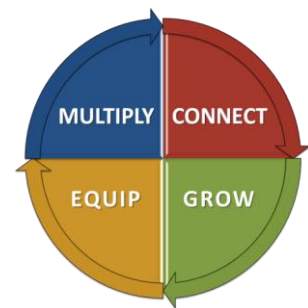




Let me remind you what we have covered in the first three parts of our series called Organic Church.

1. Discipleship Ingredients—the Bible and the Holy Spirit
2. Discipleship Environment—the church and the family
3. Discipleship Process: Connect—Grow—Equip—Multiply
Our goal is to become a **Believer Equipping Church**: The pastor sets forth a Biblical vision so that every believer equips one another to do the work of the ministry.
4. Discipleship Structure/Ministries—The Trellis of ministries that supports the Living Vine



During the last two weeks we saw how the church is a primary environment for discipleship and this morning we will see how the family is also fundamental to Biblical discipleship. We will also show you how the church and the family can work best together. This morning's text is Ephesians 6:1-4.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² *“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—* ³ *“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”*

⁴ *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Parents love verse one—*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* Many parents have their young children memorize this verse. Some parents even teach their children a song to go with this verse. Watch how this cute little girl named [Zoei sings this song](#).

Little Zoei is absolutely adorable. Her parents have taught her this Bible verse and she knows the song that goes with it. But at some point in her life, cute little Zoei is going to ask the question, “Why? Why do I need to obey you? Why is this right? Mommy, why do I need to pick up my toys? Daddy, why do I need to go to bed so early?” And if she doesn't literally ask you that question, she will ask it with her actions. Her acts of defiance will serve as this question.

As parents, we may teach this verse to our children parents don't always have the best motivation for doing so. Sometimes we use it like a Bible club against our kids. We say things

like, “Look Johnny, the Bible says you must obey me, so get busy cleaning your room. Suzie, don’t forget that the Bible says you must obey me, so you wash those dishes this instant!” Is this an acceptable use of this verse? It is certainly right to teach our kids to obey us, but it is not right to use it as a sort of weapon against our children. Some parents have never taught their children this verse and that is equally wrong. We should not want our kids to obey us simply because we have a need to be in charge. We should not want our kids to obey us merely because we fear a hostile takeover of our home by the “little people.” But we should want our kids to obey us because it is a matter of discipleship. Parents—you stand in the place of God to your children. You literally represent God to them and you should want them to obey you so that they will obey God.

Paul wrote, *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* Why? Why is it right? I want to give you several reasons and show you how they are linked to discipleship.

Q. Why is it “right” for children to obey their parents?

1. Because disobedience is a sign of the last days. It fits right in with a long list of sins. *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, **disobedient to their parents**, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power.* 2 Timothy 3:1-5

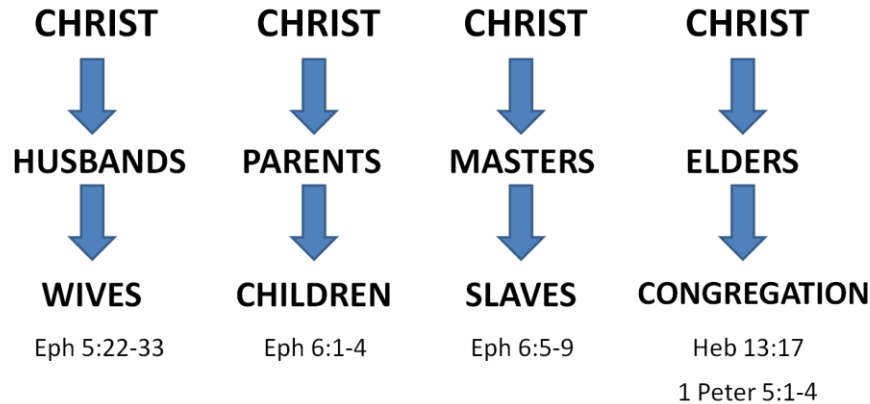
Disobedience is a sign of the last days because when a child rejects his parent’s authority he or she is one step closer to rejecting God’s authority. Am I saying that when a child refuses to clean up his toys that he is in deep rebellion against God? It may be a small thing at first, but yes, that is the path that our children are walking, which leads to our second point.

2. Because parents represent God’s authority in the life of the child. From Ephesians chapter five through chapter six Paul laid out several types of relationships: Husbands and Wives (Eph 5:22-33), Children and Parents (Eph 6:1-4) and Slaves and Masters (Eph 6:5-9). Each of these relationships has one thing in common—one part of the relationship has authority over the other. But in each case, this authority can be referred to as representational authority or representational leadership. In each case, the one who is in authority is representing Jesus Christ. This is seen clearly in each case.

- Wives, submit to your husbands *as to the Lord*.
- Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*.
- Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, *just as you would obey Christ*.

Therefore, it is right for children to obey their parents because mom and dad stand in the place of Christ to them. Obviously, parents are not without sin, but God knew that when he set up this representational leadership. God knew that parents would fail their children but that does not excuse children from not obeying their parents. When you obey your parents, God looks at it as obedience to him. Therefore, the opposite is true—when you disobey your parents you are disobeying God. It is really that simple.

REPRESENTATIONAL LEADERSHIP



3. The third reason why it is right for children to obey their parents is because it is the sixth commandment with a promise for all ages and all people. In verses 2-3, Paul quoted directly from Deuteronomy 5:16. Notice the similarities and differences between the O.T. quote and Paul's quotation, particularly the part that contains the promise.

Dt. 5:16—"Honor your father and your mother...so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Eph 6:2-3—"Honor your father and mother...that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

In both cases, honoring one's father and mother results in long life (yellow highlight) and a good life (that it may go well with you—blue highlight). The difference is that the Deuteronomy quote contains the phrase "in the land" (green highlight) and Paul changed this to "on the earth." Paul turned this promise into a universal promise for all people for all time, for those who would obey it.

Sociologically speaking, this promise makes perfect sense. Societies who care for their elderly, because the children are honoring their parents, will bring about longer life for each successive generation as well. Another example would be Ryan's driver's license that he got this week. If he obeys his parents regarding when he is permitted to drive and how to drive with the utmost care, then his obedience is much more likely to allow him to live a longer life. These two are sociological examples that could be true of anyone who lives in obedience to his parents, but this promise is much more than a sociological principle. It is literally a promise of a longer life. It doesn't mean that if you live to be a hundred that you have honored your parents nor does it mean that if you die younger than average that you didn't honor your parents. I take it to be more like a proverb—something that is true most of the time but is not an absolute kind of promise. This would apply to everyone in this room who regularly honors their father and mother, whatever your age.

But there are two more reasons why it is right for children to obey their parents. The sixth commandment is actually a summary of all Ten Commandments. This one is really cool, so pay close attention.

Watch what happens when we take our original comparison between Dt. 5:16 and Eph. 6:2-3 and add the first verses of Deuteronomy six.

Dt. 5:16—“Honor your father and your mother... **so that you may live long** and **that it may go well with you in the land** the LORD your God is giving you.

Eph 6:2-3—“Honor your father and mother... **that it may go well with you** and **that you may enjoy long life on the earth.**”

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² **so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.** ³ Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey **so that it may go well with you** and that you may increase greatly **in a land** flowing with milk and honey (Dt. 6:1-3).

The comparisons are exactly the same—you have the promise of a long life, that it will go well with you and the promise of the land. But the difference is that this section of Deuteronomy is a summary of all Ten Commandments. Look at Dt. 6:1 again. *These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe.* Moses had all of the Ten Commandments in mind when he wrote this verse. It is fascinating that the same promises related to the sixth commandment are exactly the same as the summary for all Ten Commandments. Which leads directly to our fifth point...

5. Children should obey their parents because it is the best way parents can train their children to fear the Lord. Look at verse two (above, highlighted in gray). Moses gave all of the commandments *so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God...* The future success of this new nation that was just released from bondage in Egypt was the passing on of the faith and commandments to the next generations. Do you now understand why the promises are the same for the sixth commandment and for all of the commandments? They are the same because when children obey their parents they are able to be taught by their parents. When children are willing to submit to parental authority, at that point, they are able to be taught. But if they are not submissive to authority, when you try to teach them it has about as much affect as an infant's breath against a brick wall. Therefore, one could say that the sixth commandment is the engine that runs the other nine commandments. If children are not obedient and teachable, then they cannot learn the other nine commandments.

It is the role of children to obey their parents but it is the parent's role to teach their children to obey; to teach their children to fear the Lord; to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. This is so necessary because by nature, children are not obedient. Children are not merely a blank slate ready for you to lay your impression upon them. Children are not lumps of clay ready to be molded into your vision for them. If this were true, that would make parenting so much easier. If parenting were like sitting down at a potter's wheel and learning the skill of pottery, then every parent would be a rousing success. Some would make beautiful vases and others with a little less skill would make plain cups and bowls, but they would all make something useful and good. But children are not lumps of clay. They are not naturally obedient. Fearing the Lord is not in their basic nature. Therefore, parents must overcome the selfish nature that their children are born with and train them to fear the Lord, respect authority and obey

everything the Lord has commanded. This is no simple task because before we can train our children to overcome their selfish desires, we must do the same for our own selfish desires.

And Paul knew that one of our selfish desires is the desire to rule over our children with an authoritarian heavy hand. This is why Paul gave the direct warning to fathers not to exasperate your children. Exasperate means *to provoke to wrath or to make angry*. Of course this does not mean that if your kids get angry that you are necessarily exasperating them. If you train your children well, they will get mad at you—perhaps often.

Exasperating is not unlike the Roman culture in which Paul lived. There was a Roman law called *patria potestas*. This literally means the power of the father. The father had absolute power over his children. If a child was born with a deformity, the father had a right to practice infanticide. The father could sell his child into slavery, he could adopt children, decide whom their children could and could not marry and even practice capital punishment. Notice I said capital punishment, not just corporal punishment! Therefore, since a father's natural tendency is to rule over his children and since Paul lived within a culture that practiced *patria potestas*, with one short command, he put an end to all such poor parenting.

I really like how one commentator described it. “Effectively, the apostle is ruling out ‘excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child’s needs and sensibilities.’”¹

But not all exasperation is a matter of being too firm. This is portably my favorite book on parenting and the author has an insightful quote. “Most parents are afraid of exasperating their children by being too firm, but most children are exasperated by parents who are not firm consistently.”²

Can mothers also exasperate their children? Of course they can, but Paul knew that this was more likely to come from the fathers. Exasperation from mom or dad can happen with lazy parents but it can also happen with determined parents because they know the standard for parenting is so high. Parents realize this standard and sort of force them to the standard or even beat them with the standard, which will always result in exasperating our children. Instead of beating them with the standard, we must train them to the standard.

This is what Paul taught in verse four. *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* There's that word training or discipline again. Do you recall this word from a few weeks back? It means discipleship. Training equals Discipleship.

The process of discipleship is *paideia*. The instructor is a *paideutes*. The child or learner is a *paidion* and the act of discipleship is *paideuos*.

The paideutes
The discipler

paideuos
disciples

the paidion and this is called paideia.
the disciple and this is called discipleship.

The instructor teaches, trains, punishes and chastises the student and this process is called discipleship.

Parenting is not a matter of survival, though there may be days when it feels like that. Parenting is not education. Parenting is not even preparing your kids for the “real world.” Although you can do all of these things as a part of discipleship, all of them must be subservient to the greater goal of discipleship.

So what is the best way to carry out this training? Should parents schedule a 30-60 minute training session? The best way to disciple your children was laid down 3,400 years ago. This section of Deuteronomy, that most of us are familiar with, follows directly after the part we looked at a few minutes ago,

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The goal of parenting is not to get you children to obey you. Any tyrant can do that. Anyone can apply enough pressure and exert enough fear so that children do what they are told. Rather, your goal is to train your children to obey *so that* you can disciple them.

Discipleship occurs on a daily basis in any kind of atmosphere with your children. Many people summarize this passage by saying that we need to take advantage of the teachable moments in life. To that notion I say, don't wait until the some magical teachable moment overtakes you but rather create your own teachable moments. The timing in Deuteronomy describes nearly every part of your day—*when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up*. In other words, discipleship never stops. And what kind of curriculum do you need to disciple your children. Verse six gives the answer. *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.* ⁷ *Impress them on your children.* The Bible is our basic textbook.

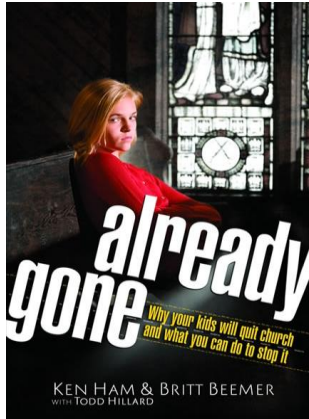
We have got to be committed to this goal because the rest of the world is determined to do the opposite for our children. Listen to this quote from atheist Richard Dawkins.

How much do we regard children as being the property of their parents? It's one thing to say people should be free to believe whatever they like, but should they be free to impose their beliefs on their children? Is there something to be said for society stepping in? What about bringing up children to believe manifest falsehoods? Isn't it always a form of child abuse to label children as possessors of beliefs that they are too young to have thought out?³

After all of this, answer a simple question for me. Whose responsibility is it to disciple your children? Wouldn't you have to agree that the primary responsibility for disciplining your children is you? Many of us would agree to this answer and give lip service to it but when the rubber

meets the road, we actually believe that the job of discipling our kids belongs to the church. For example, I have heard this question a dozen times: When is this church going to have Sunday School?

There was a detailed study done last year on the effectiveness of Sunday School and the results were not encouraging. It was research study with 1000 participants aged 20-29 and they were all evangelicals. 61% of the respondents attended Sunday School and 39% did not. The results are as follows. Those who did attend Sunday School were...



- More likely not to believe that all of the stories in the Bible are true.
- More likely to doubt the Bible because it was written by men.
- More likely to defend that abortion should continue to be legal.
- More likely to defend sex outside of marriage.
- More likely to believe that God used evolution to change one kind of animal into another.
- More likely to believe that the church is hypocritical.

The differences between the two groups was not huge, but it was consistent in eighteen different categories. Now please hear me carefully. I am not saying that Sunday School is wrong. This is not the reason that we do not have Sunday School. For the past ten and a half years, we have not had a space to do Sunday School. But the question that will be before once our basement is completed is: Should we do Sunday School or not? The rock solid Biblical fact is that parents are responsible for discipling their children. I am convinced that many churches actually hinder parent's ability to disciple their children. Think about it. If you want your children to learn a task—for example, doing the laundry—but if mom does every load of laundry, what are the chances that your kids will learn this task? The same thing can happen in churches. If a church does all of the discipling, they have in a very real sense, usurped the authority of the parents.

So what are we to do? Next week I will try to tackle the question of the ministry trellis that supports the living vine, the organic church. But first, let me leave you with a few thoughts.

Some parents here this morning need to let go of the idol of perfect children. You understand the standard of discipleship is high but in your quest for perfect children, you are exasperating them right now. You need to let go of that idol.

Others need to let go of their *patria potestas*—the right to rule over their children with a harsh hand, or an inconsistent hand of discipline.

Each of us needs to take up the mantle of responsibility to disciple our children. Each of us needs to take up the high privilege of training your children to obey you so that they can learn to fear the Lord and so that you can disciple them. Next week, Lord willing, we will figure out how we can do this together.

Rich Maurer
July 17, 2011

¹O'Brien, Peter Thomas: *The Letter to the Ephesians*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999 (The Pillar New Testament Commentary), S. 446

²Reb Bradley, *Child Training Tips*, Family Ministries Publishing, Sheridan, CA, ©2005, p. 147.

³Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, © 2006, 2008), p. 315.