
COME ALIVE IN YOUR FAMILY
Ephesians 5:21-6:4

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Come Alive In Your Family¹ ***Ephesians 5:21-6:4***

On Easter Sunday two weeks ago, hundreds of us came forward and committed ourselves to come alive in Christ's resurrection, and to live in that resurrection power. So since then, we are spending time in a series looking at practical and powerful ways that resurrection life makes a difference in our lives. Our desire is that we would realize that living this resurrection life has an impact in very practical ways. Yet the fact that it is practical does not take away from it being resurrection life. This is a quality and power of life that cannot be reached without the resurrection; without the new life that Christ gives us and without his Holy Spirit within us. We'll fail without him.

Last week, we looked at ways that we can "come alive" in our relationships. Remember we looked at the four key relationships in our lives: God, family, church, and those outside the church who don't yet know Jesus. We looked at keys to healthy relationships, remembering to be patient, deal with anger, watch our words, and to forgive, and then saw the keys to dealing with offenses: pray, talk to the person (if we feel we really need to), and do NOT talk to others, which is the sin of gossip.

Next week will look at how to come alive in our work, and finally how to come alive in our circumstances. But today I want us to talk about immediate family – whether it is your husband or wife, or your children, or your parents. And we are going to learn it primarily from one key passage of Scripture, found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

And I think it would be good for us to recognize how important God's Word, the Bible is, by having us stand together as it I read it to us. It is from Ephesians 5:21-6:4.

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his

¹ Haydn Shaw, *Generational IQ* (Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2015); Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992); Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Blessing* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1986)

wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise— ‘so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:21-6:4, niv)

There are incredibly powerful and yet practical instructions in that passage about our family relationships. If you are not married or don’t have kids, you might think this doesn’t apply to you, but it does because you are a part of an immediate family somewhere – even if you are a single adult now, and these principles can still apply to those relationships. And it will be very helpful for you if you do become a spouse or parent. So let’s see first what this passage says about...

1. **Wives and Husbands**

There are twelve verses in this passage that speak to the relationship between a wife and a husband. Four of them are for the wife, and eight of them are for the husband. One quarter of the passage is instructions for the wife, and three-quarters of the passage is instructions for the husband. I think one of the reasons for that is because it takes three times as much to get it through the man’s thick head!

There is some vital information here that could be misunderstood, so I want you to listen to me very carefully, please. The first portion of this passage essentially says:

- Wife: obey your husband

This passage has caused more destruction to marriages and the church than just about any passage I know of in the Bible. These three verses have done more to keep wives enslaved to abusive husbands, and to validate husbands abusively controlling wives. I’ve even heard pastors who tell wives who are being abused that if they are going to obey God’s Word, they are required to stay in an abusive marriage. And they would be right – if you take three verses out of the context of the entire passage.

Taking a verse out of context is a very dangerous thing and can have serious consequences.

Let me give you an example. Take for instance this verse from the King James Bible:

“If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.” (Luke 4:7, kjv)

That seems like a great promise, doesn't it? There's only one problem – it is not a promise, it is a curse. Here is that verse in its context – I'll just give you the verse along with the one right before it and right after it:

“And the devil said unto him (Jesus), ‘All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.’ And Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”’” (Luke 4:6-8, kjv)

This is from the account of when Jesus was fasting for 40 days in the wilderness and the devil came and tempted him. That “great promise” that we read was actually Satan's words, trying to get Jesus to bow down and worship him! If Jesus had claimed that promise, our salvation would never have happened and the church would not exist.

Context is everything! Taking a verse out of context allows us to twist it to suit our own sinful desires. And that is what has happened with this passage today.

“Wives, obey your husbands” - as much as Christ expects those of us who are Christians to obey him. It's that simple. I know, wives, that it might sound like you are giving up your self-hood. It might sound like you are being required to be submissive in a male-dominated, misogynistic rule or religion, but only if it is taken out of context.

Stay with me as we put it in context. In fact, if the husband obeys this passage, your part as the wife is incredibly easy. So please – stay with me to hear the rest of this and watch this:

- Husband: *love* your wife

This passage says that husbands are to love their wives *just as Christ loves the church*. This is the key to this entire passage for husbands and wives. I think that's another reason why the wives have one fourth of the passage and the men have three-fourths – because the men have a huge responsibility here.

What does it mean for a man to love his wife like Christ loves the church? Well, what did Christ do for the church? He died for us. He gave all that he had for us, so that we could become and achieve our highest and best in God.

So it stands to reason then, that the husband is to give his all for his wife so that she can achieve *her* highest and best – so that she can become all that God created her to be. And he should continue to do so.

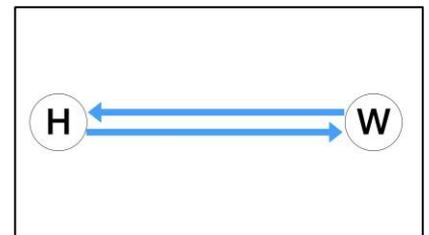
Now then, if a husband loves his wife like that, it wouldn't be hard for her to submit to him would it? If a wife has a husband who always lives to see her become her very best in whatever she feels led to be and do, and he is always supportive of her, why wouldn't she in turn support him?

But when a husband uses his position to control, manipulate, and abuse his wife, then the wife is not obligated to submit to him.

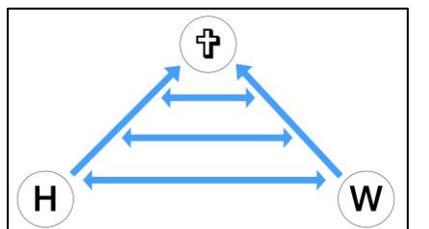
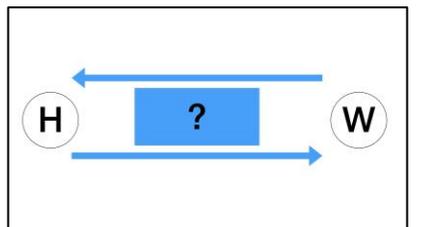
There have times over the years that abused women have come in to my office for counseling, asking for help and prayer to “keep obeying her husband,” because she was told that a wife is supposed to submit to her husband no matter what. That’s *not* what this passage says. I can’t describe the incredulous relief that I see on their faces when I tell them they don’t have to submit to abuse. Worse yet, often these women had children who were also being subjected to abuse because she was told she had to obey her husband.

Now I will say that after those counseling sessions, I tell them that once they’ve been able to get to a safe place; their primary objective is to see if their husband will get treatment, if they will go to counseling, and if their marriage can be reconciled. But usually that requires her and the children to get to a safe place and pursue help from a distance. Now I can tell you, it’s rare that the man is willing to change. But the wife must be certain she has done what she can, under professional Christian guidance, to get him help, before leaving him for good.

Okay? So how is it supposed to work in the marriage according to this passage? Like this: Here’s the husband and here’s the wife. According to this passage, their priority is to meet the needs of the other person; to submit to and serve each other. His job is not to focus on his own needs, but hers. Her job is not to focus on her own needs, but his. And if they are doing their jobs, they don’t have to focus on their own needs – that’s the other person’s job. Of course, they have to communicate those needs to each other. And in a perfect world, that’s how it works.



The problem is that life is not perfect. There are always obstacles that get in the way. You can put anything you want in that box: crises, work, circumstances, schooling, kids – it doesn’t matter if it’s bad things or good things – it’s just the stuff of life that gets in between. The difference between healthy and unhealthy couples is not whether or not they have these obstacles, because *every* relationship does. The difference is that healthy couples learn to work around these in order to continue doing their work of serving each other. Does that make sense? That’s what this passage is talking about. But here’s one last thing about this passage before we move on. It talks about Christ being the head of the church, right? That means that he is the head of every individual in the church, correct? Then both the husband and the wife ought to be giving themselves completely to Christ, right? Here’s the amazing thing that happens when they do: as the husband and the wife grow closer to Christ, what happens to the distance between the two of them? It gets smaller and smaller. In other words, it gets easier and easier to meet the other’s needs the closer we get to Christ in our relationship.



That's what this passage is talking about for husbands and wives, and that is how we can come alive in our marriages.

But those aren't the only relationships in a family. The passage goes on to teach us about...

2. ***Children*** and ***Parents***

There is wise advice in this Scripture about parenting.

But first consider the advice some children have given. Children were asked to share their "life lessons," and here is a sampling of their wisdom:

- Andrew, age 9: Never smart off to a teacher whose eye is twitching.
- Rocky, age 9: Wear a hat when feeding seagulls.
- Heather, age 16: When your dad is mad and he asks you, "Do I look stupid?" Don't answer him.
- Randy, age 9 gave some health advice: Stay away from prunes.
- Matthew, age 12, has economics figured out: When you want something expensive, ask your grandparents.

These next two remind us of the value of family:

- Joanne, age 11: Remember the two places you are always welcome – church and grandma's house.
- Molly, age 11 – Remember you are never too old to hold your daddy's hand.

Parenting is difficult, complicated, and it's unpredictable. You have to be adaptable, wise, loving, nurturing, disciplinary, and on and on. I don't pretend to have all the answers – just ask our boys and they could quickly cite examples. But God's Word here gives some great advice that we need to see, starting with:

- **Child:** ***honor*** your parent

In that passage we read it said:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise— 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'"
(Ephesians 6:1-3, niv)

On the one hand that makes sense; obey your parents if you want to keep on living! But actually, your life will go *so* much better if you will honor and obey your parents. Of course, this assumes that your parents are not asking you to sin; the Bible would never encourage you to obey that.

But you might be thinking, "My parent or parents are (or were) bad parents or even abusive parents. Why should I honor them?" Listen carefully: even if you can't honor their *person*, you can honor their *position*. They are your parents; if nothing else you learned what *not* to do. I'm not trying to minimize the situation. I'm just saying that even if you can't trust or obey their character, you can show respect for

the *position* of parent in your life. You should not subject yourself to their abuse, but you can honor the place of parenting. When it comes to the relationship, you might need to employ some of the things we talked about last week, but you will find that *your* life will be better if you can come to honor the position if not the person, too. To dishonor your parents is to dishonor yourself. To honor your parents is to honor yourself. This is a difficult, if not impossible thing to do without resurrection life in you, but you will be amazed at what it brings in your life and family.

Then, don't miss the next one:

- Parent: ***compose*** your child

Next, the Bible gives a directive to fathers to help their child be composed. Does that mean mothers are off the hook? Nope, it applies to both, but I think this addresses fathers for a few reasons. One is the same reason that the husband was the focus in the instructions to husbands and wives – if the husband will take his responsibility, the rest can do theirs much more easily.

A second reason is because dads have a harder time keeping their cool and not getting angry, so God knew he needed to speak specifically to men. Yet another reason is because it was a cultural thing in the day that this was written, and so we know that today it just as easily applies to moms. It goes on to say, “Do not exasperate your children.” “Exasperate” is a key word in that sentence. It means “to irritate or provoke to a high degree; to annoy extremely.” Another way to describe it is that it means to “break the spirit.” When you discipline your child, *do not break their spirit!* I know kids get irritated with their parents – that’s a parents’ job! But this is to take it to such an extreme that their spirit is broken.

So for sure, you shouldn't discipline your child in anger, but there's more than that. Let me explain it this way: in my 15 years as a youth pastor, I found that most reasonably healthy parents want their child to become mature and successful. Again, I'm talking about reasonably healthy, non-abusive parents. I have noticed though that parents have a tendency to move toward one extreme or another when trying to raise their children.

One approach of parents is to see the good things the child is doing and focus on those – to encourage the child, while correcting the harmful. A focus on the good helps the child grow up confident and sure.

Another of those that I've observed over the years is that parents, in their attempts to raise good kids, see the mistakes their kids are making, and the negative things that are holding their kids back, so they naturally begin to correct those things: “Correct what's wrong and protect them from the bad.” Pretty soon, though, that's all they see is what's bad. And before they know it, the kid only hears all the mistakes she makes, all the things he's doing wrong. And the child begins to think that they can't do anything right; that no matter what they do, they can't please you, because you never acknowledge the good and only correct the bad. And they push back. And the parent thinks that the pushback is a challenge to the parents' authority, so the parents respond in even harsher ways. And the child grows up

with a horrible self-esteem – even though the parents’ intentions were good. But the harder the parent enforces the rules, the angrier and more hurt the child gets, so the harder the parent enforces the rules...and it becomes a vicious cycle of broken rules, punishment, and more rules, with little or no relationship between parents and child.

So here’s a principle that I want you to write down and commit to memory if you are a parent or plan to be one:

Rules without relationship = rebellion. (repeat)

When all we do is focus on the rules with our kids, we sacrifice any possibility of a healthy relationship, and so the child rebels. When we are too harsh with our kids, we end up causing them to resent us and become embittered and estranged from us, and then they rebel.

One example of setting rules too strictly comes from NBA hall of famer Charles Barclay. When he was asked how he would handle his then twelve year old daughter’s future boyfriends, he said, “I figure if I kill the first one, word will get out.”²

I think that may be a little too harsh.

If you overdo the rules, you will get rebellion and possibly a broken spirited child. If you are constantly facing rebellion from your child, I would encourage you to examine yourself, seek outside opinion, and see if you need to back off the rules and start working on the relationship. The older your child is, and the longer you’ve been treating her or him that way, the longer it will take to repair the relationship. Don’t abandon the rules entirely, but choose your battles and work on the relationship.

Secondly...

Relationship without rules = lack of respect.

I’ve seen this so many times and it is just as bad as the other extreme. For whatever reason, parents sometimes go overboard in their desire to have a relationship with their child. Maybe they never had a relationship with their parents, or maybe the parent is insecure and immature, so they just want to be their son or daughter’s buddy. Usually this happens not out of a desire to raise the child correctly, as it is to fill some missing need in the parent’s life. This is a dangerous way to parent – I mean that. I choose that word intentionally.

Listen – let me warn you as strongly as I can: your kids don’t need another friend; they have plenty of those. What they need is a *parent*. They only have one or two of those, and that’s your only job. Besides, if you raise them right, you’ll be the best of friends when they are adults.

Without rules they will not respect you. That’s what’s behind what the passage said about obeying parents. Be parents worthy of obeying.

² *Newsweek*, 6/18/01, pg 17

They need a healthy amount of rules. If you don't give them enough rules, they will push back against you and try more and more bad things; not because they want to get away with it, but because they want to see if you will finally draw a line! They want to know where the boundaries are, so they will push and push until they find them. They instinctively know from a young age that boundaries mean safety. They want to know where they are safe. And when you finally put your foot down and show a boundary, they will push again to see if you really mean it. No boundaries are disastrous. Too tight of boundaries and they can't breathe and it breaks their spirit. Children need rules; they are the guardrails on the highway of life. I'm telling you, I could cite loads of research to back up what I'm telling you; trust me it's not just my observation or experience.

If children respect their parents, they won't be involved in destructive behaviors, and instead have a greater chance of living healthy and productive lives.

So finally, the balance is that:

Rules with relationship = a responsible child.

Our goal as parents is to raise kids who will be healthy, productive members of God's Kingdom who are making a difference in the world in their own, uniquely God-gifted way. That is your mission statement as a parent! That's success for us as parents – when our kids have gone on to be believers in Jesus who make a difference in the world. And the safest way to insure that is to balance rules with relationship.

In the meantime, if you've erred one way or the other, be man or woman enough to admit it, explain to your child your mistake, and begin to correct it with them.

You might think, is it that simple? Who ever said it was simple?! It is the hardest thing in the world to do. That's why you need resurrection life within you. You see, it comes down to something that was the very first verse in this passage we read, and it has been subtly weaving itself throughout this entire message. That is the vital principle of...

3. *Mutual Submission*

You might be tempted to think that this passage is all about women obeying men and men being in charge of women and children obeying parents and parents ordering around children. And if that were true, this would be a *terrible* passage. But none of that makes any sense at all without first there being mutual submission, one to another: wife to husband, husband to wife, child to parents, parents to child. This can only be done through Christ.

The word "submit" isn't about giving up your identity and letting yourself be bossed around. It *is about willingly serving the other IN LOVE*. Jesus made it clear that this is the way of the resurrection Kingdom. Jesus even said this about himself:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45, niv)

Jesus taught us both by example and word that the path toward greatness in the Kingdom is by becoming a servant to the least (see John 13:4–17; Matthew 20:26–28).³ That was the very point of why Jesus washed the disciples’ feet in that upper room: to teach us the always-present posture of servanthood for resurrection people.

The Apostle Paul said:

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”
(Galatians 5:13, niv)

This is the key to coming alive in your family: it takes resurrection life in you to be able to love and serve each other in this way. It’s not about who gets the power; it’s about who gives up power to serve the other. Husbands and wives serving each other, parents doing what they do out of a servant heart to their children, teaching their children to serve their parents. It is all about mutual submission. Come alive family.

Pray

³ Mark A. Holmes, *Ephesians: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 170.