

Spirit-Filled Parents and Children

Ephesians 6:1-4

In the last message from this text, we remembered the tragic story of the collapse of the St. Francis dam in California in 1928. Because that concrete dam was built on and supported by unstable rock, it collapsed, killing more than four hundred people. When we build families, we must continually work to keep them on a strong foundation and maintain them with good support. But the fact is that there are dams that pose a far greater peril to lives today. We will talk about two of those during this message.

In today's message, we want to examine the relationship of parents and children in the light of the Scriptures. The Scriptures discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12). One of the marvels of modern day engineering is Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). In the larger models, the instrument looks like a lawnmower that can be pushed from place to place. GPR tells you what is under the soil. It sends out and then records electromagnetic energy to locate utilities, unmarked graves, sinkholes, property boundary pins, etc. In some soils, the radar can penetrate to 100 feet in depth. Wouldn't it be great if you had a GPR for your family life? You would need a "GPR" for your soul and the souls of your family members. But, my friend, that is what you have in the Bible you hold in your hand. It can examine the thoughts and intents of your heart. It's like Ground Penetrating Radar for the soul. And Ephesians 6:1-4 gets right to the heart of issues in the family:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou may live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

You see, building the right foundation and support for the future begins at an early age. By the Spirit's enabling power, parents and children can honor God both now and in the future. Throughout this brief series, we have seen how the filling by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:17-21) can lead us to joyful, grateful, humble living. This is an important way to think about your future and the future of your children.

By the Enablement of God's Spirit, Children Can Honor Their Parents. 1-3

"Children" translates a Greek word [tekna] that refers to those who are old enough to understand. And it applies until they are old enough to leave the home and be on their own. If you are in that age range today, how does this commandment strike you? Remember, the Scripture is like a "GPR" – it shows you that God sees right into your soul. It's a straightforward command and it's the first command (of the 10 commandments) that came with a promise. It's a welcome with an implied warning. Do this in order for things to go well with you in your life; ignore this command and you do so to your peril.

It's important to remember that this command was given to mankind after the fall in the Garden of Eden. Otherwise, we would be tempted to think, "Well, yeah, in a perfect world, I could honor my parents." But the point is that the 5th commandment was given after mankind fell into sin. In other words, every one of the parents we would be obeying and honoring would be and are sinners. Jesus was wiser, smarter, and more righteous than the sinful human beings that raised Him, but He submitted to them (Luke 2:46-51). Verse 1 instructs children to obey "in the Lord," and the Lord will help them do so. By the Spirit's enabling power, parents and children can honor God both now and in the future.

Learning from Adults with Experience

There are adults who are listening to this part of the message who are reflecting on their past. You could learn a lot from them if you would ask them about this. Each and every one of us can think of times when we disobeyed our parents; there were occasions when we did not honor them. But many can also remember the way they humbled themselves and made those things right with their parents. For those who are contemplating marriage in the future, here are two pieces of advice: 1. Pay close attention to the way your romantic interest treats his or her parents. (Hint: That tells you a lot about the way they will treat you.) 2. Remember that you are seeking the person that you really want to disciple your children. (Your children will be far more like them than you can possibly imagine.)

The Pressures on Families

As you well know, families are being shredded throughout our society. For those who marry between the ages of 20 and 25, there is a 44% - 60% chance that the marriage will end in divorce. For those between 40-49 years of age, there is a divorce rate of 21 out of every 1,000 persons. The average length of a marriage is slightly over 8 years. "Children of divorce statistics suggest that children whose parents divorce are four times more likely to get a divorce themselves in the future. Even though religious, moral, and socioeconomic factors play a role in this pattern, the statistics suggest that people are far more likely to obtain a divorce if their own parents were divorced."ⁱ These statistics read like seismic fault lines running under our society.

Unfortunately, immense pressures are coming to bear on families; there are many more family break-ups ahead. We cannot simply ignore the problems in families when these pressures are mounting. The March 1928 St. Francis dam collapse should have been a wakeup call to engineers all over the world. But as you know, good engineers are sometimes overruled by arrogant politicians. Though it is disputed, some believe that this is the case at the Three Gorges Dam in Hubei Province in China. It is well-known that the dam contains 419 square miles of surface water with a normal depth of 574 feet. It is also well understood that this would produce about 248 pounds per square inch of pressure on the lakebed below. (Just think of the increasing pressure your ears feel when you dive into deep water.) But 248 p.s.i. water pressure bearing down on two known fault lines (the Jiuwanxi and the Zigui-Badong faults) is a predictable recipe for disaster! For instance, on July 2, 2020 a Chinese seismologist predicted that heavy rains in the Yangtze River basin would cause an earthquake – and it happened just as he predicted!ⁱⁱ Chinese scientists have also warned the government about the danger of landslides due to raising and lowering the water level during seasonal floods. But "Following a brief period of openness, discussion of the dam's environmental effects has once again become largely taboo in China. Government officials fear that continued free discussion of the project's ramifications could lead to civil unrest."ⁱⁱⁱ The danger is dismissed by Chinese engineers.^{iv} But that is not the most dangerous dam in the world; even more lives are in peril. In the same way, we cannot simply ignore the problems in our families when the pressures are mounting. It's time for parents and children to seek the Lord's help and the enablement of His Spirit.

By the Enablement of God's Spirit, Parents Can Lead Their Children in a Patient, God-Honoring Manner. 4

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

Just as a parent's sinfulness would not justify a child's disrespect, the opposite is also true. When a child disobeys or rebels, God's Spirit can help the parents respond in a Christ-honoring manner. Verse 4 specifically addresses fathers. What would provoke a child to anger? Dad, your anger, impatience, critical

spirit, or hypocrisy irritates your children. Yes, they know that you go to church, but they are watching you at home. They could remind you of your many failures. But by the power of God's Spirit, you could show them how to change. Several years ago, while some of our children were still at home and others in college, I asked them this question: "Have you ever seen your father get sinfully angry?" Their humbling answer was, "Yes, lots of times." I responded, "I agree, but I would like to ask you this: when was the last time you saw that happen?" They looked at each other and then said, "Wow, Dad, it's been a while since we've seen that." I then responded: "All I want you to know is that when you face problems with sinful anger, you know someone who has experienced some victory, and he is glad to show you what he has learned." This is what we could ask the Spirit of God to do: to change us in front of our children's very eyes. We could raise them "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The word "nurture" refers to training. Show them how to live and how to serve the Lord. Lead by example. Be what you want them to become. The word "admonition" refers to warning them. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Turn them from wrath by showing them the right responses to life.

Across the years, many men have expressed a desire to do something. I have heard more than one man say, "I wish I could take that kid out behind the shed and beat some sense into him." But the problem is that our arms are not long enough to reach the idols of their hearts. But the Bible – the Spirit's Word – can help each human being discern the thoughts of his heart. The Bible can show him what is really wrong and how to make it right. We will need the power of God's Spirit to humble ourselves and to build strong families. But by the power of God's Spirit, parents and children could honor God.

By the Spirit's power, we could strengthen the foundation and support for our families. But bear in mind that it will feel like a continual construction project. The Three Gorges Dam is not the most dangerous dam in the world. That distinction belongs to the Mosul Dam in Iraq.^v In 2006, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a report stating that, "'In terms of internal erosion potential of the foundation, Mosul Dam is the most dangerous dam in the world... If a small problem [at] Mosul Dam occurs, failure is likely.'"^{vi}

Let's think about the problem this way: The 2 Findlay, Ohio reservoirs together contain 6.4 billion gallons of water, covering 831 acres. The Mosul Dam contains 3 trillion gallons of water (or 469 times the size of the Findlay reservoirs). To put that into perspective: If you start in Findlay, Ohio and draw a line to Toledo, Ohio, then go due east to the shore of Lake Erie, back south to U.S. 224, then west to Findlay, it would encompass roughly that same area as the water in the Mosul Dam. But remember, Findlay pumps water out of the Blanchard River into our reservoir. Mosul Dam is holding back the Tigris River. But here is the terrifying part: the Mosul Dam is built on unstable soil that includes gypsum; that is the stuff that's in your wallboard on your walls at home. As a result, Iraq conducts a round the clock 24 hour a day, 7 days a week construction project on the dam. And what are they doing? They are injecting concrete grout into the cracks and foundation of the dam to keep it from giving way. According to a Fox News article in January, 2018, "*The dam, the largest in the country with the capacity to hold 3 trillion gallons of water, controls the flow of the Tigris River north of Mosul and supplies electricity to more than a million residents. The Army Corps of Engineers estimates that if the dam ruptures, it will send floodwaters crashing more than 200 miles downstream – swallowing villages and much of Mosul City with waves as high as 80 feet. In addition, floodwaters could reach as far as Baghdad and potentially result in the loss and displacement of millions of lives and up to \$20 billion in damages.*"^{vii} So each and every day is a construction project. Each and every hour of the day, engineers are pumping concrete grout into the Mosul dam to avoid disaster. Our families are like that: a continual construction project.

Now you might be reading this and thinking, “How could people go on about their daily lives when such danger threatens them?” But my friend, our children are in much greater peril. You are only thinking about the danger of death. Are you ignoring the danger of the second death (Revelation 20:14; 21:8)? The fact is that every person who dies, unrepentant in his sins, faces an eternity in the lake of fire. There is the real disaster which ought to occupy our minds. Yes, it would be terrifying to live under the shadow of the Three Gorges Dam or the Mosul Dam. Yes, it would be cause for great concern, even if you lived a hundred miles downstream. But the fact is that every one of us lives on the cusp of eternity. It is appointed unto man to die once, but after this is the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). There is the greater danger that faces the members of humanity, including our own children. We need God’s help!

Romans 2:4-5 make the matter plain. The goodness of God is leading you and me to repentance. The rain that falls from heaven helps to grow the plants that feed us. But what if that same rain were pent up by a huge dam like the Three Gorges or Mosul dams? This is the picture that comes to mind when you read Romans 2:5 : After the hardness of your unrepentant heart you treasure up wrath in preparation for the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Like a dangerous dam on an earthquake fault, or a deadly dam eroding a gypsum base, the wrath of God will one day break forth. Are you ready? Are you safe in the arms of Jesus? Jesus Christ humbled Himself and came to this earth to enter into the disaster that is humanity. He died on the cross for our sins, was buried and rose again to show you that you could trust Him. And today, He is like the engineers in Mosul – putting His grace in the dangerous cracks in our lives – like concrete grout in the gypsum foundation of the dam.

God’s enabling Spirit points us to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Children, obey “in the Lord.” Parents, raise them up by the power “of the Lord.” By the Spirit’s enablement, parents and children can truly honor God.

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ⁱ Branka Vuleta, “Divorce Rate in America [35 Stunning Stats for 2021]” January 28, 2021, accessed at <https://legaljobs.io/blog/divorce-rate-in-america/> All of the statistics in this paragraph are drawn from that article.

ⁱⁱ Keoni Everington, “Earthquake sparks fears of landslides above Three Gorges Dam, 07/02/2020 accessed at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3957236>

ⁱⁱⁱ Mara Hvistendahl “China’s Three Gorges Dam: An Environmental Catastrophe?” Scientific American, March 25, 2008, accessed at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/chinas-three-gorges-dam-disaster/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20greatest%20fears,the%20water%20level%20strains%20them>.

^{iv} See Zang Hui, “Experts dismiss rumors about connection between Three Gorges Dam and earthquake” <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1156839.shtml>

^v Mosul Dam accessed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosul_Dam#:~:text=A%20September%202006%20report%20by,65%20feet%20\(20%20m\)%20of](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosul_Dam#:~:text=A%20September%202006%20report%20by,65%20feet%20(20%20m)%20of)

^{vi} U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, cited by Amit Paley, “Iraqi Dam Seen in Danger of Deadly Collapse” Washington Post, October 30, 2007, accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/29/AR2007102902193.html?hpid=topnews> See Journal of Earth Science and Geotechnical Engineering, “Mystery of Mosul Dam the most Dangerous Dam in the World: The project” <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:983052/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

^{vii} Hollie McKay, “Inside Mosul Dam, Iraq’s biggest potential weapon of mass destruction” Fox News, January 11, 2018, accessed at <https://www.foxnews.com/world/inside-mosul-dam-iraqs-biggest-potential-weapon-of-mass-destruction>