



# The Craft of Growing Up

## Father's Day

June 20, 2021

### SONG #1

#### CALL TO WORSHIP | 2 Corinthians 6:16b-18 (Sam)

'I'll live in them, move into them;  
I'll be their God and they'll be my people.  
So leave the corruption and compromise;  
leave it for good,' says God.  
'Don't link up with those who will pollute you.  
I want you all for myself.  
I'll be a Father to you;  
you'll be sons and daughters to me.'  
The Word of the Master, God.

### SONG #2

Dismiss kids

### SONG #3

#### PRE-SERMON READING | Ephesians 5:21, 6:1-4 (Cohen)

Out of respect for Jesus, be courteously reverent to one another.

Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. 'Honor your father and mother' is **the first command that has a promise attached to it**, namely, 'so you will live well and have a long life.'

Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.

## THE CRAFT OF GROWING UP | Sermon

For those that don't know me, my name is Jeremy Pace. I am an apprentice of Jesus, a husband to Deedra, a son to Lynn and Karen, a pastor within our faith family, and a father to twin nine-year-olds, Cohen Maddox and Lily Alana. Oh yeah, I'm also a sinner who often fails in all these relationships, but especially the fathering one!

Parenting has undoubtedly been one of the most joyous and vivifying experiences of my life. Parenting brings with it a continual source of gratitude, laughter, delight, and love. Yet, the day-to-day reality of raising up a son and daughter with the aim of them living well, long after they leave their mother and my's quotidian care, has proven to be an enormous and weighty responsibility.

Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. 'Honor your father and mother' is **the first command that has a promise attached to it**, namely, 'so you will live well and have a long life.'

(Eph. 6:2-3)

I'm all for my kids holding to the command to honor myself and their mom. What parent is not?! But the command has a promise attached. A promise that assumes that the parents' parenting is for more than survival—the kids and their own. A promise that assumes parenting sees beyond getting the child to a certain age, clothed, fed, educated, etc.—and envisions a child full in their humanity, whole and holy in their unique God-giveness with others (in-home, community, and society).

The goal of raising Cohen and Lily in the way they should *go-on-living*, at times, is an engulfing wave and a task I often feel ill-equipped to take on and unsuccessful in my execution. Of course, I won't really know the fruit of my labor for a while, which only makes the blessing that is parenting that much more vexatious!

I don't think I'm unique in experiencing this paradox of parenting. There is nearly an unlimited and ever-increasing supply of good and helpful—as well as not so good and not so helpful—books, programs, courses, seminars, and the like, promoting ways to help us solve the parenting dilemma and survive the parenting stage of life. Each affirming the duality of the delights and rigors of being dad and being mom.

Even if you are not a parent, as an adult who was parented, surely you can recognize the tension for those who parented you—the mixture of blessing and angst, the weight of a joyous and worthwhile responsibility, the pressure to help you succeed in life. A responsibility that, as Sam read for us a few moments ago, that God takes for you and me.

'I'll live in them, move into them; I'll be their God and they'll be my people.

So leave the corruption and compromise; leave it for good,' says God.

'Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself.

**I'll be a Father to you; you'll be sons and daughters to me.'** The Word of the Master, God.

(2 Corinthians 6:16b-18)

The apostle Paul's reference here comes from a combination of Old Testament texts. To be specific, Paul pulls from Isaiah 43:1, 6-7, and Leviticus 26:11-13.

I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, **that you should not be slaves**. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

(Leviticus 26:11-13)

Leviticus 26 is amid the blessing portion of “the Law of Moses,” which Paul called a tutor, a guardian set up by God to help his people know how to live well and avoid the pitfalls of shortened life (whether in length or depth)!

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.

I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; **bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth**, everyone who is called by my name, **whom I created for my glory**, whom I formed and made.

(Isaiah 43:1, 6-17)

Isaiah 43 is amid a promise that even after his people had decided they no longer needed or wanted God’s guidance for life and had fallen into the short-lived experience of life, like a good Father, God would call them back to who they were created to be—fully, truly, and uniquely. They were no lost cause.

In combining these two passages, Paul brings together the command with a promise attached to it (Eph. 6:2-3). That in God’s parenting of us, and our honoring of him, we become ones who are able to live well and long in the freedom of our relationship with him. God as Father assumes his parenting is for more than mere survival. That God’s fathering of us is for our good, our unique wholeness and holiness in relationship with him and ourselves, in our homes, community, society, and the world we inhabit. We don’t always think of our relationship with God in this way, do we? He is Creator, the Holy, Sovereign, or distant, arbitrary, and demanding. But not always as one looking out for our good, parenting us to live good and long lives.

Yet, did you know that Jesus’ standard reference to God is as his Father? Jesus calls God “Father,” some 165 plus times in the Gospel accounts! It’s like Jesus wanted us to know something about God and our relationship with the Master, the Lord Almighty, that divine words and religious ideals simply did not capture.

Being a dad to a beautiful little girl and handsome young dude has cultivated a deepening resonance with Jesus’ grounding and prolific naming of God as Father. While you might expect me to muse about how being a parent has helped me identify with God, who is a parent, as I am sure the correlation has for many, that’s not where Jesus has taken me. Instead, being a dad for these first years of my children’s lives thus far has helped me identify more with my childishness in relation to our *Father in heaven*. After all, if Jesus referenced God as Father, it was because he was a child and that being like Jesus is to be a child too.

Being a child is freeing, simple, and an utterly overwhelming mixture of emotions and experiences! While we've all gone through this "stage," as parents, we get to witness this reality afresh. For example, I've observed my little girl play in the comforts of a safe home with ample toys, imagining herself to be a warrior princess who is kind and noble, who abruptly determines her playmate brother is no longer needed and an absolute pain; that must be smote! I've witnessed my little buddy in the context of a warm afternoon play catch with me for hours like we are best friends, only to have him turn me into his adversary, one out to ruin his very existence, when it's time for a bath, or—God forbid—piano!

Over the course of any given day, I'll notice in my children the anguish of mistakes, the uncontrollable joy of unexpected encounters, the difficulty of discovering and processing new or unwanted feelings, the deep sleep of knowing one is loved and care for, the frustration with boundaries and disappointments with limits, the beauty of friendship and the pains of communication and inconsideration, the energetic anticipation for tomorrow's adventures, and the budding worry of what others might think or do and its implications for what they want. I think we can all identify with what I observe in my children. Not simply because we were once children, but because, in some way, we still are.

But of course, all of this mixture is just my children becoming fully human, as it is for you and me too. My children, experiencing the world—internally and externally—in relationship with those who are looking out for their good, cultivating in them life whole and holy, is what we call the process of maturing, that unstoppable force of growing up. Observing in my children the ups and downs of growing up in relationship, to their full humanity compels me to contemplate my own maturing as a human, as a child of God our Father. At times myself knowing all the moments of simplicity, freedom, and the overwhelming mixture of emotions and experiences growing up with God as my Father, just as Jesus grew up with his Father,

And Jesus *increased* in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

(Luke 2:52)

What a wonderful and actually complex experience it is to be a child growing up! But growing up is not a stage; it is "*The human task.*" At no point in our living do "we become exempt from the realities of"<sup>1</sup> growing up into who our Father has created us to be, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" Jesus (Eph. 4:13). All the other growing up we do, physically, socially, mentally, emotionally, financially, etc., "is all meant to be put to the service of growing up in Christ." Maturing, "not only within ourselves but in our relationship with God and with other persons,"<sup>2</sup> is the vision our Father has for his children. A vision for long (forever), good (complete) lives.

And it is in owning "the human task," where parenting becomes a gift, *a means of grace*. By *means of grace*, I am describing God-ordained experiences that "regardless of appearances, and any feelings we might have towards them at the time, **get us to the end that God intends for us,**" which is a life well lived for a long time.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Like Dew Your Youth: growing up with your teenager*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Now we need to recognize that “Grace does not preclude pain and bewilderment,” rather as Peterson reminds us, “biblically, it usually includes it,”<sup>3</sup> and every parent knows both.

Here is the beauty of this means of grace which is parenting; it comes to us when we need it most. At a time when in our lives when we have the world at our finger-tips, life figured out, revolving around what we want and can do, when we are (appropriately) leaving childish things, but also when we are beginning to forget what it means to be a child that is growing up. We—often—become parents at the moment when our world is our own, and then suddenly, it is a world overtaken by these precious little enigmas that are blessed reminders of who we are (children), and whose aim we have for them is our aim as well, to grow up into the promise!

And with this daily prompt of our identity and aim running around our homes, we set out to become master craftsmen in growing up in Jesus! Look again at what Paul said, and Cohen read for us a few moments ago,

Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. **Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.**

(Ephesians 6:4)

How do we parent well? We grow up like Jesus into who we were made and formed to be as daughters and sons of God, ourselves following the way of the Master. But now, taking our child's hand, we “plunge into the process of growth”<sup>4</sup> their growing up and our own. Commenting on what he has observed as a parent of three adult children and over the course of four decades of pastoring, Eugene Peterson says that amongst the parents who seem to be living up to the promise of the command in relation to their child,

“actual practices vary widely. Particular rules, techniques of discipline, variations in strictness and permissiveness—they run the gamut.” Yet, Peterson contends, “One thing stands out: these parents, seriously, honestly, joyfully follow the way of Christ themselves. They don't define [parenting] as a problem and try to solve it. [Rather,] they are engaged in vigorous Christian growth on their own and [here is the key] **permit their children to look over their shoulders while they do it.**

The family [argues Peterson] is a most useful, maybe the most useful arena in which to learn the faith [that allows one to live well and long]. [Thornton Wilder said it this way,] ‘Family life is like a hall endowed with the finest acoustical properties. Growing children hear not only their parents' words (and in most cases gradually ignore them [as did Israel and as do my kids!]), **they hear the intentions, the attitudes behind words** [the heart of the Father and their parents]. Above all, they learn what their parents *really* admire, and *really* despise.’ [Which is what Jesus spent his life and ministry revealing to us—his sisters and brothers.]

[In other words, parenting] is the old practice of apprenticeship applied to family life. [We parents are little ‘m’ masters to which] The young apprentice is placed in close association...for a period of years. Through the association [this hand-in-hand relationship] a discipline is shared [that goal of human life, growing up!], skills are acquired [in this trade], the work is discussed. The master is seen at his best and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8.

his worst [as all parents know]. The master allows [herself] to be vulnerable to the apprentice who sees [her] make mistakes, and how [she] reacts to [her] mistakes. The master craftsman may not be a good educational psychologist [knowing all the in's and out's of child development and behavior], and he certainly is not a perfect person but [she] has to be good at what [she] is doing. Likewise, the parents. They don't have to be experts in [child rearing—meeting every need and solving every problem in preparation for the child's life] or have read the latest book [taken the latest course, listened to the newest podcast on parenting right], and they don't have to live perfect lives, but they must take seriously what they are doing, which is growing up in [Jesus]. They must do it openly [[like a lamp on a stand, shedding light on the entire house!](#)] before [their children] so that [their children] can observe, imitate, and make mistakes [which we all know is a part of growing up!] in the context of care and faith.

The task of the parent, [then], is not to confront directly the problems of the young and find the best solutions to them; it is to confront life, and [Jesus in life], and deal with that.”<sup>5</sup>

To “confront life, and Jesus in life, and deal with that”—life in all its simplicity, freedom, overwhelming emotions and experiences of any given day in which we are breathing, and Jesus there too—is to be a master craftsman in growing up. Growing up is our task, the human task, whether we are parents or not. A task we are to take seriously, honestly, joyfully as it is exercised openly (Matt. 5:13-16) for our sake and the good of others.

And for those who are parents today, Jesus' model and Paul's encouragement is for us to embrace (admit and submit) the good reality that we are children too, and plunge, with our children, into the process of growth.

When we do, we'll discover that we parent from a place of need and dependence rather than authority and force. And in such a place, we are able to receive all that we need each day from our Father in heaven.

Let's pray.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

## SONG #4

### COMMUNION

Our Father in heaven,  
let your name—your relationship with us—be treated with reverence.  
Let your good desire become life as we experience it,  
in our homes, community, city, and the world.  
Give us all that we need for today,  
and let us not fear that we will have any less tomorrow.  
Forgive us what we've owed but cannot pay,  
as we also forgive those who are indebted to us.  
Lead us not into temptation, to a place where we cannot tell up from down,  
but deliver us from evil and the evil one.  
For you truly are with us and for us,  
and everything good and beautiful is yours now and forever,  
shared with us through Jesus.  
Because of Jesus' life given and living still, we can pray.  
Amen.

## SONG #5

### BENEDICTION

My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth.

I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love; you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights!

Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.

God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

Glory to God in the church! Glory to God in the Messiah, in Jesus! Glory down all the generations! Glory through all millennia! Oh, yes!

(Ephesians 3:14-21)