

June 21, 2015

## *Growing Children of Faith*

*"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right...Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*  
Ephesians 6:1-4

Let's start by wishing a Happy Fathers' Day to all of the fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers and want-to-be fathers (Brandon) out there. And of course, if its Father's Day we need to do a lesson on Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21, "**Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.**" Mother's get Proverbs 31 and fathers get these two verses. Are we predictable or what?

What we really want to talk about today however, is part of your theme this summer, "Growing Children of Faith". Certainly the role that both parents play in raising up believing children is essential to the outcome, but Scripture, I think, makes it pretty clear that the role that fathers play in this process is pivotal.

Fathers are essential to the wellbeing of their children; to their growth and development. In our culture where fathers no longer work in the home and no longer actively participate as much in the spiritual and physical development of their own children we are losing this emphasis and it shows. Many of the most severe mental health issues that plague our society can be traced, I believe, to missing fathers. This "Daddy hole" is a major problem for our families and especially our kids.

Let me be clear from the beginning, the real secret in raising faithful, believing kids is making sure that fathers lead the way. Fathers, you need to be involved with the parenting of your children. They need your presence and particularly they need your example every day. Don't leave it up to mothers alone; get involved.

As parents then, working in tandem how do we grow up children of faith? It is really not as complex as we sometimes make it. The Old Testament is full of examples of the mechanism by which we can make this happen. Throughout the Law of Moses God tells fathers to teach their children about what they have seen and traditions that they follow. Raising faithful children begins with the example that you and I set before them.

What do we talk about in front of them? Does God populate our homes? What is our attitude towards the will of God? How do we treat others? What do we say about our neighbors, our leaders, our brothers and sisters in Christ? The first and strongest lessons that our children learn about faith they learn by watching us; by watching our faith in action.

Example alone is not enough however. If we want to raise faithful children we need to intentionally train them providing them the tools and skills they will need to live as people of faith in this world. When I teach parenting classes I like to divide these skill sets into three categories.

First, I want to teach my children to be responsible and to do that I buy them a gerbil. No, that's not how we teach our children to be responsible. Responsibility has two parts; choices and consequences. Life is all about choices and consequences and faith especially, is about choices and consequences.

Second, I want my children to learn how to cooperate with others. Faith is fundamentally about relationships and my kids need to know who to work with and get along with others. One of the earliest lessons we try to teach our kids is to share. How do we really teach this? The simplest answer is, "Do With". Have you children do good works with you. Take them wherever you go and

whatever you are doing whenever you can. They will learn how to work, and serve and play as faithful believers by being and doing with you.

Finally, teach your children to be courageous. We live in fear. All of us do. We fear what others will think about us and what they might expect of us and how they might judge us. We share our fears with our children. To be a believer in Jesus, in the God of the Bible, in the Holy Spirit of God is not popular these days. If our fears keep us from standing up for Jesus, with his love overflowing from our hearts, then our children will share that fear. Choosing faith takes courage and living that faith takes courage and your children will learn courage by watching you.

If I plant a garden by carelessly throwing seed everywhere, if I fail to water and weed and nurture my seedlings, if I ignore my garden I will reap exactly what I have sown, nothing. If I parent children, and carefully nurture and prepare them for life in this world, if I exemplify and intentionally teach them about my relationship with the Father, and if I show them how to choose, how to cooperate and how to have courage then as a parent I will reap what I have sown.