

"THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY (#1): THE ABC's of SUCCESSFUL PARENTING"

(Ephesians 6:1-4)

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**[PROP NEEDED: Video of Children Answering "parenting" question]**

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 9-8-24]

--I--

1. Read Text (CEB): Ephesians 6:1-4.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO Interviews of children answering question: "What Do You Like Best about Your Mom and Dad? (Time: 1:03)]**

A--So, what is it that makes for a good parent? It's obvious that our children have some very definite ideas about the answer to that -- answers that are amusing and cute, but profound at the same time.

B--But what guidance does God offer about this? how can God's Word in scripture help us be more mindful both of our *responsibilities* and *opportunities* with our children, grandchildren, and even with those who may not be our children *biologically*, but for whom we as God's church nevertheless still have spiritual responsibility?

3. Well, there are many challenges faced by parents and families in contemporary culture. Some are struggling to stay together, and some even question the value of family itself.

A--For all these reasons, today we're beginning of new worship series simply called "*The Christian Family*" in which we'll be discussing biblical insights which I believe can help us create, nurture and sustain strong, healthy bonds as we seek to build resilient Christian families -- families which are sources of joy and renewal, rather than of stress and conflict.

B--And today, as we celebrate what (I believe) is our first-ever "*Cornerstone Preschool Sunday*," our focus is on using today's scripture from Ephesians 6 (and several others) to identify and share what I'm calling "*The ABCs of Successful Parenting*" -- that is: the qualities and practices we'll need in order to be successful in raising our children and grandchildren.

C--And yes, while I'll be couching these in the language of *parenting*, in our intergenerational congregation here at Cornerstone UMC, let me remind us that these things can (& should) equally apply to the raising of our grandchildren and those who are *like* children to us, as well!

--II--

4. First, let me suggest that the "A" in today's text can stand for **ATTENTION** -- as we heard from several in the video, our children need our attention = our time with them.

A--The first half of Verse 4 says "*do not provoke your children to anger...*" and one way we *do* that (i.e., "provoke" them) is by NOT being attentive to them or their needs.

B--One of the children in our opening video described this as "*loving me*", and another as "*providing me with everything that I need.*"

C--Yet according to a recent study, the average American family spends only about 37 minutes of "quality time" together on weekdays. <sup>1</sup>

1--And while that's actually an *improvement* from what it was 10 years ago, nevertheless compare that to the fact that the typical American adult spends about 2 1/2 hours per day on social media, it's therefore no wonder that some children unconsciously act out because they feel we're not giving them enough attention.

2--One of the "curses" of being a Pastor is the fact that many (if not most) church meetings are held on campus on weekday *evenings* during what is often understood to be *family* time.

3--So one thing I always tried to do when our daughter was growing up (not always *successfully*, mind you, but *tried* nonetheless) was to limit the number of evenings I was at church, *so that* I could spend more time with her & Trish.

4--And these days, many of you know that I often take my off-day (Fridays) to travel to Woodstock to pick up my two granddaughters from their schools so we can have Friday afternoon "granddad time" -- whether its riding bikes, swimming, playing video games, or just hanging out, these have grown to be some of my favorite times of the week (and theirs too, I hope)!

D--You see, our children & grandchildren don't just want "quality time" with us, but *time*, period!..For when we give them *ourselves*, we're giving them the attention they need. <sup>2</sup>

5. Perhaps the letter "B" can remind us of the second half of Verse 4, where it says: "*Raise [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (NRSV actually uses the a phrase that starts with "B"... "***Bring*** them up") -- in other words, teach them the importance of faith in God and Christ.

A--Family Psychologist James Dobson once said that "*Nothing brings [...families] together more effectively than a face to face encounter with the Creator of families*" <sup>3</sup>

B--You know, sometimes I'll hear parents say, "*We're not going to teach our kids about religion because when we want them to choose for themselves when they're older.*"

1--But if you think about, that doesn't really make a lot of sense. I mean... if we plant flower seeds in a garden and just leave them un-tended to "grow and bloom on their own," what happens?

2--Well, assuming they receive water and sunlight, we'd still have all sorts of weeds growing alongside trying to take over and choke them out.

3--So, just as growing flowers requires weeding, fertilizing and constant cultivation, so children need instruction in the ways of God *all along* in order to "fertilize" their lives with good things, and prevent the "weeds" of the world's prejudices, attitudes, and brokenness from taking over. <sup>4</sup>

6. And that means that one of the things we can do to "*bring [us up] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*" is by teaching us the value and importance of what I think the letter "C" stands for: a local community of Christian faith, or... **CHURCH**.

A--One of the things I'm thankful to my parents for when I was growing up was our weekly routine of going to church -- it wasn't something my sister and I were "forced" or "made" to do, but was just one the routines we did as a family each Sunday from such a young age that when we were older, we didn't question it.

B--The problem is that in today's world, a lot of folks don't seem to think that we even need the local church -- that we can have and pass on Christian faith *without it!*

1--But I have to ask: where do most parents receive their religious knowledge to pass one? Where is it that most of us come to know Christ in the *first* place?

2--You see, flaws and all, if not for the Church of the past 2000 years, we'd have no Bibles to read (whether in print, or on our tablets or smart phones in the privacy of our homes), and there'd be little/no online Christian spirituality to even *engage* in!...

3--...Because -- imperfect though it is -- God's *Church* has been the *keeper* of those sources & resources of faith all this time! God's Church, in other words, is the SOURCE of the "*instruction of / about the Lord*" that's found in Verse 4.

B--And while it's not actually the *Church's* job to teach faith to our children (that's *our job* as parents & families! <sup>5</sup>), the Church IS, nevertheless, where you and I can be *equipped* to do that! <sup>6</sup>

7. I believe the letter "D" can remind us that successful Christian Parenting also contains appropriate **DISCIPLINE** -- like what's also mentioned in Verse 4.

A--Now, this can take different *forms*, including something as simple as what one of the children in our opening video described as "*telling me to stop when I need to stop but don't know...*"

B--As we've been reminded from the events of this past Wednesday in Winder, GA, sometimes the most loving thing we can do for our children is tell them "No" -- just because they want something doesn't mean we need to give it to them.

C--But regardless of *how* we define it and what *form* it takes, it's clear that discipline -- what Webster's Dictionary defines as "*training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character*" <sup>7</sup>-- is an essential part biblical child-raising,...

D--...NOT to "break the will" of a child, but as a *tool* to help them become better *self*-aware and *self*-disciplined in their own lives. <sup>8</sup>

8. Yet, even *appropriate* discipline has its limits, because discipline must also be accompanied by the setting of a Godly **EXAMPLE** (the letter "E").

A--Proverbs 22:6 says, "*Train up a child in the way they should go, and when old, they will not depart from it.*"

1--But Abraham Lincoln once supposedly said, "*There is but one way to train up a child in the way he should go, and that is to travel it yourself.*" <sup>9</sup>

2--You see, we can't honestly expect our children to grow up and live Godly lives if they don't *see* Godliness being lived out in *our* lives first.

3--If *we* participate in worship and ministry, *they* (eventually) will, too! If *we* pray, they will learn to, too! If *we* read our Bible, they eventually will, too!

B--Poet Edgar A. Guest once put it this way...

*There are little eyes upon you, and they're watching night and day  
There are little ears that listen to every word you say;  
There are little hands all eager to do the things you do;  
And a little [one] who's dreaming of the day [they'll] be like you. . . .  
You are setting an example every day in all you do,  
For the little [one] who's waiting to grow up to be [just] like you."* <sup>10</sup>

--III--

9. Now there's a lot more that I could share here, but I think "The A.B.C.s of Successful Parenting" (AND grandparenting, by the way!) start with these essentials...

A--Giving children our **ATTENTION**;

B--**BRINGING** them up to know the will and ways of God;

C--Allowing our local **CHURCH** to help equip us in that task;

D--Employing appropriate **DISCIPLINE**;

E--And setting a Godly **EXAMPLE** for our children to follow.

10. So, whether we're parents, grandparents, or even "spiritual parents" for those who aren't our biological children, I believe if we'll faithfully apply these A.B.C.s, God will bless us and those who we are growing in the faith.

11. [PRAY]
12. [HOLY COMMUNION with Kids Focus (Goldfish and Grapes)]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.studyfinds.org/american-families-spend-37-minutes-quality-time> (2018)

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we need to be more like the father who was disturbed that it was always taking his 6-yr-old son an hour to get home from school -- a walk that should have taken only 20 minutes. So one day, he decided to accompany his son home and see why it was taking so long.

After the trip, the father said, "The 20 minutes I thought reasonable was technically correct, but I failed to consider such important things as a side trip to track down a trail of ants or an educational stop to watch a man fix a flat tire or the time it took to swing around a half dozen telephone poles or how much time it took for a boy just to get acquainted with two stray dogs and a brown cat. In short," said the father, "I'd forgotten what it's really like to be six years old."

<sup>3</sup> James Dobson, cited in Leadership magazine, Vol. 7, No. 1.

<sup>4</sup> After all, if parents & family don't shape their children's religious values, then *something else will*: TV; the internet; social media; schoolmates; and so on. When we don't share faith with our children, then whether we realize it or not, what we're teaching them is that faith doesn't really matter at all!

<sup>5</sup> A survey once revealed that only 1% of a Christian child's time is spent under the influence of Sunday School and/or their church; only 7% is spent under influence of their public school; but 92% is spent under the influence of their home (Family specialist Albert S. Taylor, cited in "*Bible Illustrator for Windows, V3.0*" (1998). So, a few ways to pass on faith in our home might include:

1--Maintaining a family worship and Bible study times in our homes.

2--We can be sure to say a blessing at each meal, even when we're eating out.

3--At special holidays and seasons, we can make a special effort to include spiritual dimensions to our home celebrations: a home Advent wreath; giving up something as a family for Lent; a special offering for the needy at Easter; etc.

<sup>6</sup> A survey (now dated but still relevant) once revealed that if *both* parents attend church regularly, 80% of their children will be committed Christians in adulthood, as well. If only the *father* attends regularly, 60% of children will become committed Christian adults. If only the *mother* attends regularly, 15% will do this. And if *neither* attends church regularly, only 6% of children will grow up to make Christian faith as a priority as adults [--Survey cited by Dr. Charles Boleyn at United Methodist Men Rock Eagle Retreat (Eatonton, GA), Fall 1989].

<sup>7</sup> Definition of "*discipline*" from Webster's Dictionary.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Proverbs 13:1 & 24; Proverbs 19:18; Proverbs 23:13; Proverbs 29:17; Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 12:7-11 James Dobson also once identified several important things to remember about discipline, regardless of the *form* that it takes: (#1) Establish well in advance with your children both the boundaries (what's expected) and the consequences of breaking them; (#2) When they *are* broken, *follow through* with the action or consequences that you promised; (#3) Don't discipline children for mistakes or accidents; (#4) After disciplining your child, offer reassurance that you still love them; (#5) Above all *be consistent!* Don't discipline your child today for something you ignored yesterday! (Taken generally from James Dobson in his 1970 book Dare to Discipline)

<sup>9</sup> Abraham Lincoln, cited at [https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/have-children-lead-them-jack-aslan-hornsby-1c?trk=related\\_article\\_Have Children? Then Lead Them! \\_article-card\\_title](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/have-children-lead-them-jack-aslan-hornsby-1c?trk=related_article_Have Children? Then Lead Them! _article-card_title)

<sup>10</sup> Edgar A. Guest, from the poem "*A Father's Love.*"