

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will do Bible study together about one important aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We will use a very easy Bible study method called the five steps method. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. The second series of 6 Bible studies is about 6 important relationships: Christian love, Christian friendship, the Christian men-woman relationship, the Christian marriage relationship, the Christian parent-child relationship and unequal yoke-relationships. Today's Bible study is: A DISCIPLE BUILDS A CHRISTIAN FAMILY. The fundamental question is "WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN FAMILY?"

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Ephesians 6:1-4. Let us take turns to read one verse each.

(T) Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (S) Honour your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise - (T) that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. (S) Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in this Bible passage. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Someone thought that this meant that Christian children should only obey their parents when their parents are "in the Lord", that is, *when their parents are Christians*. But that is not correct. It means that Christian children should obey their parents, because *the children are Christians!* While many non-Christians children disobey their parents, Christian children should obey their parents, because that is what Christ commands Christian children to do. Christian children should obey their parents even when their parents are not Christians, not considerate and not fair.

(T) An important truth for me is in Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children." While children have the duty to obey their parents, parents have the duty to *encourage* their children. This passage is also written in Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." Because I have children, it is important for me to continually encourage my children. Although they are not perfect, I should not deliberately upset them or break their spirit. So I have decided that I would like to be an encourager!

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in this passage and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. Until what age should Christian children still obey their parents?

(T) In some cultures in the world, children are taught to obey their parents throughout their life and under all circumstances. Until their parents die, the parents have absolute authority over their children! No matter how old the children are, as long as their parents live, the children must obey their parents.

However, according to the Bible, these cultures are wrong. These cultures make the parents tyrants over their *adult* children and force the children to obey their parents, even when their parents are wrong or evil!

Let us consider the example of Jesus himself. In Luke 2:51 we read that when Jesus was still a child of 12 years old, he was obedient to his parents on earth. However, in Mark 3:22,31-34 we read that when Jesus had become an adult and was occupied with the task of his life, he no more obeyed his parents and he no longer complied with their wishes. He was an adult with an independent task in life. Moreover, in Matthew 10:37 the Bible teaches clearly that we should obey God more than our parents. Therefore, the Bible does not teach that Christians should obey their parents throughout their lifetime or under all circumstances. Instead, the Bible teaches that Christians should obey their parents as long as they are still children, underage, immature and dependent on their parents. Adulthood starts when Christians leave the home of their parents, or when they are no longer dependent on their parents or when they get married. Thus, obedience to parents has a time limit. Children should obey their parents only until they are adults. But children should always honour their parents.

2nd question. What are important practical ways of honouring my parents?

(S) To 'honour' means "to regard highly, to show consideration and to love without reluctance, selfish motives or fear". The following examples are intended for all people, whether they are still children, teenagers or adults, in their relationship to their own parents, parents-in-law and to the heavenly Father. There are five ways to dishonour or honour your parents and your heavenly Father.

First. Honour your parents by not arguing with them. Do not argue with them about things that have no real spiritual significance. For example, do not argue about which clothes are appropriate to wear, about which TV programme to watch or about who should do certain family chores. Arguing is a way to let your parents know that their point of view is ridiculous. How can you honour your parents? State your point of view in a gentle way and then allow God to work it out in the way that will please him most. In this way you show that you believe that God is in control of every situation and that God has the ability to accomplish what is best for you.

Second. Honour your parents by taking their suggestions and advice serious. You dishonour your parents when you reject their advice without even considering it. How can you honour your parents? Whenever your parents make suggestions or give advice, learn from them. While you have the opportunity, learn from their years of experience and accumulated wisdom. Learn especially things in the areas of their strengths, from their talents, skills, knowledge and know-how.

Third. Honour your parents by including them in your real life. When you don't let your parents know what you are thinking and feeling or planning and actually doing or when you don't give them any chance to influence your plans, then you dishonour your parents. When you exclude your parents from sharing in your fun or in your pain, in your joys and in your hurts, then you dishonour them. Cutting your parents out of your real life and decisions is a way to let them know that they are not worth relating to! How can you honour your parents? Communicate with your parents. This is difficult, but is still one of the best ways to honour your parents. Take the initiative to talk to them. Talk to them about your activities: what you do at school and at work, what you do together with your friends and what you do at church. Talk to them about what you believe: about God, people and the world. Talk to them about your Christian convictions. Talk to them about what you think, feel and plan to do. And you also honour your parents by involving them in your plans and decisions. Respect your parents' experience and wisdom and seek their counsel. Even if your final decision goes against their desires, you give them a feeling that you have listened to them and have taken their views serious.

Fourth. Honour your parents by serving them. When you only serve your parents when they ask you to do something, you dishonour them. Train yourself to see where you can serve them, where they need your help and if you can do something for them, which nobody else is willing or able to do. Take the initiative to serve and to help and don't wait until your parents ask you.

Fifth. Honour your parents by loving them. When you only show love to your parents in the culturally required ways, like visiting them and giving them gifts, then you dishonour your parents. Genuine love goes far beyond the culturally required *filial piety*. Genuine Christian love is patient with their shortcomings and forgives the wrongs they have done to you. When you become a Christian, parents generally fear that your conversion will effect you negatively: they fear that you will do worse in your studies, you will not be able to get a good job, you will not be successful in life, you will earn less money and will not be able to support your parents financially. They fear that you will lose your culture and that you will anger the house gods. Explain your Christian faith to them carefully and prove to them that you have become a more responsible and loving person through what Christ has done for you.

3rd question. How, do you think, can fathers exasperate their children?

(T) 'To exasperate' means 'to discourage'. There are many ways in which fathers can discourage their children. By observing the reactions of children to their parents, you can know which things discourage them. For example children get irritated, angry, depressed, withdraw or give up on their parents. These reactions are indications that the father ought to change his approach in dealing with his children. How can a father transmit respect to his children? I think by allowing his children to develop three things: to develop responsibility, their own convictions and mature relationships.

First. Let your sons and daughters grow in responsibility. If your goal were to please your children, then your children would probably grow up to become spoilt, selfish and self-indulgent. However, if you train them to take increasing responsibility for more and more areas of their life, then they will grow up to become responsible adults! Teach responsibility through four stages. The first stage is when you make all the decisions for them. As children grow older, you should give them more and more responsibility. The second stage is to make decisions and choices together with your children and execute them together. Set a good example for them and also set the standards of quality and family rules. The third stage is to let your children make decisions and choices by themselves, but they still need to receive your approval and supervision. Their greater freedom demands greater responsibility and accountability to you. The final stage is to let the children do everything by themselves. Now they have become mature adults and are responsible and accountable not to you, but to God for everything they do. Some important areas to train responsibility are: their schoolwork or job, family relationships, self-control, handling money, travelling alone, making friends and developing their own relationship with God.

Second. Let your sons and daughters develop their own convictions. As long as you demand that your children drift on your personal convictions and opinions, they will never grow in developing their own convictions and opinions. Therefore don't demand that your children absolutely obey your convictions, beliefs, values and priorities, but rather encourage them and help them to develop their own convictions, beliefs, values and healthy opinions and help them to base it on the Bible! In this way they will become responsible adults. Teach convictions through three steps. The first step. Let your child discover the truths from the Bible for himself. The second step. Let your child choose his own application of that truth. The third step. Discuss the consequences of his application together. For example, concerning the issue of wearing clothes, the Bible has two principles, namely, clothing should be morally acceptable, not tempting and clothing should be culturally appropriate for the occasion. These two principles form the boundaries for a decision. Within these boundaries, your child has a free choice. Your child makes his own choice or decision. And you discuss the consequences of his choice as well as the effect or influence his choice has on others as well as on himself.

Third. Let your sons and daughters build mature relationships. Your goal should not be to develop independence, but healthy inter-dependence. The Bible places every believer in a specific family, a specific church, and in a specific society. The world-view of the Bible does not consist of individuals, each one going his own way, but of individuals within families, churches and societies. The world-view of the Bible is that we all need one another and have a unique contribution to make to one another. Therefore, help your children to make good friends, to relate to people from different kinds of societies and social backgrounds and to develop healthy relationships with the opposite sex.

4th question. How should Christian parents bring up their children?

(S) Loving the child's mother and bringing up the child are the two main responsibilities of every father! To bring up a child in "the instruction of the Lord" means, "to teach your child the truths of the Bible". To bring up a child in "the training of the Lord" means, "to exercise your child in obeying the truths of the Bible".

First. Train your children to be good citizens in this world. Training above all means "to exercise them in putting truth into practise" and "to encourage them again and again". It sometimes includes "to discipline or to punish them". Train them especially in three areas. One, train them to intellectual, physical, spiritual and social maturity. Two, train them to be wise. Three, train them to love. Healthy families are the building blocks of a healthy nation!

Second. Train your children to be good citizens of God's kingdom. Train your children to trust God in all circumstances and to obey God unconditionally. Train them to live a holy and righteous life. Above all, train them to love God, to love their neighbour and to accept themselves.

(T) **STEP 4. APPLY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of **possible applications**, consider which possible application does God want you to turn into a **personal application**.

(S) My personal application is the following. I especially want to make it a habit of my life to ask advice of my parents and learn from their wisdom in life. I will make my own decisions and choices, but I do want to honour my parents by taking their considerations seriously.

(T) I especially want to be an encourager to my children and encourage them to develop responsibility, their own convictions and mature relationships with people and to express their emotions in a self-controlled way. I realise that this is one of the great tasks that God has entrusted to me as a parent.

(S) **STEP 5. PRAY**

Let us take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in Ephesians 6:1-4.

Dear Father in heaven, please let me be humble enough to learn from the wisdom from my parents and to take their advice seriously. And if I cannot follow their advice, then give me the grace to still honour them.

(T) Dear Father in heaven, give me the determination to be an encourager to my children. Give me wisdom to train them to become mature and responsible adults, who will live for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen!

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Summarise the God-given responsibilities of Christian parents and of Christian children in a Christian family. Consider how you could improve the exercise of your responsibilities towards your child or your parents.

Second. Prepare next week's Bible study from 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www. Etc

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to "Discipleship training on the air".