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SERMON TITLE: **God's Best Blessing: Children**

Marriage Series: The Honeymoon is Not Over

SCRIPTURE: **Ephesians 6:1-4**

DATE: **October 4, 2020**

View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Psalm 127:1-5.

There are gifts and then there are gifts.

A 2019 survey by the Higher Education Research Group of freshman in United States colleges found surprising answers to "Objectives Students Considered to be Essential or Very Important." Take a look at some of their answers:

- Raising a family – 71%.
- Being very well off financially – 84%
- Developing a meaningful philosophy of life – 49.8%
- Integrating spirituality into my life – 43.1%¹

Notice, they think the best "gift" is financial security.

Financial security is important, but if you look back, it has not always been the highest value to Americans. An article in Consumerism Commentary shows how a focus on financial wealth has grown:

- ✓ Baby boomers, those in college in the 1960s-70s ranked it at 45%
- ✓ Generation X, who entered college from 1979 to 1999 ranked it at 71%
- ✓ Millennials or Generation Y, who entered college from 2000 to 2009 ranked it at 74%
- ✓ Since 1989, this goal has consistently ranked first of all objectives considered essential.²

I state those statistics so that we contrast what is determined to be important to our culture with God's ranking of important things as stated in Psalm 127:

"Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior's hands. How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!" (v. 3-5).

God's biggest gift: children! This Psalm tells us something very significant about God. We are God's children, right? If God calls children a gift, a reward, a blessing, a reason for joy, that

means WE are a tremendous gift to God! How many times is it written that trusting in God, walking by faith, and obeying God's Word will bring blessing to those who do those things.

Our first thing to learn about God's values is to see God's perspective on children. Perhaps because we bring such joy to God, God gives us children so that **we share God's own joy**. That is a spiritual truth.

As we discuss our topic of God's Best Blessing, let's ask ourselves some questions.

- ~ How do we get to the place of utter enjoyment in our families?
- ~ How do we maintain healthy relationships throughout the ups and downs of raising children?
- ~ What does the Bible teach us about how to raise a child?
- ~ What expectations does the Bible set for my child?

The Bible has a lot to say.

Here is some advice for parents:

- ~ "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray" (Proverbs 22:6). That does not mean the child does not stray at any time but it does mean you establish a solid foundation which God can use to bring the child back to you.

Here's some advice for children:

- ~ "My child, don't reject the Lord's discipline, and don't be upset when he corrects you. For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:11-12). Realize that discipline is an important part of growing up—just like you will not be a good musician or a good athlete without correction, so you will not be a mature person without discipline.

More advice for parents:

- ~ "Assemble the people-- men, women, and children . . . so that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law, and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 31:12-13). Parents, you must hear and learn, but also do what the Bible says or your words will be meaningless to your children.

More advice for children:

- ~ My child, keep your father's commandment, and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and

¹ "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2019," Prepared by the Staff of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Higher Education Research Institute University of California, Los Angeles M. Kevin Eagan Jr., Associate Professor, CIRP Director, and HERI Director at [https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2019.pdf?ct=t\(LFL_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_9_15_2020\)&mc_cid=b1abce5c07&mc_eid=5277e354bf](https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2019.pdf?ct=t(LFL_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_9_15_2020)&mc_cid=b1abce5c07&mc_eid=5277e354bf), accessed September 22, 2020.

² Luke Landes, "Millennials Want to Be Rich More Than Anything," in Consumerism Commentary, July 23, 2019, at [https://www.consumerismcommentary.com/millennials-want-to-be-rich-more-than-anything/?ct=t\(LFL_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_9_15_2020\)&mc_cid=b1abce5c07&mc_eid=5277e354bf](https://www.consumerismcommentary.com/millennials-want-to-be-rich-more-than-anything/?ct=t(LFL_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_9_15_2020)&mc_cid=b1abce5c07&mc_eid=5277e354bf), accessed September 22, 2020.

when you awake, they will talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:20-23). Humble yourself and learn and God will lift you up.

God cares about children. God wants them to have a solid foundation.

Remember the time parents were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed, and the disciples stopped them? But Jesus got annoyed with them and intervened because he loved children.

We just seem to have a tendency to miss the joy. We seemed to be inclined to overlook our blessings. Maybe it's because we get embroiled in the day-to-day fray of raising a family. Let's face it; it's work. So let's turn to Scripture for help. READ Ephesians 6:1-4

In this passage of advice to married Christians, Paul addresses fathers and mothers and children because all members of the family have a relationship to the Lord. The parents need to see to it that their children are nurtured in the church. Or aunts and uncles or neighbors. The entire congregation has a responsibility to help children grow in their faith.

My Sunday School teacher had a major role in my becoming a Christian at age 15. I was to attend a boarding school in Washington D.C., and that year she flew with me to D.C. to escort me to my new school. Then she spent the night at the local YWCA and flew back home to Kansas City the next day. She was a single woman, a widow, who took an interest in me and nurtured my faith from sixth grade until I went off to that school.

Can you imagine someone going to that expense for a child in their Sunday School class? I don't know if you do, but she stands out among all my Sunday School teachers.

At the same time, youth have a responsibility to nurture their own faith. They are to "do the right thing" and honor their parents. They are to be obedient because it is the Lord's will. Even though they are in a subordinate position, they have obligations, too. The Lord gives them the respect of requiring them to do this outward sign—obey their parents.

You know how when you are given a responsibility as a youth that is just a little bit beyond you? And as a young person, you feel so proud. But the young person may not do the best they can. In fact, they may fail miserably at times. Let's just say it can get discouraging at times. How then do parents oversee the child?

Paul says it has a lot to do with attitude.

By the way, the translation of the verse in Ephesians which says "fathers do not embitter your children lest they become discouraged," does not actually let mothers off the hook. The word translated "fathers," *πατέρες* is plural. In other verses it is translated as "parents." For example, the plural, *πατέρες*, in Hebrews 11:23 is translated "parents." "By faith Moses was hidden by *his parents* for three months after his birth."

We are admonished not to embitter our children.

What does it mean to embitter your children? It's broad. A scholar named Andrew Lincoln defines it: "This involves avoiding attitudes, words, and actions which would drive a child to angry exasperation or resentment. So, that rules out excessively severe discipline, unreasonable harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of insensitivity to a child's needs and sensibilities.

Now to be honest, we all fit in that definition somewhere. So let's think of it like this. Paul presupposes that we have the authority as parents, so Paul sets boundaries about the use of our authority. Children are not just property because parents have authority. They are owed dignity because they are human beings.³

The idea is that training is much more than strictly discipline. Another Greek word that expresses that concept is *βακτηρία*.

You've heard it. Proverbs says, "Those who spare the **rod** (*βακτηρία*) hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them" (13:23). The word means a *staff or a cane* which someone carries as a badge of office. For example, the shepherd is identified by his staff. He uses it to correct the sheep and bring it into line. It is used as a means of discipline by pulling the animal back when it gets out of line. It is the same word used in this verse: "Your rod and your staff (*βακτηρία*) comfort, (reassure, encourage, cheer me)." (Psalm 23:4)

Discipline is a whole package deal. It involves much more than punishment—it's training, correction, teaching, nurturing and encouraging so that your child overcomes rebelliousness and embraces the courageous, disciplined, "narrow road" of the Christian faith.

How are you doing with your parenting? God's best blessing is children.

Follow this advice in your relationship with your child, youth, young adult and you will receive a great gift, and you will find joy in his or her future.

AMEN

³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, vol. 42, gen. ed. Bruce M. Metzger, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 406-407.