

## Children's Own Ministry

Purpose:

1. To awaken children and their parents to the very important ministry children have in their own family and congregation.
2. To help children see who they are in Christ and how that affects how they respond to parents by obeying and honoring them.
3. To combat the many messages out there that would undermine the ministry of children to obey and honor their parents.
4. For parents to realize that who they are in their parenting will assist their children in carrying out their ministry faithfully.

What is this surprising responsibility of children before God?

Luther, in the Large Catechism writes much stressing the need for children to be obeying and honoring their parent. We sometimes think what someone like parents can do for us is more important than what we as children can do for them.

I have preached well over 200 children's sermons, but guess what? I don't think I ever told the children what their ministry is while they are children. God does ask them to do two things. Ephesians points this out very clearly. We might have heard this many times, but the question I ask myself is, "Did I ever raise this command to the level of seeing it as a ministry—the assignment God has given a child to fulfill as they are growing up?" We know there is a distinction between something I may *possibly* do as a human being on the one hand and something God has *specifically* told me to do, on the other hand. There is a wide gulf between these two approaches: 1. Maybe sometimes if I feel like it, I might do it. And then far on the other side of the gulf: 2. This is what I have been asked to do and I am specifically accountable for doing it.

If a child were sitting in Ephesus back in the time of the apostle Paul, and he or she heard the letter to the Ephesians being read to the congregation, the child might have been only half listening. But then, towards the end in what we now call chapter 6:1-3, the child is abruptly awakened by orders particularly addressed to that child. Suddenly, the child is hearing a message directed right at him or her, not at the adults in the congregation. "Whoa! I better listen to this," says the child to himself or herself.

So this is what the child is hearing, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—this is the first commandment with a promise: "so that it may be well with you and you may live a long life on the earth.'" "Wait a second," the child might be saying, "Am I hearing right? So, the way I relate to and regard my parents, with obedience and honor, is going to have a major effect on my life and how long I live on this earth. That's a huge word to me right there. I never knew there was a promise connected to the way I relate to my parents."



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*Discussion Questions? What is this child in Ephesus surprised to hear? Of the children in your congregation, how many have been told this charge and these promises so they really get what is being said? Does this suggest that children have a ministry of their own to fulfill that will help the congregation be built up?*

What is the big reason for a child to obey and honor his or her parents?

The Ephesian child is first told: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” The child on the way home asks his or her parents. “What does it mean “in the Lord, for this is right”? Dad answers, “Were you listening to the first part of the letter? The child answers, “Well, not really.” Dad explains, “You are not just a nobody. You have been chosen by God to be God’s child. Before God created the world this was his decision out of love, to adopt you into his family. He lavished his love on you, not by just saying some magical formula, but by actually acting out his love in an unbelievable way on your behalf. In love, through his merciful decision, he sent his Son, Jesus, to make sure that you are right with God. So, Jesus died that you might be forgiven, which you are. That means you are an insider in God’s family, not an outsider.”

The child responds, “Oh, I get it. The main reason for me to obey you and Mom is because I am a member of God’s family. I’m an insider and so to obey you is my way of expressing who I am in God’s eyes. It is my way of claiming who I am and responding to who God says I am. This is starting to make sense to me now. I guess I always thought the only reason for obeying you is because you said I should.”

Being an insider means being a vital part of the congregation, a meaningful member of the body of Christ. When children obey and honor their parents, they are building up their parents and in so doing, building up the congregation.

*Discussion Questions: What is it this child is trying to understand about hearing “in the Lord”? What did the father say that made sense to this child? Do your children know what this child now knows? How can you get this across to them? In what ways do you see children as building up the body of Christ?*

What are messages being fed to children that contradict this ministry they have? How might they come to see their parents?

Now, we live in a society where we better get this straight. We need to unpack this. Why? Because all kinds of cartoons and messages in our culture are saying the very opposite. A child can say, “I don’t have to respect my parents. They are old and dull. It is okay to sass them, to not listen to them, to treat them as “has-beens”. They don’t understand technology the way I do. I can hide things from them and get by with a lot they don’t know about. They don’t understand the exciting things I’m into and I’m not going to tell them either. They just don’t understand what it’s like to grow up in today’s world. They are way out of touch with life today and I’m cool, I’m in tune with the way life really is.”

Disrespectful behavior is in style. The Parents Television Council study found 622 examples of disruptive, disrespectful or otherwise problematic attitudes. Out of these, 53 were aimed toward teachers or parents. Not so long ago, the promotion of sex started with teenagers, but now this isn’t early enough



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for Hollywood. On Disney Channel's "Sister, Sister", there are references to pornography and descriptions of foreplay. Are these topics appropriate for 8-year-olds to be discussing? Cartoons used to be amusing and rather harmless. Not anymore. A recent study by the Parents Television Council titled, "Wolves in Sheep's clothing" found the following: " In the 443.5 hours of programming, researchers documented a staggering 3,488 instances of violence. This isn't just an anvil falling on Wiley Coyote. It is realistic and often pits one child against another." (From the Internet).

***Discussion Questions: What is happening today that makes parenting and grandparenting a greater challenge than it was years ago? What kind of messages are children or their friends hearing that compete with family leaders? How do these undermine what you are trying to teach them?***

Here is the scariest part—a great challenge for parents. Children today often have cell phones, ipads, and computers, etc. They may even have more technical skills than their parents. At the same time, wolves like sextortionists, predators, traffickers, seducers, neo-Nazis, scammers, and groups with evil intent, now have access to our kids as never before. At the same time, young people like to be independent, secretive, part of a group, and adventuresome. This, in and of itself, can be just part of growing up. Many are heavily into social media. What does this mean? For one thing, has there ever been a time in world history when outsiders had the access and influence on children as in our world today? All this makes our kids very vulnerable to being deceived or tricked. It is hard for them to share their secret lives with their parents, especially if they are already into something. Even if a child wants to obey his or her parents, unless the parents have had wise, loving conversations with them often, what is going to happen?

Parents need to assert their authority. They need to plainly help the child come to terms with what is expected of him or her. They need to help the child recognize that they are there to help get the child through the minefields of youth. They are not there to come down hard on them like a dictator, but to help the child set wise boundaries that will keep them safe. Youth do not have the mental capacities or experience to see that actions taken and messages listened to, can bring on huge problems for themselves and their families.

Connivers are very good at getting around boundaries. Monitoring may be needed but doesn't solve the problem of a resistive or clever child. Parents also need to understand that their child needs to show they can be trusted. This needs to happen not all at once but with privileges given, little by little. Cell phones are most often paid for by parents. So, parents need to be in control of them. The child needs to realize that there is danger involved and that a hurtful future can result. All the more reason to obey their parents and listen to their concerns and wisdom. This is all part of what we are calling the ministry of a child.

In this session we can only scrape the surface of the threat technology poses to the lives of our young people. We will go into this more in-depth in Course Two.

***Discussion Questions: In raising a child today, how do you see the creation of technology that brings strangers into the lives of a child, as being a great challenge for parents? What kind of relationship needs to be developed and nurtured between parents and children in their early years as one way of***



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*combating this influence from wolves? If we look at the many menacing influences present in today's world, how might children recognize themselves as having a ministry that benefits them in their growing-up years? What is it about children that makes it prudent for them to listen to their parents?*

Here is an example of how easy it is for a young person, with very immature insight, to see a parent. Mark Twain said, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

What we find here is that a child will only see half of what is going on. God has lined it up for those who have lived longer and dealt with the way the world works, to have the responsibility to raise a child and the authority to do so. This means the child is seen as inexperienced, as only understanding so much, as not being aware of the dangers in life and the craftiness of people. In a word, children are very vulnerable, even if they don't think so.

Have not many of us who are followers of Christ been much more influenced by our modern culture than we realize when it comes to thinking straight about the ministry of the child?

*Discussion Questions: What is it about a child, and what is going on today, that makes it so important that family leaders are being faithful and wise? In what ways may a child be out of their depth in facing today's world?*

What can we learn from Martin Luther about the ministry of children? Let's go back almost 500 hundred years and see what Martin Luther had to say about the fourth commandment, which is what we are looking at.

From the Large Catechism, a Quote from the Fourth Commandment:

"Now follows the other seven (commandments), which relate to our neighbor, among which the first and greatest is: Honor thy father and thy mother - the parental estate God has especially honored above all estates that are beneath him, so that he not only commands us to love our parents, but to honor them. For with respect to brothers, sisters and our neighbors in general he commands nothing higher than that we love them; so that he separates and distinguishes father and mother above all other persons upon earth, and places them next to himself. For to honor is far higher than to love, inasmuch as it comprehends not only love, but also modesty, humility and deference as though to a majesty there hidden, and requires not only that they be addressed kindly and with reverence, but most of all that both in heart and with the body we so act as to show that we esteem them very highly, and that, next to God, we regard them the very highest. For one whom we honor from the heart we must truly regard as high and great. We must, therefore, impress it upon the young that they should regard their parents in God's stead, and remember that however lowly, poor, frail and queer they may be, nevertheless they are father and mother given them by God. And they are not to be deprived of their honor because of their mode of life or their failings."



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Lest we think Luther is letting parents off the hook for the way they are parenting, we need to hear again what he also says in the Large Catechism: “Here think what deadly injury you are doing if you be negligent and fail to bring up your child to usefulness and piety, and how you bring upon yourself all sin and wrath, meriting hell even in your dealings with your own children, even though you be otherwise ever so pious and holy.”

*Discussion Questions: How does Martin Luther believe children should regard their parents and why? What warning does he give parents?*

What is being said in this article makes me wonder how much my silence and my congregation’s silence about this matter is influenced by our modern culture.

In this session, we are taking seriously the inexperience and vulnerability of children. They are dependent on their parents and very impressionable. So it is the key time for parents and grandparents to be imparting two truths to their children, plus one great gift we can give them.

1. Who God is, what God has done and who God is for us today.
2. The wisdom we need to live a safe and productive life.
3. One of the best ways to love our children is to pray for them daily.

Quote: Luther recognized the role of parents in helping their child be all he or she can be. Speaking to parents, he said, “If God has given you a child who has the ability and the talents for this office, i.e. pastor, and you do not train him for it, but look only to the belly and to temporal livelihood, see what a pious prig and small potato you are.” See Luther’s Works, volume 44, pg. 130.

Summary:

1. To help children see they do have a ministry to fulfill as they obey and honor their parents, with especial emphasis on honoring them.
2. To help children see how God has worked it out that parents have authority for good reason - so the inexperienced child can grow up in the faith, be wise and be safe.
3. To help children to see how God’s lavish love has made them an insider in God’s family, and they can respond to that by honoring their parents.
4. To help parents see they can help their children keep the commandment by themselves being trustworthy, responsible, and caring.

Closing Prayer Suggestions: 1. We ask God our Father, how we can best get across to our children that they are to obey and honor us as parents and grandparents. 2. That we in turn be the family leaders that instill in them God’s messages and wise skills for living. 3. We pray for them, that they may hear from us what God has done for them, has given them, and wants to keep blessing them.



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A Resource: *Adults Saving Kids* has a booklet of 26 weeks of praying for someone every day with a different prayer and Bible verse to support the prayer. It is called "Loving Others by Praying for Them". It is \$4.00 or if ten are ordered they are \$30 for the ten. Blessings to bless another are also included.