

Series: FATHERS DAY

Sunday June 20, 2021
TEACHING YOUR KIDS TO LOVE
Proverbs 22:6, 1 Corinthians 13
Speaker: Ken Davis

1. I'm guessing that some of you, like me, grew up on a family where you had **Family Altar** or **Family Devotions**. So, **here's my question: How many of you would say that it was the HIGHLIGHT of your week?** I mean, you sat spellbound at their feet; said things like, "Oh, Mom; Dad; is it over already? **Pleeeassee--**Teach me more!" Then you thought about it **all day**—and told your friends about it!
 - a. I'm going to be completely transparent this morning. We had family devotions on a semi-regular basis; **one...only one** was memorable. And that was when my Dad invited us to discuss the passage he had read. You know, some give and take. It was **cool**—but **that was it!**

-Dad would read out of the KJV—and because it was ancient English, we really didn't understand it all that well. Then we'd pray--and Dad would pray--and pray--and pray. I could feel the pressure building inside: **JUMP UP AND RUN OUT THE DOOR TO SCHOOL!**
 - b. Looking back, I've wondered if Family Altar was as painful and awkward for my Mom and Dad as it was for me! See, I think the **real** Family Altar took place when we sat around the kitchen table at supper and talked about our day--and figured life out in the light of what God had to say about it. Sometimes it was after hot words and discipline. Sometimes it was after crushing defeats and tough times. Sometimes it was before I went to sleep at night. Sometimes it was when I was with my Dad out in the boat fishing.
2. A few weeks ago we talked about Jesus' accountability stories. About the fact that when a treasure has been entrusted to your care—**Jesus expects that you'll invest well**. In Jesus' story, three guys were given a **lot** of gold worth **millions** of dollars. Two were **very** excited to tell the owner that they had **doubled** his investment. The third one? Let's just say that because he had done **nothing** with it—the exit interview was a hard one.

-I think most of you Dads...and Moms would admit that the most **valuable** thing that God has entrusted into your care is not your home, your job, your bank account, the family cottage, or your cars. It's **your children!** When it comes to your children, your influence in their lives is **immense!** And we are accountable for that!

-Remember the final story Jesus told in this trilogy? It was about love; we are accountable for whether or not we **love other—not in how we feel about them, but what we do for them**. Our children would fit that category; I was hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick—and, well, **hopefully not in prison, but it could happen**—and you fed me, gave me something to drink, took me in, visited me.

-Love always has the practical edge, right? But it goes way, way, **way** beyond that. Our calling as parents is not just to **love** them—and fill their hearts up; our calling is to **teach them how to love God—and love others**. Why? Because according to Jesus—that summarizes all God wants from us.

-And **that's** the accountability that comes with brining children into the world. Kid's Branch teachers and school teachers and friends will help—but the main responsibility is **right here...ground zero...me!** Proverbs, the incredible book of wisdom says:

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6 NIV)

So, **WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?**

a. I used to build model planes--you know, the flying kind with engines? These were called **free-flight** planes. I would build a normal plane with its little .049 engine--but I would build the rudder so that when the plane was flying right, it would circle up several hundred feet in the air--and then when the engine quit, it would circle back down.

-This passage is telling us to not only give our children the wings, stability, and power they need to fly--it's telling us that we need to **SET THE RUDDER! build direction into that training and not turn them loose, hope they head in the right direction and land well at the end.**

b. For over 70 years some child-rearing gurus have told parents, "Hey, just be neutral. Don't make value judgements. Just let your **children** decide their own moral values when they get old enough." There's a Greek word for that. **SKUBALA! Biblical bumper sticker word: SKUBALA HAPPENS!**

-I honestly find that amazing; that intelligent people would tell to make **sure** we teach reading, math, culture, and hygiene to our kids, but leave the most important thing in their lives up to chance! In our culture, we are reaping the results of crazy advice just like that.

c. The single most important responsibility every single follower of Jesus has is to tell their children about God--about what He expects from their lives. If you're a parent, you need to know that your children **want** to know what you believe in and value. They want to see in black and white what they ought to do. They may, at the time, hate the boundaries you set, but they will **respect** you for loving them enough to do it.

3. Please trust me on this. Family altar and church ministries alone won't do it. See, in the years that our children are really learning values--from age 0 to 5--they learn best by **imitating!** Now, are there any parents out there whose kids let you get away with any inconsistencies in your life? I don't see your hands—but I know the answer—cause **mine** don't—and never did!

a. Kids would make **excellent** lawyers and police officers—and **great** umpires! These little sinners have **amazing** radar focus when it comes to inconsistencies.

-Years ago, Lori and I took Kelly and Brian for a walk in the woods behind our house. While we were out there, I found an old rusty sledge hammer with a broken handle. So I picked it up and brought it home. Did I ever get the third degree from Kelly—our resident police officer and border patrol! You should've seen me trying to explain that I really wasn't **stealing** this thing. I felt like I was being questioned by the Gestapo!

- b. Your kids see **everything**! One night we Lori and I were visiting a good friend who was a leader in a church we served. I can't remember how we got on the topic, but you should've seen him squirm and protest when his little girl reported in front of his wife and Lori and I that she saw him looking at a magazine with pictures of naked women in it in a bookstore.
- c. I think the question most parents ask is, "Where do I start? I mean, are we talking lessons on the virgin birth, the inerrancy of the Bible and redemptive history?"

-I already mentioned this early, but when it came to what Jesus thought was most important, he narrowed the 630 commands of the Old Testament down to two. He put it like this:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:38-40 NIV)

- 4. So if Jesus said that the **Big Ten** can fit into the **Big Two**—Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind—and love your neighbor as yourself...how do you **teach** that? For example, how do you teach a child to love God with everything he or she is?

-It's extremely difficult to teach kids about intangibles--things they can't see or feel. When you talk about God to them, they tend to think in terms of images; people; things. To them, God is an old man kind of hovering a few feet over their heads. Want to know one of the primary ways you will communicate God's love to them? It's by your tenderness and love for them **and** the kindness and generosity you show to others.

- a. Here's what I'm hoping; I hope that you look your children in the eyes, hug them and tell them how important they are to you—and how much you love them. See, unless you **make it that clear**—they will likely not just assume you do because you brought them into the world, feed them and take care of their basic needs. You do that for your **pets**! Kids are not very good at drawing those conclusions on their own!

-Without getting into another whole message—there's such a thing as **love languages**. Have you ever heard of this concept? That people experience love in at least four or five different ways? That if you don't know **their** love language, you can be with them for 20 years, think you're doing just fine while **they** don't feel loved? It's a **scary thought**!

*Some kids don't feel loved unless they get hugged and kissed on a regular basis. Now, that may not fit your style, but you may have a child that won't feel loved by you until it comes in that package.

*There are some kids that are not the kissy, huggy type--but they need to hear it on a regular basis. Do you know how much I love you? Well, if I could line up all the little boys—or girls—in the world, **I'd choose you! I love you SO much!**

*Some kids will only feel love if it comes in packages of "hang-out" time. Some parents say, "You know, I don't have much time—so my point is to spend **quality** time with them!" Truth is, **quality time** only happens when there's a **quantity** of time! You can't pop in on your kids and say, "I have 15 minutes—so let's spend some **quality** time together!"

*Some children best feel love through small gifts—or exciting experiences that you've arranged for them—because it shows that you were thinking of them.

*Some children best feel love through notes that you write to them—expressing that they are treasured and thought of.

-It seems to me that it would be worthwhile to learn those languages, don't you think? You know, some of us may have to do some growing in this area.

- b. There are some other ways in which your children will learn to love God. The first one's pretty self-explanatory. Make God a regular part of everyday life. See, the fact is, God **is** a part of our everyday life--**we** have to see that first; and then we have to show our children that He doesn't just show up in special places on special days.

-Let me give you a hint on this one; your kids will never learn to love a God they perceive to be far off, distant, disengaged, and disinterested.

- c. And ask yourself this question: Are my children learning to turn to Jesus when they're lonely, frightened, anxious, or frustrated? Think for just a moment about a friend who stood by you in an incredibly difficult time--loved you, and helped you through it. How do you feel about them? **LOVE! HANDS DOWN LOYALTY!** By the way, parents, have **you** learned to come to Jesus when you're lonely, scared, or angry?

- d. One more thought. What do your kids see in your attitudes toward God; toward following Jesus? Would they describe it as fun? Joyful? Challenging? Meaningful—or a **hassle**—an **obligation to be fulfilled**? See, kids won't be interested in something that seems to put us in the pickle barrel; you know, that makes us mean, crabby or impatient. They'll think, "Who needs it?"

-Here's the tough bottom for me—and you. **Do I love God!** Really? Is it clear that He's first; that I love Him with all my heart, soul, strength and mind? That I respect **Who** He is and **What** He says?

-Our kids will look at our lives, and they will decide whether or not they want Jesus --whether He really loves them, whether He is worth living for--or whether we mostly just **talks** about it.

5. And **what about loving others?** It's clear in everything Jesus taught this is extremely important. In fact, as we pointed out two weeks ago, He made it clear that this isn't just **on** the final exam—you know, along with keeping the rules, Bible knowledge, church attendance and giving—it **is** the final exam!

Love it what makes it clear that the **Holy Spirit of God** has been living and working at the core of your life—changing your priorities and attitudes.

-Paul, who was once known for his religious ladder-climbing and harshness and hatred for the followers of Jesus actually had to **learn** how to love—even though he'd memorized the Jewish Scriptures and was **flawless** in keeping the law! In writing to a **performance oriented, success-driven people**—like us, I might add—he said, “Your performance and success may impress others—but it does **not** impress God!

-We define love in terms of feelings. Paul didn't; he defined it in terms of how we treat others:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.
(1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV)

-And right before this, Paul makes it clear that love is **the most important thing we will ever do?**

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, “Jump,” and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3 MSG)

-We parents have this little game we sometimes play; it's called **how successful are your kids--in comparison to mine, of course?** This is a subtle way of bragging about ourselves—while talking about our children—and feeds **our** egos, as parents.

-So we make it a point to tell others—especially if they're parents—what university our kids are in—or what their GPA is—or what career they're in or headed for—or how good they are at sports—or if they're in some program for the really smart and talented people of the world. If our **kids** are successful in terms of what the world system sees as successful—then we must be **really** successful parents. And it's why parents push, nag, drive and shove their kids toward what will make them proud.

-What this passage says speaks to that:

*Your son can have the best slap shot in the GTA and be scouted for ever professional NHL team, but **if he doesn't love—he's nothing!**

*Your daughter can graduate summa cum laude from high school, university, and law school—or med school and be courted by the best hospitals and law firms in Canada—but if they don't learn to love, they're **nothing!**

*Your kids can have astounding talent in sports, music, dance—and have entire bookcases full of trophies and awards--**whatever**—but if they don't learn to love, they will **waste their lives!**

-In a letter to people trying to gain credit with God by rule-keeping and appearances, Paul narrows everything down to one rule:

**The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
(Galatians 5:6 NIV)**

Dads, Moms—here's the question we need to ask: Are my children learning compassion? Are they learning to be sensitive to the feelings and needs of others and inconvenience themselves—use their money, time and energy—to show love? In our world what we learn most **naturally** is the **survival of the fittest**. We don't ever **say**, "Kill off the weakling"—but it's seen in just about every arena of life.

- a. Years ago in Pennsylvania I visited someone who had found and was raising about 10 young wild turkeys. I guessed that they were young adolescent turkeys—**turk-lets** at that point. One of the turkeys in this pen was bleeding and had a bunch of its tail feathers plucked. I wondered if maybe they were planning to have him for Thanksgiving—and changed their minds halfway through.

-I asked, "What's up with that one?" He said, "Look at it's foot." Because of its deformed foot, he said that the others turkeys—brothers and sisters—continually pecked at him and would eventually kill him. I thought, "That happens every day on every school playground in North America!"

- b. Sensitivity and compassion does **not just ooze** out of people because they've been made in God's image. Teaching it to children is a full-time job. And even **then** they may not learn it. The hard thing for us parents is that you can't just **tell them how to do it**; it has to be something that you do so they can **see what it looks like!**
- c. Another value question: "Are my children learning to not be selfish and demanding; or to be unselfish and considerate?" How many of you had to teach your children to hold onto their toys, scream and demand their rights? That's what I thought. Selfishness comes **very** naturally. Here's what surprises me; it's how **easily** selfishness comes out of me—and I've been following Jesus for a **long** time!

-Let me simply say this: Mom and Dad, it's pretty hard for us to teach our children about selfishness when we reach for the biggest piece of pizza; when we rant and rave around the house about **our** rights, **our** money, **our** car—and get **weird about our stuff!**

-Our children will have to learn from **us** about the value of holding things lightly; sharing generously with those who have less than us; and valuing people more than stuff.

6. Finally, we need to teach our children how to accept themselves as God accepts and loves them. It's a fact; if a person doesn't like or accept themselves it is extremely difficult for them to love and accept others. I think it goes like this; if you don't like who you are, that places everyone else in competition with you—and you aren't free to just relax and like them.

-There's something extremely important that we somehow have to get across to our kids, parents. That's the fact that God created them special--**just like He wanted them to be**. That He has created them for a special purpose on this earth that not **one other person** can adequately fill. That means that we never compare them to other kids—which implies, "You were a **mistake!**"

-If your children sense deeply that you love them just like they are--love their hair, their eyes, their personality, their mind, their abilities--and that God loves them even more--that gives incredible value. Let me state what I've said in negative form for just a minute. One of the most natural things in the world is to criticize other people in our homes. We've all done it--but that doesn't make it right.

a. See, we teach our kids to love their neighbor as much as they love themselves. So we smile and shake hands with the people at work or at church or in the neighbourhood, then sit down at the supper table and sneer at them, roll our eyes, talk about what jerks they are, what do **you** think goes on inside their little brains? Over time, that hypocrisy has a warping, corrosive effect on that quiet part of a child's soul that loves others. And God will hold us accountable. Jesus is pretty clear on how he **treasures** children. That's Good News for parents! But He also says, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble...?"

Watch out!

b. The only way that **sincerely** valuing others will be important to our children is if it's important to us. To be honest, for our kids, to understand God's love, they need to see us loving our enemies—as Jesus taught us--people who hurt us, trample on our rights, take advantage of us.

7. Most of you know that I like to experiment with fudge—either for the Markham Fair—or for Christmas. You know where I usually get caught? It's in cooking it—and stirring it for the right amount of time before I pour it into a pan. In cook books, they say, "Cook it to the soft ball stage, take it off the heat, and stir it until it loses its glossiness, then dump it in the pan.

-So, I'm stirring and stirring and stirring--all of a sudden it starts to set up, so I'm trying to dump it in the pan before it gets hard. A **few** times, I haven't made it and ended up with a big lumpy, crumbly mess.

a. In some ways, kids are like fudge. At first, their lives are very fluid--you think they're never going to "set up." But all of a sudden their values start to harden--and that's it! Love is a **spiritual value**. One child expert writes that a child's spiritual values start to harden between the ages of 5 and 6. Scary, isn't it?

b. We as parents need the power of the Spirit of God to help us with this immense task of parenting—loving God, loving others, and loving our children in a way that is deep and life-giving. I don't know about you, but I need God's help in learning to love right--and show my kids how to love God and others. I have to **ask** myself—did my children—**do** my children—see me loving God with all I am. Like, He comes first in everything—and I respect what He says about life—and accept His authority over my life. Has that made a difference in how I love them and others? Has His power and blessing and anointing over my life left goodness and love on my path? Is it **clear** that I love God—and love others?

-I have a **lot** to say, don't I? But my **example** drowns out my words! Here's what I believe, Dads! I believe that God wants to give us the strength to make our dreams and our prayers for our children--reality.