

**“Jesus in Our Home”**  
**Sermon Series on *Everyday Jesus* #4**  
**Dr. Peter B. Barnes**  
**May 14, 2017**  
**(Eph. 6:1-4)**

**Introduction.**

After the baptism of his baby brother one Sunday, little Marcus sobbed all the way home from church in the back seat of the car. His mother asked him, “What’s the matter honey?”

The boy just kept crying. Then his father said. “Son, why are you so upset?”

Little Marcus couldn’t be consoled, and he continued to cry. Exasperated, his mother said, “Now, honey, if you don’t tell us what the problem is, we can’t help you.”

Finally, the boy composed himself and replied, “Well, when that pastor today put water on my little brother’s head during the baptism, he said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home. But I want to stay with you guys!”<sup>1</sup>

What exactly is a Christian home? What is a Christian family? And how can you and I as followers of Jesus Christ make the most out of family life? What does *Everyday Jesus* in the home really look like? The Bible has a great deal to say about being a family, and we find some of the advice here in Ephesians 6.

As we consider this text today, there are three matters I want you to note. The first is the struggle to be a Christian family.

**I. The Struggle to Be a Christian Family.**

As he prepared to launch his "Great Society" programs in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson affirmed the importance of the family in an address he gave at Howard University in Washington, D.C. In that address He said:

The family is the cornerstone of our society. More than any other force it shapes the attitudes, the hopes, the ambitions, and the values of the child. And when the family collapses, it is the children that are usually damaged. When it happens on a massive scale, the community itself is crippled.<sup>2</sup>

I think Johnson was right. The family is the basic unit of society. It’s the foundational building block for and the primary means of socializing and civilizing children in this world. And history has proven that no nation is healthy where family life is weak or crumbling.

However, perhaps now more than ever it seems we struggle to build strong families in the world today. Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, and less than half of all the children born this year will live continuously with their own

mother and father throughout childhood.<sup>3</sup> 41% of all children born today are born to women who aren't married.<sup>4</sup> Is it any wonder that our nation is experiencing a breakdown in community and is confused about morality? The foundation of our society is crumbling beneath our feet. And it's falling apart in our own homes.

Even in families where the husband and wife stay married and everyone is in tact, parents and children still struggle to get along and build a life together. And the Christian family isn't exempt from these problems. Studies indicate that Christians struggle just as much as anyone else in building a life together as a family. Poor communication, anger, fighting, and money problems – they all plague Christians just as much as anyone else.

I grew up in the world of *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Leave It to Beaver*. Even when a family was presented on TV as not being complete with a spouse missing, like *The Andy Griffith Show*, you still had the solid feeling that Andy would one day marry Helen Crump, the school teacher, and they would live happily ever after. Only later in the 1980s did the media begin to portray the reality of the struggle most families have in getting along today.

*Ordinary People* was the first movie directed by Robert Redford, and it was a landmark film which offered a gut-wrenching portrayal of how families struggle in America. It presented a repressed and angry mother, a son who died in a boating accident, another son who was withdrawn and depressed after trying to commit suicide, and a passive father who always got triangulated into the dysfunction of the others. Ordinary people living in the suburbs of Chicago, just like the folks down the street, just like you and me.

My own family had its fair share of dysfunction when I was growing up, and I suspect yours did too. I think of the pain I experienced in my relationship with my father and how he was emotionally aloof and tended to love me only on his terms and his turf. One of my brothers was a cocaine addict for 20 years, and my mother, by her own admission, was codependent and an enabler.

We're all sinners saved by grace, and even the best of families struggle to make it these days. What are we to do? Where can we go for help? The apostle Paul provides some timeless advice in his letter to the church in Ephesus. Let's take a closer look at it.

## **II. Paul's Advice to Children.**

Paul introduces the subject of family life in the context of his teaching about practical matters in the Christian life. You'll recall that the first half of the book of Ephesians deals with the theological underpinnings of the Christian faith, and the last half deals with the practical implications for daily living. Earlier in chapter 5 Paul writes about marriage from a Christian point of view, and here the apostle continues his advice in chapter 6 as it relates to parents and children.

It's interesting to note that since Paul addresses his remarks to children as well as to their parents, he evidently expected whole families to be gathered together for worship when this letter was read to the church. Children were included in Paul's advice because they were a part of the worshipping community of the early church, and I believe children should be in our worship services as well.

That's one of the reasons we have a time for young disciples in our order of worship each month. It's important for our children to worship with us. Did you know studies indicate that children worshipping with their parents is the single most important factor for ensuring that a child continues in the faith when he or she becomes an adult? It's one of the keys to children developing what is known as "sticky faith" – which is faith that sticks with a child when they grow up and leave home. Sunday School and involvement in a youth group, as important as they are, is not what matters most. Children worshipping with their parents is the key factor.

Into this context Paul offers his advice, and his words were revolutionary for his day. Not only did the apostle raise the status of women in the 1<sup>st</sup> century; he also raised the status of children as well. In this he followed the Lord Jesus Christ who said, "*Let the children come unto Me and forbid them not, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt. 19:14).

William Barclay writes<sup>5</sup> that in the Roman world, there was what was known as *patria potestas*. It was Latin for "the father's power." Under the *patria potestas* a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in the fields, and he could punish them any way he liked, and even put them to death without breaking the law.

Against this backdrop Paul's words stand in stark contrast. He urged father's not to exasperate their children but to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. This was a radical change from the cruelty which prevailed in the Roman world at that time. In the Roman Empire, unwanted babies were abandoned, weak and deformed children were killed, and even healthy children were often regarded by people as merely a nuisance to be tolerated. Paul offered an entirely different perspective on children and family life.

To children Paul said, "*Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*" (6:1). Then he went on to quote one of the Ten Commandments to reinforce his admonition. Obedience is intended by God to be fundamental to the relationship of children to their parents, and every child who claims to be a follower of Christ must make this a primary part of their discipleship.

The reason Paul gives for a child's obedience points back to the Ten Commandments. He quotes the OT Law that a child should honor his/her father and mother, which was the first commandment given with a promise. It's a part of God's design for the family that parents are to have authority over their children,

and whenever a child rejects that authority or seeks to undermine a parent's leadership in the home, it's not only disobedience to the parent, it is also disobedience to God.

I can remember as a child growing up that whenever my mother asked me to do something – like clean my room or take out the garbage, I knew that if I procrastinated long enough, eventually she would do the task herself out of frustration. I'm embarrassed to admit it, but it was a game I played to get out of doing chores around the house. I look back now with great regret (especially today on Mother's Day!), and I think about all the times I was disobedient to her in both active and passive ways. And I see now all the ways I didn't fulfill Paul's teaching in this passage. I also realize now that in doing this I not only broke my mom's heart; I also broke the heart of God. You see, obedience is a test of one's discipleship in Christ.

However, let me be quick to add the obedience to which the apostle calls us it is not an absolute obedience. The obedience which he advises should be *in the Lord*. That is to say there are limits to our obedience. For example, if a parent asks a child to do something that is morally wrong or contrary Scripture, the child is obligated to disobey the parent because of the child's obedience to God. Our loyalty to Christ always comes first, and Jesus said very clearly in Matthew 10:37-39 that anyone who loved mother or father more than they loved Him was not worthy of the kingdom.

Francis Schaeffer, the well-known Christian writer and philosopher of the last century, tells about the way in which his own parents objected to his studying for the ministry and how he had to go against his parents wishes in order to follow the Lord's call. They also opposed his move to Switzerland and the founding of L'Abri, the Christian community he and his wife Edith lead. However, his mother lived with her son and daughter-in-law at L'Abri the last 7 years of her life when she was in poor health, and she came to see the blessing that Francis' life and his ministry had become.

There's also a limit in obedience to a child's parents when a person grows up and especially after marriage. Whenever a man and a woman become a husband and wife, they leave two family units and create a brand new one. The new commitment in marriage takes priority over our commitment to our parents, and we leave our mother and father and begin to make a new life of our own. When we come of age, we must begin to make our own decisions, and a parent must learn to let go. We give them roots, and we also give them wings. It is all part of the maturation process, and healthy individuation is important in marriage and becoming an adult.

### **III. Paul's Advice to Parents.**

Paul also has advice for parents, and he says, "*Fathers, don't exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*" (6:4). The injunction is directed toward fathers, but mothers would do well to remember it, too. Paul's words to fathers have two parts, one negative and the other positive.

The negative part involves restraint. Fathers aren't to exasperate their children but are rather to exercise their authority in a balanced and loving way. Elsewhere the apostle wrote, "*Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged*" (Col. 3:21). While there's a proper and necessary place for discipline in the home, that discipline must never be arbitrary or unloving, and we dads should be careful that we aren't overbearing with our kids.

I came across a list of the Top 10 Dumb Things Parents Say When They Discipline Their Kids, and I got a kick out of it. Here are few examples that were in the list.

- "Don't make me stop this car and have to come back there to get you!"
- "OK. That's it. You're grounded for a year!"
- "If you don't stop doing that, I'm going to have the pilot turn this plane around, and we won't go on vacation anywhere!"
- If a child is dawdling behind: "If you don't speed up, I'm just gonna leave you here!"
- And one that I heard many years ago: "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out! And what's more, I can make another one that looks just like you!"

I think of all the dumb things I have said and done as a father. It's a wonder at all that God chooses to use our fumbling efforts to raise and discipline our children. I had a former colleague once say, "In His infinite wisdom and grace God has chosen to entrust the task of child-rearing to amateurs!" We've never done it before, and we all make mistakes along the way.

On the positive side, fathers are to spend time teaching their children the things of God. I think too many men abdicate their responsibility to nurture the spiritual life of their children, and they tend to look to their wives or to the church to provide the training their kids need. Men, this is to our shame. It's our responsibility before God along with our wives to make time to teach our kids how to love God.

One of the passages I love the most in the OT is the one in Deuteronomy 6 which encourages the people of Israel to talk with their children about the Word of God "*when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down*

*and when you get up” (Dt. 6:7).* It was supposed to be a way of life for Jewish families. It should be as natural as any daily activity.

Some of the favorite memories I have of our family are the times we spent in family devotions together. When our older two boys were small we called it Four on the Floor. Then when our youngest came along we changed the name to Five Alive! We’d get together on the floor of the landing of our stairs, and we’d share in a brief time of reading a Bible story, perhaps sing a song or play a Bible trivia game, and then we’d have a short prayer. It wasn’t elaborate and it wasn’t always regular, but God blessed those times over the years. And our kids would tell you they had a big impact on them. Reading at night and praying at meals and at bedtime, talking about God like we talk about sports, was a part of our daily rhythm, and it shaped their spiritual lives, and it shaped mine, too.

To Paul’s admonition in this passage I would add that in addition to training and instruction in the things of God, fathers and mothers should also learn the art of encouraging and blessing their kids. Heaven only knows the true power of a word of encouragement, and many a child’s destiny has been influenced by the kind and simple words of a mother or father.

Benjamin West was one of America’s greatest painters who lived in the 1700s and 1800s. One day when he was young, his mother went out, leaving him in charge of his younger sister Sally. In his mother’s absence, West discovered some bottles of colored ink, and he decided to paint his sister’s portrait. In the process, he made an awful mess. But when his mother came home, she didn’t say anything about the mess or the terrible ink stains. Instead, she picked up the piece of paper on which he had been working and exclaimed, “Why, it’s Sally!” Then she stooped down and kissed him on the head. Benjamin West said, “My mother’s kiss that day made me a painter.”<sup>6</sup>

Martin Luther once said, “Spare the rod and spoil the child – that is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Conclusion.**

What is everyday Jesus look like in the home? It’s when the members of a family, especially the parents, by the grace of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit, try to keep Christ at the center of the home. No family does this perfectly, but every Christian family should attempt to do it sincerely. Everyday Jesus in the home is when parents and children live out their discipleship amid broken lives in the shadow of the cross. There they learn to ask for and extend forgiveness to one another, even as Christ has forgiven them. They center their lives around the Word of God, and they realize that a family is the primary school of discipleship God has

given us to learn how to grow in grace and live for Christ. That's what everyday Jesus in the home is all about. Let's try to live it. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Source unknown. Adapted from Kristin Huffman in "A Family Centered on Jesus" in *reNews*, December 2003, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in "Issues Tearing Our Nation's Fabric: Breakdown of the Family" in Leadership University Online, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Pat Conway in Focus on the Family's newsletter.

<sup>4</sup> Statistic from Pew Charitable Trust, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians*, p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians*, p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*