

INTRODUCTION

It's a lot of fun to raise kids. I heard a funny story about a mother who was having trouble with her young son because he constantly lied. He would make up wild stories and insist that they were true. She had tried everything she knew, but he still fabricated fantastic lies. One morning he got up and said, "Momma, you'll never believe what happened last night! A spaceship landed in our backyard and I went out to check it out, and these little green men took me on board their ship and we flew around in space all night long—it was awesome!" His mother was finally at wits end, so she said, "I've had it! I'm taking you to the pastor right now and I'm going to have him teach you not to lie."

So they went to see the pastor and the pastor said, "Tell me what happened." The little boy said, "Last night a spaceship landed in my backyard, and I went to check it out and these little green men took me for a ride in space and brought me back before breakfast." The pastor decided to use reverse psychology. He thought if he could tell the boy a totally unbelievable lie it would make the kid admit he was lying too. So the preacher said, "Son, that reminds me of something that happened when I was preaching up in the mountains years ago. Right in the middle of my message a huge grizzly bear burst into the little church, and started growling and snarling—people started jumping out windows and making doors where there weren't any doors. But I was so frightened that I froze. That old grizzly came creeping toward me to eat me, and all of a sudden a little yellow dog came running in to the church, and that little dog jumped on that grizzly and killed it and ate it on the spot." The pastor smiled and said, "Now, son, do you believe that?" The little boy's eyes were as big as saucers and he said, "I sure do, preacher, because that was MY dog!"

Kid's can drive their parents crazy sometimes—but for some of us, it's not a very long drive to start with! In this section of the Bible, we've been seeing how God gives very practical advice on how we should live in relationship with others. In the last message, we studied about wives who are brave enough to step forward and submit to the spiritual leadership of their husbands. We examined God's call for men who are strong enough to be perfect husbands—and love their wives as Christ loves the church. In this passage, we find God's directions for children and parents. Let's read Colossians 3:20: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." Next week we're going to talk about verse 21 which says, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

In 1972, Mary Rodgers wrote the novel *Freaky Friday*, which has since been made into a movie starring Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis. It's the story about a mother and daughter who woke up on a Friday, and each of them had switched bodies. After a series of comical events, the point of the story is each of them came to better understand each other. Parents, how would you like to spend a day in your child's body? You can't go back, but it might be fun to think about. How about it kids, would you like to be your mom or dad for just one day? You may be thinking, "Yuck!" But don't worry; you *will* be there soon enough!

As we think about what the Bible says about family relationships, it would help kids and parents to trade places for awhile in order to better understand each other. This is a two-part message. In this portion I'm going to address the kids and try to give you some insight into what it's like to

be a parent. In the next message, I'll speak to parents about the importance of trying to understand what's going on in the life of your kids.

1. WHAT EVERY PARENT WISHES THEIR KIDS KNEW ABOUT THEM

The directions we read in Colossians are supported by a similar command in Ephesians 6:1-3, "Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. 'Honor your father and mother' is the first commandment that has a promise attached to it, namely 'so you will live well and have a long life.'" (The Message)

Children and teenagers, God wants you to obey your parents, because He says it is the right thing to do. He never said it would be easy. But if you could live in your mom or dad's body for one day, there are some things you would learn that might make it a little easier.

(1) I'm not an expert, this is on-the-job-training

The law says the person who pilots your airline flight has to have earned a private pilot's license, a commercial pilot's license, an instrument rating, a multi-engine rating, and an airline transport pilot license. He or she must have logged thousands of hours of flight time before they can sit in the left seat of the cockpit. When you fly, you can rest assured a trained pilot is at the controls.

If you go into the hospital for surgery, your surgeon has graduated from high school and college. In addition, he or she has spent four more years in medical school, four more years in medical residency, and one or two more years in a surgery fellowship. You can go under anesthetic confident your doctor is well trained.

But the funny thing is God gives children to young people who are usually just a few years from being teenagers themselves! You can read books on parenting, but there is no way to truly learn about how to be a parent other than to be one. It's on-the-job training. It's a little scary when you really think about it. It would be like a guy sliding into the left seat in the cockpit of your plane saying, "Wow, I wonder what all these dials are?" Or like being in surgery and just before going under you hear the surgeon say, "Wow, what are all these shiny knives?" But that's basically how parents learn. God gives us a child and says, "There you go. Raise them." That's why we make mistakes. Did you hear me, kids? We make mistakes.

About the time we get old enough and mature enough to be good parents, we find ourselves unemployed. And I finally understand WHY it feels so good to be a grandparent. As someone has said, "If I had know how much fun grandkids were, I would have had them first." So, kids, give your parents a little slack—they're learning as they go along. A lot of parenting is trial and error—we make the errors and you're on trial.

(2) By learning to obey me now you can avoid some major pain in your future

The one-word command in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 6 is that ugly four lettered word: OBEY. Whether or not you realize it, kids, you were born with a rebellious spirit. It's in your DNA. Nobody ever had to teach you how to lie, cheat, or steal—it came naturally.

Proverbs 22:15 says, "Rebellion is bound up in the heart of a child." I'm living proof of that. It was New Year's Eve in my small South Alabama town, and I was about 12 years old. Our parents had invited some guests over, and my younger brother, Dan, and I were out in the street in front of our house shooting off firecrackers and bottle rockets. Being bored, I came up with the brilliant idea to put an M-80 in our mailbox to see what kid of noise it would make. Now in my enamored memory, an M-80 was about half a stick of dynamite. My dad bought them for us, but had given us strict instructions we could only light the firecrackers and bottle rockets, and he would have to be with us when we lit the M-80s. But I couldn't wait. I lit it and tossed it into our mailbox and slammed the door closed. Three seconds later I knew I was in big trouble. Kabloom! It sounded like a nuclear explosion. The next thing I remember was the sound of the metal mail box clanging down on the pavement beside me. The explosion had completely flattened the metal and thrown it about thirty feet into the air. My brother and I stood there with our mouths open. The noise was so loud the adults inside heard it and my dad came running outside. I'm standing there with a box of matches in my hand with a flattened piece of mailbox at my feet and my dad says, "Did you light that M-80 after I told you not to?" And you know what I said? With huge innocent eyes, I said, "No daddy, it wasn't me. Dan did it!" My dad was too smart for that. I got a good spanking and had to earn money to buy a new mailbox. To make it worse, my older sister, Miss-Know-It-All, kept telling me blowing up a mailbox was a federal offense and the FBI was going to come arrest me any day. Why did I lie? Because I'm a liar. I was born that way. All kids are! That's why God tells kids to learn to obey their parents.

All throughout your life, there are going to be people in authority over you. You're going to have teachers and professors who have authority over your academic world. When you get a job, chances are you'll have a boss who will have authority over your vocational world. When you start driving, and become an adult, there are laws, policemen, and judges who have authority over your legal world.

God made it easy on you. He gave you parents to teach you to submit to authority. If you disobey, there are always negative consequences. The older you get, the more severe the consequences become. For instance, if you disobey your folks, the consequences may be a spanking if you're young, or getting grounded when you're older. Those punishments may seem severe, but you ain't seen nothing yet! If you don't complete your assignments in college, they won't ground you, they'll just flunk you. If you don't obey your boss, he or she won't spank you, they'll just fire you. And when you don't obey the law, that's when the hammer really falls.

So, obeying your parents is training you for life, so do yourself a favor and obey them. They don't have to be right—in fact they make mistakes—but when you obey them the Bible says it pleases the Lord, and you will live a good life—it is the first of God's commands with a promise.

Sometimes teens and young adults ask me how long they must obey their parents. There are two commands in the Bible for children. The first is to obey them, and the second is to honor them. As long as you are living under the provision and protection of your parents, you are to obey them. Kids, a general rule of thumb is to ask your parents if they're still claiming you as a deduction on their income tax return. If they are—obey them!

But once you move out and start life on your own, or with a wife or husband, you are no longer required to obey them in everything. But the Bible is clear you are to always honor them. One of the worst sins we see committed today are by grown kids who refuse to take care of their elderly parents—that's worst than child abuse. My hat goes off and my heart goes out to all of you who are obeying God by honoring your parents when they get to be too old and weak to care for themselves.

One mother wrote about an experience she had that brought tears to her eyes. "After helping my three-year-old son, Isaac, dry off after a bath, I wrapped him in a towel and put him on my lap for a hug. I said, 'Isaac, you're getting so big! What are we going to do when you're too big to fit on my lap anymore?' He replied, 'Then I'm going to hold you, Mom.'" Indeed, when kids grow up and parents grow old, the roles are reversed—the children feed and care for their parents. But that's part of God's circle of life. So kids, obey until you move out, but never stop honoring your parents.

(3) When I say, "no" there's usually a better "yes" down the road

Have you guys learned yet that "No" is a parent's favorite word? Kids, before you become an adult you're going to hear the word, "no" a million times. And you're going to hear it in a variety of ways like, "No! No, no, no, no, no! No." That's because a lot of us grew up singing a song from the 1960s that said, "No no no no no no no no." It's like parents have a preset button, "No, no, no, no."

But you need to know when you're parents are saying, "no" they're usually trying to protect you from harm, and to prepare you for a better "yes." I remember coming home once and seeing my daughter Jenni lying on the living room carpet. She had crawled over to the wall and was chewing on an electrical cord. She was pretty young at the time, 15 or 16...No, she was 2 or 3 actually. The moment I saw her, I said, "Go ask your mother." Not really. I screamed, "No! No no no no no no!" And I jerked that cord out of her hand. She looked at me with surprise and opened her mouth in one of those silent cries that makes no noise, because she didn't have enough air; then she took a breath and really let out a wail. In her tear-filled eyes I could just read her thoughts, "You mean, cruel, man! Why do you want to deprive me of the pleasure of chewing on this nice, cool, rubbery cord?" Of course, you know why I said no. I didn't want her to be electrocuted—but she couldn't comprehend that at the time.

The older you get, kids, your parents may say no and you still might not understand why, but they're saying no for the same reason I took the electrical cord away from Jenni. They don't want you to get hurt. When they say no to drugs, or no to pre-marital sex, or no to putting yourself in a place where you can get in trouble, they don't hate you. They love you enough to try to spare you the pain they know accompanies bad choices. And when they say, "no" there's sometimes a better "yes" down the road.

(4) I'm not trying to tie you down; I'm trying to launch you out

Kids at home are like baby birds in a nest. Every good mom and dad realizes a time comes when those baby birds learn to fly on their own. That's why we talk about homes where the children

have left as an "empty nest." Of course, there are a growing number of homes that are "refeathered nest" where grown kids are moving back in!

Kids, your parents don't want to kick you out, but they understand one of their main roles is to successfully launch you out into the world. This may happen when you head off to college, or get your first full-time job, or get married. Your parents will invest a lot of time and money in launching you. The government recently conducted a study that revealed in a middle class family, parents will spend an average of \$160,140 on raising you to age 18. Think about it, if you live to be 80 you'll spend 18 of those years with us and 62 years on your own.

Every parent lives for the day when we can successfully launch our children out into the world. The Bible gives a better metaphor than a bird's nest for sending out our children. Launching our kids is like shooting an arrow.

Psalm 127:4-5a "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." The quiver was the pouch where a warrior stored his arrows, and arrows can't fulfill their purpose if they're left in a quiver. Children aren't supposed to stay at home either. But arrows in the hands of a warrior can do amazing things. An arrow can go where a warrior can't go. An arrow can hit a target the warrior can't touch. That's what parents hope for our children—we want you to go places we couldn't you—we want you to accomplish things we couldn't accomplish.

A parent's job is to point the arrow and then launch the arrow. Once the arrow leaves the bow, we can't change the direction. Sometimes we wish we could run after the arrow and redirect it, but once it leaves the bow, it has a mind of its own. That's why parents spend the first 18 years of your life trying to point you in the right direction.

My parents were great, but they were far from perfect. But one of the best things they ever did for me was to point me in the right direction. My dad was a rough guy who smoked, drank, and cussed like the sailor he was. He wasn't a perfect dad, but I'm thankful he read his Bible, and took us to church. He pointed me in the right direction. My parents had three arrows in their quiver, and the reason I'm here today serving the Lord, and the reason my brother, Dan, is on a church staff in Arkansas, and my sister Judy is active in her church in Georgia is because our parents aimed us in the right direction and let us go.

CONCLUSION

Now that I've spoken mostly to those of you who are still children or teenagers, I want to speak to all of us. No matter how old we are, we're somebody's kids. And in a deeper sense, if you know Jesus Christ, you're part of God's family. God is your Heavenly Father and you are His beloved child. If I had a final point to this message it would be what the heavenly Father wants all His children to know about Him. It's pretty simple. He wants you to know He loves you unconditionally and He is the perfect Dad. When Jesus came teaching about God, the most profound thing He said was we may call God, "Abba." That's like our word, "Daddy" or "Papa." The most revolutionary thing you can ever comprehend is that you are Abba's child. The Bible says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of

God!" (I John 3:1)

Even if you didn't grow up with the best parents, you have a perfect Father in Abba. Kids, you may be growing up in a family where you aren't being raised in the best way. Your parents might have split up, or there may be conflict and pain in your family—but your life doesn't have to be defined by how good or bad your parents are. You have a heavenly Father who cares so much for you He has even numbered all the hairs on your head.

Over the past year, I've been blessed by reading the books of Brennan Manning. In his book *Ruthless Trust* he writes about how hard it was for him to trust God, because He grew up in a home in which he has no memory of ever being kissed, hugged or held by his mother. Instead he was called a nuisance, a pest, and told to sit down and shut up. His mother had grown up as an orphan when her parents died in a flu epidemic. His father was seldom around, so he received little masculine support.

He writes that when he saw other kids his age enjoying a great relationship with their moms and dads he concluded there must something wrong with him—it was surely his fault. Because he grew up with a lack of attention and affection, he found it unthinkable that God could have tender feelings toward him. His view of God became one of a harsh, unbending, unaffectionate, angry God. This led to all kinds of spiritual and emotional problems in his life.

Out of a sense of guilt he even went into the priesthood determined to earn God's love by becoming the next Brother Teresa. Later he had a conversion experience where he came to understand God's grace and became what he calls, "Abba's child."

Not long after his grace conversion, he was praying one morning and suddenly remembered his mother. He had a vivid image of his now-deceased mother as a five-year-old orphan. In his vision she was kneeling on a window sill at the orphanage, and as she peered through the glass, tears streamed down her face as she begged God to send two nice people to adopt her.

When Brennan saw this picture of his mother, he burst into tears himself. He wrote, "Suddenly all the anger simmering within me at my mother, all the resentment I had felt because she hadn't been there for me as a child disappeared. Sobbing, I asked her forgiveness. With a radiant smile she said, 'I may have messed up, but you turned out okay.'" (p. 13-15)

And when Brennan Manning spoke here last spring, I went to hear him and bought one of his books. He signed it, "In Abba's embrace. Brennan." So whoever you are today, and wherever you've been, there is a loving Heavenly Father who asks you to call Him Abba who has His arms wide open for you. Why don't you fall into Abba's embrace?

OUTLINE

1. WHAT EVERY PARENT WISHES THEIR KIDS KNEW ABOUT THEM

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- (2) By learning to obey me now you can avoid some major pain in your future
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes