

life groups' study guide

forever and ever, amen



Life Groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for spiritual growth, caring for one another, and reaching out to others.

Introduction

Consider the following:

*"If you wonder how long I'll be faithful, I'll be happy to tell you again.
I'm gonna love you forever and ever; forever and ever amen." – Randy Travis*

"GOD, our God! GOD the one and only. Love GOD, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got! Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night." – Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (The Message)

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." – Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)

Q: What is/are the kernel(s) of truth in each of the above?

Q: What is/are the connection(s) between these three statements?

Q: If you had to summarize these three statements into one sentence, what would it be?

Here is how one venerable Bible commentator put it:

"The very heart of Christian nurture is this: to bring the heart of the child to the heart of their Savior." William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary.

Do you believe this?

How about this?

"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" Matthew 16:26. Substitute "your child's soul" for "your own" and "your" in this verse. If you're like most Christian parents, your answer is probably – "absolutely nothing!" If so, are you prepared to commit yourself or recommit yourself to Christian parenting? If you're not a parent, or at least not yet, are you helping to bring *children's' hearts to the heart* of the Savior?

Digging In

Background: Summarized from William Barclay, *The Letters to Galatians and Ephesians*, Daily Study Bible Series.

Judaism and then the Christian faith did enormous good for the welfare of children. Consider the following three facts of childhood in the Roman world of Paul's day:

1. The father's power: The Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, work them or punish them as he desired, or even inflict the death penalty. And the father's power lasted as long as he lived. A Roman child never "came of age." While most Roman fathers loved their children, the fact remains that Roman fathers had absolute power over their children.
2. Child exposure/abandonment: When a child was born, it was laid at the father's feet. He decided whether the child would be kept or thrown out into the street. Here is a letter excerpt from a Roman man to his wife: *"If – good luck to you! – you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out."* Unwanted children were commonly left in the Roman forum. They were collected at night by people who nourished them in order to sell them as slaves or to stock the brothels of Rome.
3. Ancient civilizations were merciless to the sickly or deformed child. Seneca wrote, *"We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown."*

This was the society in which the Ephesian church existed (and which exists in much of the world even today) and it was with this in mind that Paul wrote his advice to children and parents.

Study: Read the following: Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:1-3; Deuteronomy 5:16, 6:4-9; Romans 1:30; **Ephesians 5:21, 6:1-4, 9b**; Colossians 3:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 12:5-11.

First things first: What is your attitude and behavior toward your parents?

Leviticus says that each of us must show "great respect" ("revere" in ESV) for our mother and father. Whether we are parents or not, all of us have or have had parents. Do/did we treat them with "great respect?"

Q: Does anything in Leviticus 19:1-3 mention any qualification of parents before respect is given?

Q: How specific are the promises of Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 meant to be?

Q: Look at Romans 1:30 in its context. Are you surprised to find disobedience to parents in the company of these other sins? What does this say about how God sees it? What does this say about our culture?

Q: Read Ephesians 5:21 again. How do you see mutual submission being worked out in Ephesians 6:1-4?

Q: Consider this from the *ESV Study Bible*, “Obedience is due to both parents; the mother’s submission to her husband does not remove her parental dignity but rather increases it.” **How so?**

Q: How do your ideas on discipline compare with that in Hebrews 12:5-11, especially verses 6-8?

What are the limitations of the discipline of a human parent compared with God’s discipline?

For thought (discussion optional):

1. What word, phrase, or sentence would you use to describe your relationship with your parents?
2. If either of your parents is still living, what one thing can you do to improve that relationship?

Part Two: Now let’s look at our attitude and behavior toward our children. If you’re not a parent, that’s ok, this is still God’s Word and is “useful to teach us what is true.” (2 Tim. 3:16)

We are told one negative – “do not provoke your children to anger (“exasperate” in many translations) by the way you treat them,” and two positives – “bring them up with the **discipline** and **instruction** that comes from the Lord.”

Q: First the negative: What are ways in which your parents “exasperated” you – words or attitudes or actions that did not bring you closer to God? What are some ways in which you can be more obedient to this command to not provoke children to anger?

Now the positive: What does it mean to bring a child up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord? Let’s take a closer look at the two words Paul uses:

Discipline – from the Greek word *paideia*, can also mean nurture, correction, or chastening. It is the same word that the ESV translates as *training* (in righteousness) in 2 Tim.3:16. The NLT in that verse translates it as *teaches* (us to do what is right), and it is listed as one of the uses of Scripture there. So this kind of discipline is the sum of everything that results in increasing holiness and obedience to God in a child, particularly what is learned or taught from the Bible.

Instruction – from the Greek word *nouthesia*, can also mean admonition or correction. In 1 Corinthians 10:11, the same word is used to describe the purpose of the Old Testament, that it was “written down for our *instruction*” (ESV). So this kind of instruction is also meant to be primarily instruction from God’s Word.

Q: Based on this brief word study, what would you say is the most important resource for Godly child rearing? (Hint: It isn’t Dr. Spock) Brainstorm a bit here – what are some ways in which parents and the church can be more effective in instilling God’s Word into the heart of a child?

Q: Who is responsible for raising children in the Lord, or at least responsible for bringing them to the Savior (we are not implying that we do the converting)? Who do we often think is responsible?

Q: Matt's sermon stresses that "the greatest gift a parent can give a child is a loving marriage." Reflect on that. What do think he means? How can this be expressed if divorce or separation has already happened? What about in the case of single parents? How can/does God redeem these situations?

Our long-time pastor, John Caldwell, wrote a book entitled *Raising "G"-Rated Kids in an "R"-Rated World*. Consider these chapter titles in light of the commands of Ephesians 6:4

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| Show Affection | Learn to Communicate | Spend Time |
| Have Fun | Provide Discipline | Teach Values |
| Set Boundaries | Control the Media | Deal w/Substance Abuse |
| Lead Them to Christ | Respond to Rebellion | Ascribe Value |

Q: In what ways would the ideas above contribute toward "not provoking children to anger," and toward bringing them up in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord?"

Finally – Never Give Up! It is never too late to be a better parent and/or a better son or daughter. It is never too late to pray for your children, your marriage, and your parents. The stakes are too high to treat these relationships lightly. Consider these words written over a century ago:

"Parents should care more for the loyalty of their children to Christ than for anything besides, more for this than for their health, their intellectual vigour and brilliance, their material prosperity, their social position, their exemption from great sorrows and great misfortunes."
R.W. Dale, 1883.