

# **Spiritual Leadership in the Home**

## **Ephesians 6:1-4**

### **Introduction**

If you have your Bibles this morning, and I hope you do, please take them and turn with me to Ephesians 6. And yes, you heard right, I said Ephesians and not Philippians. This morning we are going to take the opportunity that Father's Day affords and address a matter of utmost significance, spiritual leadership in the home. Now, I hope that the ladies here today don't feel slighted by the fact that I didn't preach a message on motherhood on mothers day but I am preaching a message about fathers on Father's Day.

It's not my intention in any way to slight the women of our church, but rather to address something that impacts every single one of us in an incredible way, whether we are a father or a mother, a man or a woman, an adult or a child. I believe this is true because as we consider the needs of our society, at the very top of the list is the need for spiritual leadership in the home. And the reason why is very simple. Strong homes lead to a strong society. And of course the opposite is also true. Weak homes lead to a weak society. I think we would all agree that our country is a mess – and while there are many contributing factors to this mess the breakdown of the home stands alone at the top, and the break down of the home can be directly related to the break down in spiritual leadership in the home.

Now, before we really get into it this morning, let me first of all say that I am by no means an expert on this subject. For the most part today I will be speaking out of weakness rather than strength. I can quite honestly say that my knowledge of spiritual leadership far outweighs my application of that knowledge, and I need this message as much as anyone here today. So, as usual today I will be preaching to myself as much as I am preaching to you.

With all of that said, let's pray now and ask the Lord to help us as we wrestle with this most urgent of issues.

### **Pray**

So, Spiritual Leadership in the home. What exactly does that look like? Well, I think it begins by understanding three important realities.

### **Reality #1: Spiritual leadership is a father's responsibility.**

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2] "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." [4] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4 ESV)*

Now, fathers, we really like verses 1-3 don't we? I mean, just think about how many times we have quoted this to our kids. I think we like this verse almost as much as 5:22 – you know what that says, right? "Wives, submit to your husbands." Now, I'm not going there this morning, mostly because we all want to have a nice peaceable Father's Day. So let's stick with Ephesians 6:1-4.

As father's we really like verses 1-3, but somehow we seem to miss the fact that if our kids are going to obey and honor us, we have to teach them how to do so. We have to instruct them. We have to correct them. We have to discipline them.

You realize, don't you, that children aren't born naturally obedient and respectful to their parents? If so, newborns would sleep when their parents sleep, take naps when they are supposed to, and quietly and respectfully let their needs be known. From much experience with my own and other children, I think I can confidently say that not one newborn has ever done this. The truth is that if children are going to be obedient and respectful, they have to be taught how to be obedient and respectful.

All this said, there is something more important here than teaching our children to be obedient and respectful to us. The bigger issue here is teaching them to follow the Lord. In fact, note that this really is what Paul is getting at here.

*Children obey your parents in the Lord.*

*Fathers, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

And get this dads, verse 4 tells us that it isn't the church's responsibility to do this, it isn't the schools responsibility, or the day care worker, it isn't the grandparents, it

isn't even ultimately the mother's responsibility, it is the father's. We are responsible to raise our children to know the Lord and follow Him. When it comes to raising our children, the buck stops with us. We've got to get this, guys. Spiritual leadership begins with understanding that it is our responsibility. Got it?

Now, at the same time, there is a second reality of spiritual leadership in the home. It is hard. Really hard. Really, really, really hard.

## **Reality #2: Spiritual Leadership is hard.**

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, "It is harder to lead a family than to rule a nation."

While I have never ruled a nation, I would have to agree that this is true. I have been in church ministry about the same amount of time that I have been a parent. And I can tell you that although church leadership is anything but easy, it is a piece of cake compared to leading my family. In all honesty that has a lot to do with God's grace and the wonderful people I have had the privilege to serve with, but it also has a lot to do with my weaknesses as a husband and father. I can have a great day here at church, working with our staff, teaching a group of men, doing some pre-marital counseling and feel really good about how I am doing, and then five minutes after I get home I can blow up at one of my kids and feel like a complete failure.

And so I think it is important for us to identify why leading in the home is so difficult. Why is it such an issue? Why do we struggle so much? Scripture would tell us that it is because we have two very powerful enemies – the devil and our sinful nature.

1 Peter 5:8 tells us this:

*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8 ESV)*

Now, do you know who his number one target is? It's dads. Why? Because the devil knows that if he can take down the dad, he will mostly likely get the wife and kids as collateral damage.

Men, we need to realize that the devil wants to destroy our families and that it is time for us to wake up and fight.

Let me make this simple. If you knew that at some point tonight someone was going to break into your house and bring harm to your wife and kids, you would do something about it, right? You would call the police, or go evacuate the premises, or you would do what I would do and be sitting on the couch waiting with your 12 gauge shotgun.

Well, then what do you do when you know that the devil is not only desirous of doing your family physical harm but more significantly, eternal spiritual harm? You do something about it. You decide that you are going to be a man and through the power of the Holy Spirit, you do something about it. We will talk about what and how to do it in a little bit, but for now let's just determine that we are going to do something about it.

Of course, we also have another enemy, perhaps our greatest one and that is our lazy, selfish, sinful nature. By nature we as men are self-centered and spiritually lazy. We are prone to think of ourselves first and to be apathetic about spiritual things. This goes all the way back to the garden when Adam stood by and watched Eve eat the fruit, plunging everyone of us into sin. You do realize how we got into this mess in the first place right? It was Eve who ate the fruit first, but let me ask you, where was Adam when she was plunging all of us into sin? Standing right beside her, sinfully doing nothing about it. And today, many Christian men are just like Adam, sitting idly by while their families go to hell.

So if we are going to succeed where Adam failed, we are going to have to realize that to be a spiritual leader we must go against the grain of what we naturally desire and do things that don't come easy to us.

Listen, I know that some of you think, that because I am a pastor, this spiritual leadership stuff comes easy to me. And I have to tell you it doesn't. The honest truth is that most of the time I don't want to do what it takes to lead my family. My default mode isn't to lead but rather to sit back and let my wife take care of it. And I think if we were honest men we would say that we all struggle with this.

And so how do we counteract our natural tendency? How do we fight against spiritual laziness and apathy? Well one of the things that we can do is to understand reality #3 and that is:

**Reality #3: Spiritual leadership provides an incredible opportunity.**

I'd like to share a very special passage with you this morning, Psalm 128. Notice what it tells us about spiritual leadership in the home:

*Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! [2] You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. [3] Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. [4] Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. (Psalm 128:1-4 ESV)*

This psalm gives us a picture of what can happen when a man walks with the Lord and lovingly leads his family. I know that none of you sit at our dining room table and picture your wife as a cluster of grapes and your children as olive branches right? So you need to understand that what is pictured here is a wife that is joyful and children that are full of energy and promise.

Now, I can affirm from experience that what this psalm says is true. There is an old saying that goes "if momma ain't happy... finish it... ain't nobody happy." Well the opposite is also true... if momma is joyful, everyone else tends to be joyful as well.

And I can also affirm that when I see my children living up to their potential it brings great joy to my heart. I just had this experience the other day. Earlier this week I walked into one of my children's rooms and found hand-written Bible verses posted all over every wall in the room. And it's hard to express the joy I felt in my heart at the thought of my child desiring to hide God's Word in her heart.

3 John 1:4 (ESV) says this:

*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in truth.*

And I can say from experience that this is absolutely true. You know as I thought this week about the times in my life when I have had the most peace and joy, many of them have to do when my wife is joyful and my children are excelling spiritually. That's just how it works.

We will talk more in a moment about how this happens, but for now I want you to understand the prerequisite for a blessed and joyful home. The prerequisite is a man living his life in a manner pleasing to the Lord and leading his family to live

lives that are pleasing to the Lord as well. That's what it means to fear the Lord. Fathers, this means that you are the key to a joyful and blessed home.

I'd like to press this issue further because I believe the opportunity part of fathering is greatly ignored. You know, it's easy to be down on men and to tell them how much of a screw up they are. But the point of this message isn't to make you feel guilty. What I really want to do is encourage, empower, equip, and challenge you with the incredible opportunity you have to shape your children's lives.

I really doubt that most of us realize how much of an impact a father's leadership has on his children. Of course the Bible tells us this clearly, particularly in the example of Israel. In the Old Testament we see over and over again that when the Israelite father's followed the Lord, the nation as a whole followed the Lord and was blessed. When the father's strayed from the Lord the nation wandered as well and received the Lord's discipline. The same is true for us today.

Let me share with you one of the most concerning statistics that you will ever hear. Current American evangelical church research shows that somewhere between 80% - 90% of teenagers in churches like Harmony will stop going to church for good by the time they complete their sophomore year of college. I am not making that up. What that means is that, if this statistic stands true for my family, only one of my children will be attending church 15 years from now.

At the same time, there is corresponding evidence that shows that the single most important factor in children attending church as adults is their father's church attendance. I realize this isn't politically correct but the plain fact is that when children are determining what role religion will play in their lives; they look much more to their fathers than to their mothers. And here is where the problem lies – the decline in church attendance of young adults is in direct correlation to the decline in attendance of men in the church.

Please realize I am not suggesting that church attendance is what we are aiming for nor does it in anyway guarantee that someone knows and is walking with the Lord. But what we can gain from this is that the single most significant human factor in whether children will pursue spiritual matters when they are adults is whether or not their fathers pursue spiritual matters when they are children.

Men, this means that simply by prioritizing church attendance you can significantly influence your children's lives. Now, the Lord and we here at Harmony want more

than that for you – but if simple church attendance has this much impact, can you imagine what kind of impact you might have if you intentionally disciple your children?

So, the question now is how do we do it? This morning I would like to offer you four components to leading your family spiritually. And to help you remember them, they all start with the letter P – you might call them the 4 P's of spiritual leadership in the home.

## **1. Access the Power of the Gospel**

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Galatians 4. Paul writes this:

Galatians 4:1-7

*I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, [2] but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. [3] In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. [4] But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

What Paul is telling us here is that to understand how to be a father; you must first understand what it means to be a son.

And by son, I mean a son of God. Paul is instructing the Galatians here on the wonderful aspect of the Gospel called adoption – the fact that at one time we were slaves – slaves to the world, sin, and the devil. But at just the right time, God sent his holy, perfect righteous Son to buy us out of slavery – to redeem us and to make us His sons. And because we are his sons – we are heirs of God, with all of the privileges that come along with it. These privileges are many, but they include an eternal relationship with the Father, forgiveness of sin in the past, freedom from the power of sin in the present, and empowerment through the Spirit to be all that God desires us to be in the future.

Let me try to apply this truth to every father here today. Some of you here can't be a godly father because you aren't God's son. In order to be a godly father, you have to know God as your father first. And today I want to urge you that if you haven't

repented of your sins and turned to faith in Jesus Christ, make this the greatest father's day ever and turn to him today.

There are other fathers here who know God as Father but you are stuck in the past. Your past failures as a father have you loaded down with guilt and discouragement. You simply believe that you can't be a godly father. Listen Christian men, if you don't think you can be a spiritual leader in your home you are listening to a lie from the very pit of hell itself. Christ gave his life to pay for your sin – past, present and future. Because of this, God the Father has cast your sin into the deepest sea and remembers it no more. He doesn't hold it against you, so quit holding it against yourself. You need to repent of the past, put it behind you and through the Holy Spirit that lives within you begin to be what God has called and enabled you to be today.

There are others of you here who are struggling with the sins of selfishness and spiritual laziness. I am firmly in this circle myself. To us I say quit living like a slave to sinful desires and realize Christ died so that we can put those sins to death and begin living for Him and our families instead of ourselves.

Then there are those of you who think you are doing pretty good and you've got this fatherhood thing figured out. If so, I feel sorry for you, because you are setting yourself and your children up for a world of hurt. It is only by the grace of God that any of us can claim success in any area of life, particularly as a father. And if you don't rely on that grace going forward, you and your family are going to be in big trouble down the road.

And finally, there are those of you here, both men and women, who have no idea what it means to have a godly earthly father. And what Galatians 4 says to you today is that this is ok because God can and will be for you the father that you have never had. He can fill the gap. He will love you, he will lead you, and through the Spirit you can affectionately know him as *daddy*.

Now, there is so much more here in Galatians 4 that I feel bad about breezing through it so quickly. But what we all need to understand is that being a godly father all depends upon the Gospel.

The second P of spiritual leadership in the home is to:

## **2. Make spiritual matters the priority in your home.**



Note that I didn't say a priority but rather **the** priority. I am sure that all of us here today would say spiritual matters are a priority, but I wonder if its #1 on the list? One way to answer that is to look at your schedule for the past couple of weeks. If we were to all pull out our phones or calendars and compare notes, would your schedule show that spiritual matters are a priority in your home?

I realize that a common objection here is that "we are really busy and don't have time for that."

To this point *Samuel Davies* said:

*Were you formed for this world only, there would be some force in this objection, but how strange does such an objection sound coming from an heir of eternity! Pray, what is your time given to you for? Is it not principally that you may prepare for eternity? And have you no time for what is the greatest business of your lives?*

Fathers, the greatest priority in this life is to get ready for the next one. And as the God-ordained leaders in our homes we must make sure that we are getting our families ready for it.

Listen dads. Your children are all going to stand before the Lord one day. And on that day it will not matter one bit how many basketball games they have won, how many state records they have set, or how high their GPA was. The only thing that will matter is their relationship with their heavenly Father. And it is your responsibility to make sure they have everything they need to develop that relationship with him. So, make spiritual matters the priority in your home.

The third component of spiritual leadership in the home follows the second:

### **3. Develop a simple plan for spiritual development in your home.**

What I mean by this is that you need to come up with a plan for how you are going to lead your family spiritually. Note that I said a simple plan. It doesn't have to be complex. But I do think it should be both formal and informal.

On the formal side, you need to plan, with your wife, for how your family is going to be involved in church life. This starts with Sunday service attendance but also includes living in community with other believers and using your spiritual gifts to

serve the church and the world. This will look differently from family to family, but the question is how will this play out for your family? So men, what's your plan for church involvement? If you don't have one, you need to get one, and quick.

Another aspect of formal spiritual leadership is family worship. These are regular times when your family gathers to worship together. In the Carr household this means praying together before bed at night, having an occasional discussion about a spiritual matter during or after dinner, or gathering in the living room to read and discuss a passage of Scripture. One of the great things about the day and time we live in is that there is a lot of great material available to help with this. We have a few of these listed in the handout, but one that I would highly recommend is *Family Worship* by Joel Beeke.

That's the formal, but to take it a step further, Scripture tells us that the spiritual development of our children also needs to be informal. In Deuteronomy 6 we see Moses spelling out for the Israelites how God desires for faith to be passed from one generation to the next:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ESV)*

I believe the principles Moses lays out here are even more important today in the context in which we live. If your family is like mine, we often find ourselves coming and going. And although it would be wonderful for us to have family devotions every night of the week, with our schedules it is impossible to do. And so, while we do set aside times to do this, what we have found most beneficial is to take the opportunities to disciple our children as they come – in the car, at the baseball field, as we eat dinner, wherever we are. As a parent, and specifically as a father, you have to be looking for and leveraging these times. My sons can tell you that I have on multiple occasions pulled them aside during a football or baseball game to talk specifically about an attitude adjustment or an opportunity to be a testimony. In fact, a couple of years ago one of my sons had the opportunity to play in the championship game for his football league. And at half time his team was getting hammered and there were a lot of attitudes and tears being shed by his teammates.

And so I simply pulled him aside and we had a short discussion about the significance of a 9-year old football game and the opportunity that he had to be a witness. The point is that opportunities abound, and we have to be ready and willing to jump on them.

Finally, the fourth P of spiritual leadership is prayer.

#### **4. Prayer**

Now please know that this isn't something that I am just throwing in here because I needed another P and I had to include prayer or you all would label me a heretic. I am dead serious when I say that prayer is the most important thing you can do to lead to your family spiritually. The reason for this is that at the end of the day your child's relationship with God is that – their relationship with him, not yours. Nothing you can do will be the final say in their spiritual development. It is ultimately between them and God. And so, I would encourage you to include prayer in three ways.

**First, pray for yourself.** Pray that you will walk worthy of Christ and through the power of the gospel humbly and faithfully lead your wife and children to do so as well.

**Second, pray for your children.** Pray that the Spirit will shape their hearts. Pray that he will convict them of sin. Pray that he will keep them pure and holy. Pray for their future spouses. Pray for them to be on mission for Christ.

Don't just pray for your kids, but **pray with your kids.** And not just at meals and before bedtime. Pray with them before a big test. Pray with them before a basketball game. Pray with them before you leave on a trip and when you get there safely. Why? Because when you do you are showing them that God cares about everything we do and can be trusted to be with us at all times. A lot more to be said here but I hope you get the point.

#### **Conclusion**

Now I want to finish with a final encouragement and that is the fact that a little goes a long way.

Wherever you are today in regards to leading your family spiritually, all I want from you today is to take a step in the right direction. Please don't think that unless you have devotions every day with our kids until Jesus comes that you are a failure. You just need to analyze how you are doing right now and determine what one or two things you can do to improve your leadership in your home.

Perhaps one more illustration from my life will help you here. I have been blessed with the privilege of having a father who has been a believer for my entire life. Those who know my father know him as a quiet and unassuming man. Growing up I honestly don't remember a lot of big family devotion times, especially as I grew into my teenage years. But there are two things about my father that are unmistakably stamped upon my soul. Two things the Lord has used in a very significant way to make me the man that I am today.

The first is that my dad has always served the Lord. He is at church every Sunday morning, Sunday night, and many Wednesday nights. He goes to church more than I do. When there is a need in the church, he's there to meet it. Unfaithful is not a word in his vocabulary. He has always served the Lord and that is a big reason that I am here today at 39 years of age serving the Lord as well.

But the most significant influence my dad has had on me comes down to a Bible and a chair. When I think of my dad and his impact on my life I think of a chair in my parents living room – I can picture it right now – where I know that nearly every morning he has been home for the last 25+ years he has opened the Bible and spent time with his God. And I am sure on many of those days he has spent time praying for me. I am quite sure that he has no idea how much of an impact these two things have had on me, but I can assure you that God has used them to change me forever. And this is what I want to leave you with this morning men. I want to leave you with this question. What are you doing that God can use to change your children forever?

## **Prayer – Mike Jones**

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2012 by Chris Carr. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Harmony Bible Church's website address ([www.harmonybiblechurch.org](http://www.harmonybiblechurch.org)) on the copied resource.