your children.

You did not correct them. You did not bring them up the way they should have been brought up, and Samuel knew that. Samuel grows old, and he becomes the leader now, the prophet in Israel.

Let's see how he brought up his children, 1 Samuel chapter 8, verse 1. We read that he appointed his sons, 1 Samuel 8, verse 1, as judges over Israel, because he was getting old. And in verse 3, we read about Samuel's sons. His sons did not walk in Samuel's ways, but they turned aside after dishonest gain, just like Eli's sons, to make money out of their religious ministry.

They took bribes, perverted justice, took money to condemn the innocent. How is it that Samuel hadn't learned a lesson? How is it that so many Christians today don't learn a lesson from the many examples in Scripture and all around them, of the importance of bringing up children in God-fearing ways? One reason is, 1 Samuel chapter 7, the immediate preceding verses to this, verse 15, it says Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life, and verse 16, he used to go annually, 1 Samuel 7, 16, on a circuit, he used to travel in the ministry, Bethel, Gilgal, Mispah, and all these places, and then verse 17, he would come back to Ramah, where his house was. He was so busy in the ministry, that he had no time to teach, he had only two sons, and he didn't have time to bring them up in Godly ways.

Both of them became evil, because he thought, I've got to serve the Lord, and a lot of people are so busy in doing something that they think is for God, or they're busy in their job, or busy making money, and they neglect their children, and their children grow up to glorify the devil. Did God give you the ability to produce children, to produce people who glorify the devil, and serve the devil? There are millions and billions of people serving the devil already, we don't have to add to that number, by producing some more ourselves. Why does God give us children? Let's turn to the book of Malachi.

In the book of Malachi, we read, it's the last book of the Old Testament, and the last days of Israel were very similar to these last days of the Christian era. People have just rejected most of the things written in the New Testament, just like Israel rejected most of the things written in the law. God was fed up with this

people, and that was the last voice that God was going to speak to Israel through, Malachi, that was the end.

We are nearing that time, the Christian church. Malachi chapter 2, says in verse 14, Malachi 2,14, you know, they were saying, why is God not hearing our prayer, what is the reason for God not listening to our prayer? And the Lord says, I'll tell you, because the Lord has been a witness to something. He's been a witness to something you've been doing in secret, between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, you have been unfaithful to your wife.

Is the Lord speaking to some of you with that verse? Even though she's supposed to be your companion, and you made a covenant with her, in the time you got married, that she'd be your wife. And it's interesting that the Lord calls her, the wife of your youth. The first step to bringing up godly children, is to be a good husband.

You can't be a good father if you're not a good husband. To recognize, to value your wife, to live with her in an understanding way. To look at your wife, no matter how old she is, as the wife of your youth, the way she was when you loved her first, when you married her.

My wife is 68 years old. She's the wife of my youth. Today is our, please stand up, darling.

Today is our wedding anniversary. We were married 43 years ago, and I can honestly say that I love her 43 times more than I did when I first married her. And we're 43 times more happier than we were when we first got married.

And together, God's given us grace to raise up four boys, who all love the Lord and are following Him and serving Him, and who've all married God-fearing wives, and who are now seeking to bring up their children in the godly ways they themselves were brought up. One of the greatest things that has encouraged me is that all four of them have turned to me and said, Dad, you are our hero. And we want to bring up our children the way you brought us up.

Now I want to tell you, I was not a perfect father, but my wife and I used to pray for them regularly. We still do. We pray for them, we pray for our grandchildren now, we claim the promises of God for our children and grandchildren.

And that's something we can all do. We're weak, we're helpless, but we can go to God and ask Him, Lord, fulfill the promises of your word. That's why you need to know the scriptures.

I'll tell you a couple of promises God gave us, and that's for you too. A promise is like a check. You got to take it to the bank to cash it.

If you just keep it at home and frame it up, you get nothing. So here's a promise. Take it like a check to the bank of heaven.

Isaiah 54 and verse 13. The Lord gave us this promise when our children were born, before them they were born. Isaiah 54 verse 13, independently to me and my wife.

Isaiah 54 and verse 13, all your sons will be taught of the Lord, and the word taught in the Hebrew there is disciplined. All your sons will be disciplined by the Lord, and the well-being of your sons will be great. It was a check signed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

We took it to the bank of heaven in prayer and said, Lord, cash it in our name. Fulfill it. But that's in your Bible too.

It's not only in my Bible. That's for you. Why don't you take it to the bank of heaven and then cash it? All the promises of God are amen and are yes in Christ Jesus.

We've got to put our amen to it for us to encash it. So we did that and God has wonderfully answered our prayer. Now we have grandchildren.

We already have nine grandchildren. And so we look for another promise for our grandchildren now. The Bible is full of checks.

You didn't know that. Well, here's what we found for our grandchildren. Isaiah 59 and verse 21.

Isaiah 59 and verse 21. Isaiah chapter 59 verse 21. As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord, my Holy Spirit, which is upon you and my words, which I have put in your mouth, it will not depart from your mouth.

It will not depart from the mouth of your children, nor from the mouth of your grandchildren, says the Lord from now and forever. So here's another check. We take to the bank of heaven, signed by Jesus Christ, endorsed on the back by me and my wife saying amen, that's for us.

Isn't it in your Bible, grandfathers? Something for you to encash. There's tremendous power in prayer. Learn to make use of that power God has given us.

What is our responsibility? It's not only prayer. Let me turn you to Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 6. Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 6. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. It's like a contract.

Two people sign, one person says I'll do my part, if you do your part. You got to do your part first. What is that? Train up a child in the way he should go.

And God says I'll make sure that when he's old he doesn't depart from it. What a wonderful promise to claim again. Lord give me grace to train up this little child right from the time he's born in godliness by prayer, by singing hymns to it, and teaching him or her God's ways.

And when they're old you promise that you'll do your part. I'll tell you, if you're faithful to do your part, you can be absolutely sure God will be faithful to do his. He will bring, he will not let them go astray.

And so if children do go astray, don't blame them, don't say they got into bad company, blame yourself. Say I didn't bring them up properly. Don't blame their temperament, oh children are different.

Don't listen to what the psychologists say, listen to what the bible says, and you may find there's a lot of difference. Blame yourself, don't be like Adam who blamed his wife. Be like the thief on the cross who said I'm guilty, Lord I'm guilty.

Paradise is for such people who accept the blame and don't seek to blame others. We are responsible for the way we bring up our children. And one proof of that is found in 1 Timothy and chapter 3, where one of the conditions for leadership in God's house is the way you have brought up your children.

Now if we were not responsible for the way we brought up our children, then God could not make that a condition for leadership. I mean if I'm helpless and if children grow up different ways because they got bad company or they got a bad temperament or different personality, how in the world could God hold me responsible for it? How could God say you're not fit to be an elder if it's not my fault that the children went astray? One of the conditions, 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 4, a leader must be one who manages his own family well, keeping his children under control with all dignity. That's one of the conditions.

If you don't fulfill that condition, you can't be an elder. I know in some of our churches I've had to remove elders when their children were not brought up that way. I say brother, just humble yourself, step down from eldership, just be a brother in the church.

Because your family is not a good testimony to others according to God's word. I mean most people neglect these commands in God's word like 101 other commands of God they neglect. But Jesus said we got to obey all that he taught.

And here is God's standard. I remember when my children were growing up and I said if you grew up and you go astray, I will not blame you if you go astray, I'll blame myself. I didn't bring you up right.

Don't blame your children. And he goes on to say the reason why a leader needs to be like that in the next verse, verse 5, is if a man does not know how to manage his own family, you got two or three children and you can't bring them up in godly ways, how in the world are you going to bring up a church with two or three hundred people, or two or three thousand, that's impossible. You have to bring up your own children first in the proper way, otherwise you are not qualified to bring up a church in the ways of God.

The children go astray because they see hypocrisy in their parents. That's the reason. They see their parents preaching one thing, singing one thing on Sunday and at home living another way, talking to each other in a way they would never talk to each other publicly in a church service, and they say this is all hypocrisy.

I remember 40 years ago in India, there were a number of American young people who came there in search of the true God in Hinduism. They were what they called hippies in those days. And why did they come there? I met some of them and talked to them and I discovered they came from Christian families, from rich Christian families.

Why did they forsake the Christ which their parents worshipped? Because they saw hypocrisy in their home. Our parents had a lot of money, but they didn't live what they pretended to believe on Sunday morning when they went to church, and they said that can't be the truth, and they come seeking God in Hinduism and Buddhism. That's the reason children go astray.

Hypocrisy in their parents, and we need to examine ourselves and judge ourselves and see whether we are the cause for leading them astray. In the Old Testament, the Lord said through Moses to the Israelites in Deuteronomy chapter six, let me read you this verse, Deuteronomy chapter six and verse 20, God was concerned that every generation should have a witness for him, and he told those Israelites as they were entering Canaan, in Canaan, when your son comes and asks you in time to come, what do these things mean, these work, testimonies, statues, the commands of God, you should be able to explain to them, he says in the succeeding verses, and that applies to us too. Your children come and ask you, Dad, what does this scripture mean? You say, I don't know myself.

How in the world are you going to help them? That's why we need to study the scriptures. That's why the Bible says that we need to bring up our children in godly ways. Bring up our children in the ways of God.

Like I've repeatedly been telling people, in Malachi it says how we are not faithful to our wives and we can't bring up our children properly. I want to turn to an example of a set of parents who brought up their child Moses in a good way. Turn with me to the book of Hebrews in chapter 11, Hebrews chapter 11, we read here in Hebrews in chapter 11 and verse 23, Hebrews chapter 11 is the hall of fame, the heroes of faith, and we read here about the faith of Moses' parents, it's not the faith of Moses mentioned here, by faith Moses when he was born was hidden by his parents, it's the faith of Moses' parents.

Now Hebrews chapter 11 is a chapter where we read of people pulling down the walls of Jericho, splitting open the Red Sea, and shutting the mouths of lions, and putting armies of enemies to flight, etc. by faith, in the midst of it, it speaks about the faith of parents. Can parents come in the hall of fame, of heroes of faith? They never split the Red Sea, they never shut the mouths of lions, what did these parents do to qualify them to come into this wonderful chapter, Hebrews chapter 11? It's because they brought up their one son right.

You know the story how Pharaoh's daughter picked up Moses from the bulrushes from the basket, and gave him as a little baby back to his mother to bring him up, and said when he's old enough send him to the palace. Maybe Moses' mother had him for seven years, I don't know, at the most perhaps ten, but she knew I am going to have this little boy with me only for a little time, I want you all to remember, your child is going to be with you only for a little while. And then he was going to go to the worst place on earth for sin, the palace of Pharaoh.

And we read that when Moses went there at the age of forty, you see three decisions he took in the next three verses, and there you see the three things that his parents taught him when he was a child at the age of seven. At that young age they drilled certain values into his head. Look at them one by one, Hebrews chapter 11 verse 24.

By faith Moses when he had grown up, train up a child in the way he should go when he's old he will not depart from it. The first thing he did was he rejected the honor of this world, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He would have been the next Pharaoh if he had just kept quiet about his ancestry, pretended to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter as everybody thought, he could have been the Pharaoh.

He said I don't want it, Egypt was the greatest superpower on earth in those days, to be Pharaoh was to be the most powerful man in the world. And he didn't have to get elected for it, he just would grow up into it. And he said no, I don't want the honor of this world, where did he get that value? His parents, his father and mother must have drilled it into his head.

Son, when you grow up, don't seek the honor of this world, seek to honor God. You're not an Egyptian, you're an Israelite, we belong to the true God. That's what we need to tell our children, you don't belong to this world, we don't belong to this world, we don't seek honor in this world, we live our life seeking to honor God, we don't pursue the honor of this world, the first thing we need to teach our children.

The second thing, verse 25, He chose, Hebrews 11, 25, sorry, yeah, 25, He chose rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin. Shall I choose suffering or pleasure? You know how every normal human being would say, pleasure, definitely. But they drilled it into this little boy's head, you are part of this afflicted people of God, these Israelites, who are enslaved here, who have

been enslaved for hundreds of years, don't ever be ashamed of them, Moses, when you go there and live in the midst of the world.

That's what we need to teach our children. When you go to that palace, Moses, you're going to be tempted with all types of sinful pleasures which you don't even know now as an eight, nine year old boy, but you'll face it there when you grow up and become a teenager, resist it. Is there pleasure in sin? The Bible says there is, we just saw it.

The pleasures of sin, but it's a passing pleasure, that's what they told their son. There is pleasure in sin, that's why the world goes after it, but remember it's a passing pleasure, reject it. Be willing to suffer with God's people.

The colleges today are worse, or like that palace in Egypt. We need to teach our children about the passing pleasures of sin, teach them to reject it when they are young, and then they will reject it when they grow up. And the third thing is in verse 26, it says here, Moses considered the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking for a reward.

What a wonderful thing to teach our children to look for a heavenly reward. I'm willing to suffer for Christ's sake on earth, then get all the wealth of this world to teach our children not to tell lies, not to cheat. As they grow up, learn to pay your taxes properly, and be upright, don't cheat anybody, don't exploit anyone, and if God calls you to be a preacher, don't try to make money out of your preaching, don't swindle poor people out of their tights because you want to buy expensive cars and airplanes, etc., like that.

Imagine if parents had taught their children these values, we'd have a different type of Christianity today. Consider the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. He was taught from childhood not to value the honor of the world, not to value the pleasures the world offers, and not to value the wealth of this world.

And therefore his parents found a place in the hall of fame of great heroes of faith. What should we teach our children? Further, Ephesians chapter 6, it says here in Ephesians 6 and verse 2, honor your father and mother. Honor.

This is the first commandment with a promise. In the Ten Commandments, only one commandment had a promise attached to it, and that was this one, to honor your father and mother. Before all the other commandments of don't kill, don't steal, which are there, the first one for earthly relationships was honor your father and mother.

And the promise is given in the next verse, verse 3, that it may go well with you, that you may live long on the earth. Don't you want it to go well with your children? Then we must teach them right from the beginning to honor their father and mother, to always speak respectfully to their parents and to older people, to always obey their parents. And it's easier to teach them that if you start from the time they are one year old.

They understand when they are one, I tell you they do. Teach them obedience, and if you take that seriously, you will ensure that it goes well with your children. It's a promise of God, that if they honor their father and mother, it will go well with them, and that's why we need to teach them that.

And we read further down here, our responsibility as fathers, but before we come to that, I want to show you a verse in Psalm 90, which is the one psalm that Moses wrote among the 150 psalms in your book, in

our Bible. There's one psalm that Moses wrote. He never forgot what his parents taught him.

And he wrote in Psalm 90 in verse 16, Lord, let your work appear to your servants and your majesty to their children. We want our children to see the majesty of God. Where are they going to see it? In creation? In the wonderful things God does in creation? No.

Verse 17, let the beauty, as it says in the King James Version, let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. Let the children see your majesty, Lord, in my life as a father. Moses says, I saw that in my dad who was a slave, and my mom who was a slave's wife.

They were not rich. We lived in a little hut. They didn't have much money.

They were poorer than all of us. They were slaves. They had to scrape by every month for their needs, but Moses remembered seeing the majesty of God upon his parents' faces and their lives, their simple lives.

And he says, Lord, that's what we need, our children need to see. So that's our responsibility as fathers, as I said earlier, that people can see the beauty of God. And what is that beauty? Let me show you a verse in Romans chapter 11 and verse 22.

The reason I'm showing you all this scripture is like Paul said, so that your faith may not rest on the wisdom of man, but on the power of God and the word of God. It's very important that our faith is founded on God's word. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing is not by any man's eloquent speech.

It's by the word of Christ. Romans 11, 22, behold then the kindness and the severity of God. Just that first part of that verse.

Behold means look carefully. How many of you have looked carefully and seen a balanced picture of God as a father? Kind and strict. That's the balance.

That's the beauty of the Lord our God that must be upon us. A beauty that is only full of kindness is a one-sided God. I mean, if you were to cut a man in half and showed people half, it would be part of the man, but it's very ugly.

It's only half. You need the full man to see the beautiful picture of what a man looks like, and same way with God. If you only see grace and not truth, you haven't portrayed God correctly to your children.

If you're kind to your children, but you're not strict with them, you haven't portrayed God correctly, and you won't be able to deliver them, because they've got a sinful nature that's come, that's in them from the time they're born. We have to be strict with them if we are to deliver them from that nature, but we have to be kind with them because they got that nature from us. You can't blame them for having that nature.

That's why we need to be kind and strict, and that is the beauty of God. The glory of God was seen in Jesus Christ full of grace and full of truth, and this is why we need the help of the Holy Spirit so desperately. We cannot do it without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Turn to Ephesians in chapter 5, and verse 18, there's a lot of talk today about being filled with the Holy Spirit, and this is the one verse, it's the only place in scripture where you have a command in any of the episodes saying, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5 verse 18, be filled with the Spirit. Let me tell you, it's the only place in the episodes where that exhortation comes.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit, and in the succeeding verses, he tells us what will be the result. The first is a lot of praise, and then he immediately, in verse 22 onwards, he goes into family life, how wives should behave with their husbands, how husbands should behave with their wives, and finally comes down to fathers and children in Ephesians 6 verse 4. So, remember, this is all following from being filled with the Spirit. Then you come to Ephesians 6 and verse 4. So if you keep in mind when you come to Ephesians 6 verse 4, that you have to begin at being filled with the Holy Spirit, you'll get it right.

But you try to do that without being filled with the Spirit, you're not going to be able to succeed. Ephesians 6 verse 4, fathers, don't provoke your children to anger. Do you think you can manage that without being filled with the Holy Spirit? How much our children can irritate us and make us impatient, how can we keep ourselves from getting angry? There's only one way, be filled with the Spirit.

That doesn't mean we don't speak firmly to them, we put our foot down and say, son, my girl, you're not going to have that. If you're my daughter, you're not going to dress like that, like these models and film actresses, not as long as you live in this house. I want you to dress in a way that Jesus will be proud of you if he walks with you on the street.

And not in this immodest way you provoke all the other boys walking down the street to lust after you. And my boy, I will not allow you to tell lies in this house. And I will not allow you to play that demonic music in this house, not as long as I'm the head of this house.

That's being strict. You'll have some godly children when they grow up. You need to be filled with the Spirit.

Don't provoke them to anger, but bring them up, it says in Ephesians 6, 4, with the discipline and instruction of the Lord. You have to do both, that's what this verse says. Discipline and instruction.

Teach them the word of God, that's instruction. Teach them the principles of scripture, why we don't cheat in our examinations, why we don't tell lies, why we are different from others, why we don't let you, why we don't watch any filthy movies here. Why we don't do this, why we don't do that.

Instruction and discipline. When they disobey, there needs to be discipline. Discipline is not just always the use of the rod, there are many ways of disciplining our children by not allowing them certain privileges, etc.

But God disciplines us. Turn to Hebrews chapter 12, and that's a great example. Our Heavenly Father is the great example for all fathers and all parents.

And it says in Hebrews 12, in verse 7 first of all, Hebrews 12, 7, in the middle of that verse, God deals with you as with sons. Hebrews 12, verse 7, what son is there whom his father does not discipline? The answer to that question today is, unfortunately, millions of sons. But in that day, things were a little better.

And the writer to the Hebrews says, have you ever heard of a son whose father doesn't discipline him? What a different world we live in today. What son is there whom his father doesn't discipline? Then he goes on to the next verse, verse 8, if you are without discipline, of which all have become part, if all children were disciplined in those days, then you are illegitimate children. Do you know that when you don't discipline your children, you're treating them like illegitimate, not my children really.

That's how serious it is. In Revelation chapter 3, Revelation chapter 3, in verse 19, now this is a word that the worst of the seven churches in Revelation, the church in Laodicea. In Revelation chapter 3, verse 19,

Revelation 3, verse 19, the Lord says, those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.

This is Jesus. When I was a young Christian, if you had asked me, how do you know Jesus loves you, I'd say he died for me on the cross. Today if you ask me, how do you know Jesus loves you, I'd say he died for me on the cross, plus he reproves me, he disciplines me, that's how I know he loves me.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. Do you know Jesus loved like that? Do your children know your love for them, in the way you reprove them and discipline them when they go wrong? This is the tragedy in our generation. We try to be better than Jesus and our children bring dishonor to his name.

Now I want to speak a word to older fathers here, who maybe your children are wayward, gone astray and there's nothing much you can do about it. That's a verse in Malachi chapter 4, first of all, Malachi chapter 4, verse 5 and 6, the Lord says in Malachi 4, 5, I'm going to send Elijah, the prophet, this is the last verse of the Old Testament, Malachi 4, verse 5 and 6, who will come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. That means the church is going to come with the spirit of Elijah and what is going to be the ministry of the church before this terrible day when Christ comes to judge the world? Verse 6, it's going to be restoring the hearts of the fathers to their children.

Remember this is the last verse in the Old Testament. The Old Testament ends with the word curse, it's the last word of the Old Testament and then we have grace in the New Testament. But what is the curse coming for? On homes, on families, on the world, because fathers and children have separated.

Fathers don't have time to spend with their children, they're busy like Samuel, they're not faithful to their wives like he said earlier in Malachi 2, you've been unfaithful to the wife of your youth. You don't look at your wife the way you looked at her when she was young, the time you married her, you've been unfaithful. And so fathers and children are also separated like that.

God is against that. He hates divorce, he hates the separation of fathers' hearts from their children. Fathers who are too busy with their work, who don't have time for their children.

And in the New Testament it says before the coming of the Lord God wants to bring fathers and children together. This is the time when the church has got a ministry to bring fathers and children together to take time, to learn to value the things that your children value. When you're busy doing something and your little child comes and says, Dad can you repair this little doll of mine that's broken? You push it away, say no I'm busy with something.

I'll tell you what, leave aside your work, that can wait, fix that doll. I remember hearing of a story of a, recently I read it somewhere, of a young man who was 21 years old or something, died in a car crash. His parents were believers, regular members of a church, and after he died in their sorrow they looked into his room and they found a little diary he had written.

They never knew his son had written a diary and they looked through that diary and found little things he had written in his diary, in his journal, like this. I wanted to spend a little time with my dad today and I wanted to talk to him. He said son I'm very busy now, come later.

Another time I went to my mom, another entry in the journal, and she said I've got to go for a prayer meeting, I don't have time for you right now. One Sunday in church, I had a little doubt and I went up to the pastor and said can I ask you something? Yes son I'm very busy now, some other time. And he writes in his journal, nobody seems to have time for me.

What's the use of this type of life? Don't wait till your children die for you to read that in that journal. They value certain things, they value your time. I remember here reading another story recently of a man, old man, after his wife had died and his one son had grown up and left home, he was alone at home, one day he was looking in the attic and he saw a little journal of his son's that he had written on different dates and the dad himself had kept a journal too.

So he put both journals together to see what did my son write on the day I wrote something. And he looked up one date and he found in his journal a very brief entry, all the other days were full of his business details and all. One date was a brief entry, went fishing with my son, caught nothing, wasted the whole day.

He looked at his son's entry, went fishing with my dad, the best day of my whole life. Do you spend time with your children? They have a different set of values than you have. And if your children have been our wayward today, I want to say this to you.

Take this promise in Matthew chapter 18 and claim it today. To those fathers who have wayward children, Matthew 18 and verse 19, the Lord says, this is a promise made by Jesus, again I say to you, if two of you, if your wife is there and you're agreed with her, if your wife is not there, find another brother, agree with that person, say, Lord, here are two of us agreed on one thing, I want my wayward son and daughter to come back to you, I want them to be born again, I want them to be disciples of Jesus. And you said in Matthew 18, 19, I'm going to cash this check now, it shall be done for them by my Father in heaven.

My wife and I have claimed that promise in numerous situations at home, for many, many situations when children are sick, when they have a problem in school, anywhere, and it's always worked. And I want to say to you, the promises of God are true. Claim that promise and bring back your wayward son or daughter into the ways of God.

And if you're an older father and your children are godly, don't boast about it. It's not because of you. It's because of God, 100%.

If it was not God's mercy, your children would be wayward like those other people. Don't despise those other people whose children are wayward. Don't look down upon them, don't criticize them.

If you can't pray for them, at least keep your mouth shut. But don't ever criticize someone who's got wayward children and boast that your children are godly. It's only God's mercy that your children are godly.

And never, never forget that. No man can boast in God's presence. And a word finally to mothers, maybe single mothers who have to do the job of father and mother together.

I don't want to leave this Father's Day without speaking to them. Because it is true that in today's world, it's unfortunate that some mothers have to be fathers to their children. I want to give you the example of Timothy, mother.

Timothy's mother. We read in 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 5, Paul says in 2 Timothy 1 verse 5, he says about the sincere faith that was in your grandmother and that was in your mother Eunice, I'm sure it is in you as well. Where did Timothy get his sincere faith from his mother? We read in Acts chapter 16 that his father was a Greek.

I don't know how this Jewish person married a Greek person. It was against the Jewish commandments, but here was she married to a man who was probably only interested in business, I don't know if he was worshipping Greek gods, but obviously a man who had nothing to give his son. So the mother took on the job of being father and mother to Timothy.

While the father was just away in business or making money or traveling here and there, the mother did that job and imparted to Timothy faith in different situations. Timothy saw his mother saying, son let's pray, God will see us through, he can take care of every problem and time after time after time, this little boy saw faith in his mother and as his mother instructed him the ways of God, taught how God did wonderful things for others in the days of faith, gradually faith came in his heart and by the time he was 19 or 20 years old, he was a young man of God and it says in Acts 16 that Paul saw him and said, I want you on my team, and he became an apostle one day. Where would he have been if it were not for Timothy's mother? Timothy's mother couldn't travel the world, but she raised an apostle.

Two hundred years ago, two fifty years ago, we read of John Wesley, the great man of God, one of the greatest men of God in the history of the church who founded the Methodist church. His brother, Charles Wesley, who has written thousands of hymns, which many of us sing, do you know they were brought up by their mother? The father had no interest in bringing up his children and his mother had ten children and John Wesley and Charles Wesley were two of them. She would spend, Susanna Wesley, would spend one hour every week alone with each child teaching them the ways of God.

She was called the mother of the Methodist church because there would have been no Methodist church if it were not for Susanna Wesley, a single mother almost, bringing up her children in godly ways. And what a result. She raised an apostle.

So I want to say to all of you single mothers, there's tremendous hope for you. Don't ever give up. One last verse before I close.

Here is the verse which I give to people when people ask me, Brother Zach, how did you bring up your children? I say, I'll tell you. I was foolish and stupid, but I cried out for wisdom. I would fall before God and say, Lord, it says in James chapter 1 verse 5, James 1 verse 5, if anyone lacks wisdom, and I say, Lord, I'm the one.

I'm the foolish father. I'm the imperfect father. I admit I lack wisdom.

What shall I do in this situation? Let him ask God, who will give to all generously. I ask for a teaspoon, he'll give me an ocean of wisdom, and he won't scold me without reproach. In some translations it says he won't scold you.

He won't say, why are you coming again? He won't say, you should have got wisdom by now. It's men who speak to us like that. He's always ready.

He never scolds us. I praise God that I have a heavenly father who will never scold me. He'll never scold you, brother or sister.

Come to him and it will be given. The next verse, but let him ask in faith, James 1 verse 6. We must ask in faith without doubting. God will give me that wisdom.

Dear brothers and sisters, the world is a lonely place for our children, but like we sing in that song, because Jesus lives, our children can face tomorrow. Let's take our responsibility more seriously in the coming days. To be the type of fathers and mothers we should be to our children.

God will forgive us our past. Let's put that under the blood of Jesus. Say, Lord, I failed.

Be honest with him. He loves honest people and he will do it better for you in your family in the days to come. God can do it.

Let's bow before God and acknowledge our need. Let's bow before him and humbly confess our sin, our failure, and say, Lord, I know there's hope for me. I believe that.

Not because of what I see in myself, but in the promises of your word. Thank you. I want to respond to that with all of my heart.

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