

Colossians 3 is where we'll be today. We're going to get into the idea of children and their parents. Right out of the gate, let me just tell you my concern. My concern in addressing this topic is that you are going to begin to practically go, "Okay, how can I do this?" and miss out on the fact that nothing in your life is going to reveal that you need the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ like parenting is going to reveal. Just to set up, the New Testament almost never addresses children and parents until it addresses husbands and wives. In fact, it's almost always built out like, "Here's what I want of the wife, and here's what I want of the husband. Now that you've got this, let's move to children and parents." It's as if the Bible is saying that your ability to parent well and to impart to your children the things of God starts with a man who serves, loves and encourages his wife as she submits to that kind of loving care. Now, we don't live in a perfect world, so right out of the gate, we're in need of the grace and mercy of God as revealed to us in the cross of Christ. Because most of us, if not all of us, are not consistently that type of husband and consistently that type of wife. And a lot of us are single parents or in our second or third marriage. And so we don't live in a perfect world; we live in a fractured world where all of us have failed and have fallen short. So really even before we get into children and parents, we're at a disadvantage because we've all screwed up the first one. So it always starts there, and then it moves into children's relationship with their parents and parents' relationship with their children.

So let's look at Colossians 3:20-21. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Now, flip back to Ephesians 6, because he's going to build this out even more. Nothing in my life consistently shows me that I need the forgiveness and grace of God Almighty like trying to raise our three children. They are monumentally different from one another. They handle discipline completely different. They handle their relationship with Lauren and me completely different. They interact with each other in a completely different way. I am a big fan of methodology. What I mean by that is Lauren and I have a plan. I'm a researcher by nature, and so when we got pregnant with Audrey, I went and bought all the books I could and began to read through them. And there are some good things in those books. One of my favorite moments in a reveal how Audrey behaves was when Audrey was two-years-old and we caught her tearing the pages out of *The Strong Willed Child* by Dobson. So we're like, "Well, I guess that's a shadow of things to come." I read everything I could, and there were some things I really liked about developing a methodology. Here's what I mean by that. You have a plan. This enables you to be consistent and predictable. Predictability when you're young sounds like a drag, but predictability when you get older is a blessing. You know it's going to work this way. And so a plan gives you predictability, it gives you consistency and it puts you and your spouse on the same page. But then I also think methodology has certain weaknesses. If you're not careful, it will become about principles rather than about the person, and it removes the individuality from your child and has you putting your kids into a grid. And just looking at my children, if I even talk sternly to Audrey, she kind of crushes and starts to cry. Now she could be manipulating me, but we'll let that play out a little bit longer. But Reid, on the other hand, if I speak sternly to him, he sticks his lower lip out and furrows his brow like he wants to fight me. So that is two different children responding in two different ways to the same principles. And so we have learned with Audrey that there is a certain way to approach her, and we have learned with Reid that there is a certain way to approach him. And Nora right now can't walk yet, so she's almost perfect. So with Nora, we don't know right now. She's just so sweet and so great. Give her a bottle and she's fine. We'll see as she moves forward what she's like. But if you're not careful, methodology, which is a lot like discipleship, can turn into principles and alleviate personhood. So you have to really watch that and not become a slave to your principles and make your principles flexible in regards to how you engage each one of the children that God has given you.

Now he's going to start with children, and then he's going to move on to fathers. And if you missed out on last week when we unpacked husbands and wives, then you're going to need to go back and listen to that, because there is a reason he starts with fathers and not both mothers and fathers. Because fathers have the ultimate authority in the family unit. So that's why when we announce FM 360 and announce children's stuff, you'll hear me say, "The Village Church will not stand in front of God and give an account for the spiritual development of your children," and then I do a little rant, particularly about you fathers. I'm getting that from the Bible. And the Bible says that the ultimate direction of the family unit falls on the father, not on the mother. It's an incredible weight, and it's a weight that you'll begin to feel as your children begin to mimic the things you do and say. And then you go, "Oh no, they're acting like me." So let's get into Ephesians 6. We'll start with children, because God wants to speak specifically and directly to children also. And let me define children for you. If you live with your parents, you're a child. I don't care how old you are. If you live with your mom and dad, you are still a child. So I continue to be baffled by guys who are like, "My parent's won't get off my back." I'm like, "You're 24 and you play X-box 360 for nine hours a day and live in their house. Get a job, move out, and then you can honor them but don't have to live by their rules." If your parents are still paying your bills, you're still a child. You can go ahead and be angry, arrogant, single young men and e-mail me, and we can have that e-mail via dialogue. Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." What he means by, "Obey your parents, for this is right," is that this is how God created the thing to work. So remember last week where we talked about husbands and wives. What text did we come out of? Genesis 1, 2 and 3. We talked about how God designed the system and the series of relationships to function a certain way. And here's how it works: one man for one woman in a monogamous relationship that is unbreakable for life, where the husband loves and serves the wife and the wife is a help mate to the man. And you can go Post-Modern on me if you want, but all I have right now is secular evidence that the new way doesn't work. And I won't send you some statistics from James Dobson; I'll send you some statistics from the New York Times. The new definitions of family are not working. They are not producing well developed, socially integrated children. It's not working in that way. So God has designed it for one man, one woman for life in an unbroken, healthy, stable relationship and that that man and woman should raise their children, that children are a blessing and that those children should submit to the rules of those parents, because this is right. This is how He designed it to work.

Why? Because when you're young, you're just dumb. You're just not smart. And this is why kids are attracted to everything that can kill them. That's why you can put their toys all over the ground and what they want is the bleach. It's just like every cabinet in the house is theirs to play with, and they're going to go to the one with the chemicals. You're just an idiot when you're a little kid. You don't know yet, and you think you do. And that's a dangerous combination. I've said it this way historically. There is an intrinsic arrogance to youth. I forgot who said it, but I heard this quote a long time ago and loved it. It goes, "I'm not young enough to know everything." That's the truth. The younger you are, the smarter you are. You've got the whole world figured out. One of the reasons I have asked God to give me forty to fifty years here with you is because you had to put up with me when I was in my late twenties. So since you had to put up with me in my late twenties, I'm hoping that God would give us together life when I'm in my fifties and sixties. But that's in His hands and we'll trust Him with that. We had an MRI this week, and we'll continue to hear good news I'm confident. So even when I got here, I remember multiple cups of coffee where Dell Steele, who ended up being chairman of the elders here, would just smile as I talked. It was funny because I would leave going, "I think he likes me," only to find out years later that he was like, "Oh, I hope we survive this idiot." So Dell and I became good friends because he was able to honor my positional authority and speak life into my naïve arrogance. Because I came to the Village just absolutely sure of what was wrong with Evangelicalism and knowing how to fix it. And Dell was just excellent at asking the right question that made me go, "Oh!" So there is an arrogance to youth, and so you're put under your parents to help save you from the greatest repercussions of that. When I was a teenager, I had no idea of why I had to be home at this time and couldn't stay out until this time. I had no clue. That didn't even make sense to me. "Why do I have to come home at 11:30 or 12:00? Why not 3:00 or 4:00? What could possibly happen?" And bless my parents' hearts. I could argue this. I came out of the womb willing to debate. I could just argue at length with my folks about this, and they would try to explain to

me that bad things can happen. And I'm going, "Not to me. Bad things can't happen to me." And then I would have this whole fail-proof set of reasons on why those things can't happen to me. "Well, we're doing this. . . We're going over here. . . This will be there. . . Johnny's bringing his pistol . . . No, it's going to be fine. . ." And it sounded so brilliant and foolproof to me, and my parents were just like, "No, this is how it happens and this is when." So the Scriptures are saying, "Obey your parents, because this is right." This is Scripture very nicely going, "Look, you don't think you're an idiot; you are. Listen to your parents." And I know some of you children are already going, "Um, you don't know my parents. My parents are ridiculous." First of all, you're assuming that mine weren't. Think about this. In the end, think about if other creatures in the created realm rebelled like our children did. Think of the antelope on the plains in Africa just going, "Forget you, mom. Forget you, dad. I'm faster than the lion." So he runs at the lion and starts taunting the lion rather than listening to its mom and dad that says, "This is when we run." "Not me. I've got this." They're like, "No, there are thousands and thousands of years of the lion killing us. You might get away the first time or the second time, but eventually he eats your guts while National Geographic films it." Can you imagine what the creative order would be like if other children rebelled against their parents like humanity does? Now why does it happen? Sin. We are brought forth in iniquity, David says. Your children are born, you were born in iniquity, a bent towards rebellion. We are born rebellious. If you have children, you absolutely know this and see this. You have to train a child to be obedient, not to be disobedient. You don't have to train that, you don't have to help them with that and you don't have to go, "Why don't you rebel a little bit?" You don't have to do that; they're born with it. So obey the Lord because it's right.

Now look at the next line. "Honor your father and mother, . . ." Your parents aren't always going to be right. That's not the point. There are going to be times where they're too tight and there are going to be times where they're too loose. Some of you were born into families that are unbelievably rigid. There was not a lot of flexibility, not a lot of grace and the list of rules is in volumes. So some of you are growing up in that house. It's the house you were born into. I'm not saying your parents are right; I'm saying that your duty before God for your eventual delight is to be obedient to your overbearing, insecure parents. You honor your mother and father. And this doesn't change as you grow older. Now as you get older, you don't have to obey all the rules. And by "older," I mean you move out of the house, get a job, pay your own insurance and buy your own cars. If you pay your own bills, then I don't think you have to listen to your parents saying, "Well, I don't think you should do that. I think you should do this." But you do honor them. You thank them for that advice. You have a dialogue about that, but once you're out of their house, you no longer have to submit to their rules. But you do have to continually honor them.

Now here's a funny little truth. In 1st century Rome, you had to obey your father's rules until he died. So if you were 48 years old and your dad was still alive and said, "I want you home at 9:30," you had to listen to his rules. I can't even fathom that. So for some of you who think you've got it tough, it can be and historically has been worse. Because when Paul is writing this, he's writing to a culture that says, "If your daddy is still alive, you are not the patriarch. You are still under his rule. So in the end, we need to honor our mother and father, regardless of whether they're right or wrong. Now hopefully you'll have the type of relationship where there can be dialogue, not arguments. I don't think it's sinful at all for children to ask for clarification, to ask for reasoning. And in our house, that's once. You don't get to ask why sixteen times. As soon as you've left the once, now we're arguing or bartering. And maybe you have that kind of system in your house. We don't want to have that kind of system. Sometimes we get sucked into it, but we really don't want to have that kind of system of bartering. We want to say, "Here is the answer." And if they go, "Can you explain that?" then we want to explain ourselves. And if you can't explain yourself, then you're probably saying no out of your own fear and insecurity or just to throw a jab or I don't know and you have to work it out in your own heart. Honor your mother and father.

Now this brings us to the last part. ". . . that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." This circles the point on the children. Why? Because this is how God designed it to be. So it will go well with you and you will live longer

because you're sitting under the protection that God has given you, you're sitting under the authority that God has given you for your good, even if that authority might be a little crazy.

Now he moves on to parents from here. He's going to say the same thing, but he's going to build it out a little more. Verse 4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, . . ." Just to be straight, as fathers we do not negatively motivate our children. Your daddy might have done that to you, but a godly man does not negatively motivate his child. He doesn't poke and jab and exhaust their son's or daughter's spirit. They don't provoke them to anger. I think a house should just be filled with grace, mercy and fun, but at the end of the day, you have to figure out a way to nurture, disciple and shape your children that does not exasperate them. Now, at some level, children are going to rebel against rules and they're not going to like the rules. We have already covered that they're morons. So they're just not going to get it. I don't think this is saying, "Don't make your children angry," because there are times your children are going to be angry. The text is saying, "Don't try to make them angry." Don't take things personally to the point where you aggressively attack your children and try to lay burdens on them that they're going to be unable to walk in and unable to submit to. In the end, you simply create children who become frustrated with the authority over them in a way that honestly isn't biblical. And I'll say this just because we do a lot of work with twenty-somethings here that are banged up. Specifically you fathers, watch your mouth. And I'm not talking about cussing. Watch your mouth towards your sons, and definitely watch your mouth towards your daughters. I cannot unpack for you how powerful your mouth is when it comes to your children. It can absolutely instill in your daughters self-confidence and safety in a man who will treat her, encourage her and love her well. Or you can teach her that she's worthless and that what she needs is to be demeaned her entire life. That will start with daddy. You can make your son feel safe in how God created him to be. So maybe your son loves soccer, maybe he loves ballet. Your goal regardless, is to nurture and to love and to encourage them with your mouth. You need to speak life and blessing into your children and not use your tongue to wound or assault your children. It has lasting effects. In my sit-downs with twenty-somethings, they can still tell me of instances and times where a father or mother was quick with their tongue and that was a shaping, molding moment.

Now let me stop here and say this. I started this thing saying that my concern was that you would go, "Oh, I need to get better at this and I need to get better at that," and you would miss out on the fact that the reason you have children and the reason you engage with children like you do and fail in the way God has wired you to engage children is so that you might see over and over again your need for the grace and mercy of God extended to you in Jesus Christ. Everyone has done this. I have been quick with my tongue. I am witty, and that is a curse, not a blessing. I seldom lay in bed and go, "I should have said this." Instead, I lay in bed and go, "I shouldn't have said that." In the moment, I can think of it then regret saying it. So I have to watch my mouth. I can't tell you how often I have had to go into Audrey's room, go into Reid's room and apologize and say, "It's unacceptable for daddy to talk like that. It's unacceptable for daddy to say things like that. He didn't mean it. He was angry. Daddy needs Jesus just as much as you need Jesus. I need to ask Him to forgive me. Now I need you to forgive me." This is a way too common conversation that I have to have with my children. Don't provoke them to anger.

Next he says, ". . .but bring them up. . ." This idea "bring them up" is the idea of nurturing, caring, looking at who they are and beginning to nurture that. And that's not nurturing in the sinful line of that. You don't nurture rebellion. I don't think anybody overtly does it, but I do know and I have seen families that do it in other ways. I've seen families that think it's really cute when their three-year-old says, "You shut up" to another kid or another adult. So when I see that, I always cover up, because in my day, you would have bled out for that. I'll see that and I just don't want the kid's blood on me and I don't want to have to testify in court and say, "Yeah, I saw it. It was nasty." So I just look away only to hear laughter. Then I'll turn around and they're going, "Oh, how cute is that." That's not cute at all. So we don't nurture rebellion, but we do nurture personhood, who God has made them to be. My boy is all boy, but he is extremely sensitive. We picked up on this very early on with the fact that he loved Lauren's shoes. I mean, dad's shoes were black and brown and he had

some tennis shoes. But mom's are different shapes and sizes. Some of them sparkled. He's just very artistic; he's just very right brained. He loves to draw and color. He loves to read books, even though he can't read. This is very much Reid. He has a sensitive little soul to him. He's the one in our family who likes to cuddle and will just randomly go, "Mom, you look pretty in that shirt." He's just a very, very sweet boy who also just destroys everything. In fact, we thought something was wrong with him early on. Because with Audrey, all the toys had relationships, and with Reid, all the toys needed to die. We had friends that told us, "No, he's a boy. This is what they do." And so as a dad, I'm not panicking when my son wants to walk around the house in Lauren's sparkly flats. When he shuffles in and shows me, I'm not like, "Oh, where are his cleats? NOOOO!" I'm not doing that. I do want to remark, "They are pretty, but boys don't usually wear those." But I don't want to freak out on him or try to steal from him that creativity and that softness. I want to nurture it, encourage it. I want him to draw me pictures. I want to encourage him when he tells Lauren she looks pretty, when he feels my t-shirt and tells me it's soft. I want to encourage that. I want to go, "It is soft, buddy. . .Your mom is a beautiful woman." I want to encourage that and speak life into that and not feel like that's some sort of threat to masculinity. Because the quickest way to do soul damage to your sensitive boys is to try to remove from them that sensitivity and replace it with some sort of macho bull masculinity that's not true. "Boys don't do that. We hunt and we fish and we wear camouflage. That's what we do. We don't draw pictures and write poetry." No, you're wrong. We do. That's an ignorant definition of masculinity. And I think in being so harsh on that lane, you'll actually push your sons away from masculinity, you'll push your daughters away from femininity rather than towards it. So parents, nurture your children in the Lord. You should be a safe, safe place for your children.

There are three women in my house, well one woman and two girls, and that means drama. So we are already experiencing, with Audrey and some of her relationships, girl drama. We haven't seen that yet with the boys. The boys punch each other and we go, "Don't hit. . . unless it's just. Was it just? No? Then don't hit." But with girls, all of a sudden we don't want to play with this girl because she's mean, and then all of a sudden we do want to play with her. So we've had this talk about, "If there really is love in your heart for her, then you need to say, 'I don't really want to play with you, and here's why.' You don't just get to hide from her and not play with her anymore when she comes to the door and lie and say, 'My parents won't let me come and play.' You have to lovingly tell her how you feel." Now some of you are going, "That's crazy. She's seven-years-old." It might be crazy, but I've seen crazy at twenty-years-old. So I'll take crazy at seven to skip crazy at twenty. And so in the girl drama that exists, we go, "You've got to say to her, 'I love you. I'd love to play with you. But when you say this, when you do this, I can't play with you.'" And we're making her do that. We don't have that conversation. We let her have that conversation. Because as she gets older, she's the one who is going to have to have those conversations. So we nurture them, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This is that idea of shaping.

Now here's where I want to get a little practical in regards to discipline. Just for the record, discipline is not just spanking your child or putting them in time-out. Discipline is all the tools that we have to shape them and mold them into who God wants them and desires them to be. It is to gather all the kindling we can around them in the hopes that the Holy Spirit would ignite it. Discipline must be consistent. Everybody knows this, and everybody fails at this. Are any of you 100% consistent? So we have some liars and people who don't have kids here. All consistency means is that your children understand, "This is what's acceptable, and this is not what's acceptable. This is how this is rewarded, and this is how this is punished." Now this goes back to methodology. What's your plan? If you don't have a plan, then your kids are always going to be confused. Because sometimes when you're tired and grumpy, this is going to end up being this, and when you're not tired and grumpy, this is going to end up getting this. And they're going to be confused at what they're supposed to do and what they can expect when they do that. So consistency honestly comes back to methodology. What is your plan? What are your rules? What are your principles by which you want your family to operate. And I think there is flexibility in those principles. One of the principles in our house is just fun. We want to laugh, we want to have fun and we

want to enjoy one another. I'll get them all dressed, put them to bed, then come in twenty minutes later and we'll go eat donuts. We do just weird things that keeps it unpredictable. In the end, be consistent.

I also think discipline has to be age appropriate. I don't think you spank a fifteen-yearold anymore. Now, maybe you do. But I remember the conversation sitting on a park bench in our backyard with my dad when my dad said the, "You're too old to spank." And I was like, "Awesome! Wait, what does that mean? Are you saying I get beaten now?" I didn't quite understand the conversation we were having. I celebrated at first, and then I wanted clarity. So discipline has to be age appropriate. And you're going to have to wrestle with that. And I think this comes back to personhood and who your child is.

Discipline should always adhere to the biblical principles of fairness and justice. The punishment has to fit the crime. If you are overbearing in your discipline or if you have not let God's grace sink deeply into you and you take every disobedience as a personal attack upon yourself, then I think you are going to crush your children. Once again, this goes back to methodology. The other thing that is cool about methodology is it kind of creates community. I'll give you the perfect example: the Babywise cult. Now if you get parent's talking about Babywise, and all of a sudden you will immediately see a dividing line occur. You'll have some people going, "Yeah, we read it and did some of it." And you'll get others going, "If you only did some of it, you did none of it!" And then you've got the Babywise people who think it's the only way to parent children and if you don't do it that way, you hate your children. You end up kind of creating community around how you discipline. Now since this campus in particular is filled with young families, it's true that there are times that you can't hang out any more with people you like for how they either lack or are overbearing in how they parent. And nothing is more difficult than to have the conversation of, "Your kid caught our couch on fire. . .again. And all you did was put him in time-out." At some point, I think you have got to go, "Your kid is four and he's carrying a pistol. He needs some daddy time." So I think that you've got to have punishments that fit what actually occurred.

Discipline should be child-specific. Limiting Audrey or Reid's reading time, they couldn't care less. If you engage my children over reading, it's just not going to work. Because they'll read all they want or they won't read at all. To them, they love it if they get to, but they don't mind it if they don't have to. So it has to be child-specific. You have to figure out, "How does this child handle this?" and engage that child's heart and not just behavior. And you might have to do it differently between the other two. And nothing will be more confusing to your children than that. "Well why does he. . .? Why does she. . .?" "Well, because she is not you, because you are not her." So we're already having those conversations in our house with a seven and four-year-old. It's just going to get horrifically worse in the teenage years. I just don't see how it can't.

Discipline has to be administered in love and not in anger. Now this is a hard one. Because most of us are reactionary. I think there are some things to do that you can help. Like I have a talk with my self out loud, in my car, on the way home that my day is not over. Every day that I leave the office and am coming home, I don't have in my head that I get to watch SportsCenter seven times in a row and then eat dinner and go and lay on the couch before bedtime. I have in my head that my job is not over, that my job when I get home entails me getting on the floor, loving and engaging my children, serving and helping my wife, and my time starts when everybody is in bed. My time is before everybody wakes up and after everyone goes to bed. That block in between is daddy's work day. If you can learn to think that way, then I think you won't react so much. Because if you have this expectation in your head that you're walking into peace, when nine times out of ten you're not, you're going to get home become agitated. Because you have in your head that dinner will be all prepared, with Kings of Leon playing in the background, you're going to eat, you're going to watch the game and instead you walk into Optimus Prime destroyed all over the living room floor, your wife is still trying to cook dinner and yelling at your oldest for eating Goldfish. You start to go, "Why are you yelling at her? It's just Goldfish." Because you don't know that she has raided the cabinet all day long. She has gained nine pounds while you've been at work. So

you're completely unaware of all that, so now you and the wife are fighting. And all of a sudden, your son rides in on his tricycle and crushes your toe. And then what happens? You've told them not to have the tricycle in the house nineteen times. But now your ideal of this peaceful eat dinner, sit on the couch, watch the game and maybe read a book and then go to bed is Optimus Prime's body parts all over the living room, your toe missing a toenail and you react. So I think you prepare your mind and spirit by going, "My job is to come in and shape, mold, discipline and love." And that's a conversation you have with yourself when you get up in the morning, that's a conversation you have with yourself on the ride home and that's a conversation you have on Saturday and Sunday mornings when you get up. And you constantly remind yourself of what your role is, specifically as the husband, concerning your wife and concerning your children.

Discipline should be forward thinking and a part of a relationship between parents and children. Don't be a lazy parent. Here's what I mean by that. Good behavior in the store, although it's extremely nice, is not our end goal. Adequate social functioning is not the end goal of parents. The end goal of Christian parents are hearts and minds that love God, serve God and follow God. And that is birthed out of a relationship. What do I mean by a relationship? It means that you apologize to your children when you sin against them as persons. Children are not dogs. They might eat the dog's food, and they might poop on your lawn. There's a whole slew of things that children might do, but they're not dogs. They are in the imago dei, the image of God. You at least owe them the respect of being image bearers, just like you. That means that discipline has a trajectory or a goal of godliness and not just a behavior today. We've been talking about grace-driven effort for a long time now. We as parents go after the heart. We want to expose the heart, not just the action. The action is symptomatic of something else, even in your children. So you've got to get to the heart. And I think you've got to help them see what it is, not just tell them what it is. So I don't think you go, "God, you're just so selfish. You're just such a little selfish beast." You have to get to the, "What is your attitude there when this is the action? What is your heart there when you're behaving like this?" And you let them say it, you let them walk through it and you dig and lead and shape until you get there. Once again, we've got age appropriate constrictions on that.

Let me talk about this for a little while, because the truth is a lot of you are single or empty nesters. We are, by our creative design, cultivators. The Matt Chandler that is standing in front of you today didn't just happen today. The Matt Chandler that is standing before you today is 15-20 years of trying to pursue after and chase and submit my life to the Lord. There have been peaks and valleys, seasons of great hunger and desire, seasons of rebellion and foolishness. But it has been 15-20 years of a lot of reading, a lot of being rebuked, a lot of having the Holy Spirit beat me down after warning me multiple times, a lot of that going on. So my question would be: What are you cultivating? So as singles, as young unmarrieds or older unmarrieds or as parents without children, what are you cultivating in your heart, in your life regarding the grace of God that is going to lead you to be more sanctified versions of yourself than you are now. So when your children do get here, if God in His mercy blesses you with those children, your heart, your mind, your spirit will be more tuned into the grace and mercy of God that will then enable you to be a better parent, that will enable you to be able to apologize when you're wrong without the fear of thinking that makes you look weak in front of your children. What are you doing now in regards to your own spiritual vitality and your own spiritual health? Because decisions you're making today are determining what kind of parent you'll be tomorrow. Now this continues to come back to our need for God's grace, our need for God's mercy, our need for the cross of Christ in our lives. Have you come to that place in your life where you have been able to extend grace to your parents, in their short-comings, in your failures? Have you come to that place where you acknowledge that they did the best they could with where they were? Have you forgiven your folks? Nothing will make you a better parent than understanding that if you are any better than your parents (and I doubt that you are), then that's by the grace of God alone and not by anything you have really done. And have you extended forgiveness for their short-comings? I think this is imperative in regards to being able love and encourage. Have you let the grace of God wash over you? Because sometimes I think parents are attacking former hurt in their heart when they see their children behaving in such a way that they feel got them that hurt. And so they pounce on that behavior because they think if they would have changed that behavior, maybe mommy or daddy would have loved them a little bit more.

That's a little more psychological than I normally get, but I've just seen it enough, even in myself at times, to go, "I think that might be an issue." I think you have to get to a place where you're willing to forgive your mom and dad, where you're willing to acknowledge that they did the best they could with where they were. And then be in the kind of place where you can admit that you're not perfect yourself and that your kids one day are going to be adults and they're going to be well aware of your failures. So you should model for them now forgiveness of grandma and grandpa.

And so I always want to pull you back to this. You're going to fail at this. This is God's idea, and we live in a fallen, sinful world. Some of you are not in ideal situations. You are single parents, God bless you. Some of you are empty nesters who think you're done. You are not done. And I'm not talking only about grand-babies. You also have a role in the community at large to encourage and speak life into young women and young men who are young in their marriage and young in raising their children. Speak life into them where maybe their peers are unable or unwilling or feel like they don't know enough to say anything. And so you have a role in the community yourself to engage and to love and encourage those who are younger than you. So you don't get to go off to pasture just yet. As believers, we don't get to retire; we get to die. We work, we serve and we are part of God's sanctifying process over the community of faith until He calls us home or ends this whole thing. May you press into the mercy and grace of God as you fail this week with your children. Might you be reminded that you have a Savior who loves you, not because of you but because of the cross. And may you leave here today not going, "I'm going to be a better parent," but may you leave here today keenly aware of God's affection for you and keenly aware of God's mercy and grace shown to you as a loving Father who disciplines those He loves always for their good and never out of wrath. We are not under wrath; we are under mercy. And may you see in all of this a shadow of God's love for you in Christ.

Let's pray. "Jesus, we love You. We thank You really for this call that You've put on us to love our husbands and wives, to respect, encourage and nurture our spouses, and that that might create an environment in which children can be nurtured and disciplined and shaped into the instruction of the Lord. Might we do well in imparting Your works to the next generation. Might we talk about Your glory as Deuteronomy says it should be on our tongue at dinner, on our tongue at breakfast, on our tongue as we walk to the gate over our door frames, on our gate post. May You be the subject of life in our homes. May we laugh a lot, enjoy a lot. Might there be freedom and grace and mercy, but at the same time, just clear boundaries of what gets us into that fun and freedom and grace. Help us. These are complex. We are in complex relationships with our spouses and each of our children. Give us wisdom and grace in regards to the practical application of these things. Strengthen us, help us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."