

# "The Promise of Happiness"

Ephesians 6:1–4

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## **Ephesians 6:1–4 (PowerPoint)**

### **Preface**

I have never seen a newborn baby saying, "I hate you, mommy, I hate you, daddy."

I have never seen a child who dislikes the warmth or the gentle gaze of a mother, nor have I seen a child who dislikes the sense of security that comes from being protected by a father. I have never met a child who does not seek the love of their parents or who dislikes the love of their parents.

Not only among human children, but even among animals, I believe it is the same—for among all creatures with red blood flowing in their veins, I have never seen one that rejects a mother's warmth or a father's protection, saying, "I hate mommy, I hate daddy."

All children, by nature, love their mother and father from the moment they are born.

They are the first people they admire, the refuge to whom they turn, and no one would deny that every single word, every expression, every gesture of the parents is the most important element influencing the child's growth.

The Triune God, who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, when He first created human beings with the blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth," designed every person to be born such that the father and mother would be their most irreplaceable, important beings—the first people they love.

From this, the imagined image of parent and child must have been nothing but sheer happiness—an image filled only with bliss.

### **Part One**

However, ever since humans sinned before God and became sinners, this bliss and happiness has no longer been something natural or taken for granted.

When the first humans, Adam and Eve, became sinners—as we studied previously—their marital relationship was deeply wounded, and it became a relationship full not only of joy and delight but also of great pain. Then, their first children, Cain and Abel, born to such a couple, also had strife, no different from their parents Adam and Eve. The older brother, Cain, unable to control his sudden outburst of rage, killed his younger brother Abel—the first murder in human history, exposing a horrifying image of family collapse as recorded in Genesis 4.

Naturally, Cain and Abel, when they were born to their parents Adam and Eve, must have loved their father and mother, admired them first, looked to them for support, and saw them as warm, irreplaceable protectors.

However, as they grew both physically and mentally, they must have come to witness the strife between their parents, their arguments, and even anger unjustly directed toward them, as well as their parents' cowardice, weaknesses, imperfections, and lack of faith. As they saw these things, it is likely that feelings of disillusionment and disappointment toward their parents grew.

In fact, before the tragic incident where Cain killed Abel, there is no record in the Bible that he went to his parents, Adam and Eve, to honestly confess his heart or seek counsel. Nor is there any record that after committing such a horrible murder, he ran to them crying, asking, "What should I do?"

Perhaps, by then, Adam and Eve were already, in Cain's mind, not seen as people he could depend on.

At any rate, just as Adam and Eve—the first husband and wife in human history—fell into a marriage where they lost sight of God, the children born to them, also being sinners, inevitably built unstable parent-child relationships where God was lost.

According to the teachings of the Bible, this is undoubtedly true. Originally, it should have been natural for God to be at the center of the marital and parent-child relationship—His presence and intervention should have been something naturally and obviously felt. But instead, no matter how strongly one tries to be aware of God, one loses sight of Him; no matter how much one tries or makes an effort, one forgets God's love. The Bible tells us that all humanity has fallen into imperfect, unstable parent-child relationships far from perfect. This is not just from the Bible's teaching—it is also something we must admit from our own experiences in relationships between parent and child, or husband and wife.

After Adam and Eve became sinners and were expelled from the Garden of Eden, it became overwhelmingly more difficult to be aware of God—even though they wore the garments of skin God had prepared for them as a symbol of Christ's atonement, they continued to take their eyes off Christ. And thus, their marriage was no longer the blissful and perfect one they had in Eden, and their parent-child relationships, too, could no longer be perfect. To a greater or lesser extent, family relationships became inevitably accompanied by pain and wounds—this is surely a certain reality.

The first happiness a person experiences is within the family. The happiness felt and learned through family is, for humans, the most fundamental and important blessing established by God—the very source and beginning of happiness. The Bible teaches us this clearly. But at the same time, it also teaches us the sorrowful and tragic truth that this very form of happiness was broken and collapsed, that people began to feel unhappiness and misfortune from their own families.

When reading through the Bible from the beginning, we often feel a heaviness in our hearts because of the raw, unfiltered portrayals of strife between those who are in close relationships—husband and wife, parent and child, relatives, colleagues, companions,

friends. And perhaps it feels so heavy because it overlaps so closely with our own experiences.

To such people as us, the Bible straightforwardly teaches, “The beginning of humanity’s unhappiness and misfortune stems from the family.”

That is why, as we read earlier in Ephesians chapter 6, it says: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” And also, “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise—“so that it may go well with you.”

Originally, to honor one’s father and mother and to love one’s children was the very first and most essential happiness for a person—something naturally blessed by the Lord God. But it became unnatural to obey one’s parents, unnatural to honor them. It became unnatural to love one’s children. And we live in a world that has forgotten that this is the very essence of happiness and its original form for humanity.

## **Part Two**

There are several passages in the Bible that speak directly about this fact, so let us take a look.

First, the Book of Micah in the Old Testament.

### **Micah 7:6 (PowerPoint)**

It speaks of the state of family and parent-child relationships in a world that has forgotten and abandoned the way of keeping God’s Word and living according to it.

It says, “They make an enemy of the very parent who should have been their first beloved and beautiful object after being born.”

Next is the Book of Romans.

### **Romans 1:28–30 (PowerPoint)**

"Disobedient to parents."

In this world that sees no value in knowing God, what prevails is unrighteousness, sexual immorality, greed, envy, murder, strife, slander, arrogance, and pride. But alongside these sins, which are not to be committed, we are told that "disobedience to parents" is also rampant among us.

Another passage is from Second Timothy.

### **2 Timothy 3:1–5 (PowerPoint)**

People have always said things like “these are the end times,” but the Bible describes signs and characteristics of people in the true end—when God’s final judgment is near and the days become difficult. It says people will “love only themselves, love money, be boastful, blaspheme God, be ungrateful, refuse reconciliation with others, gossip and slander,” and

though they skillfully wear the appearance of godliness, they will have no true godliness or faith within. And listed right alongside them, in verse 2, is the appearance of people who are “disobedient to their parents.”

And yet another place, expanding the scope from just “parents” to “elders,” and including even the words of Ephesians 6:4—“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger”—is Deuteronomy chapter 28.

### **Deuteronomy 28:50 (PowerPoint)**

Deuteronomy chapter 28 is a passage listing the curses that will befall people as a natural consequence if they do not listen to the voice of the Lord or obey His commands—a passage filled with God’s painful plea of “I don’t want this to happen.” One of those cursed states is: “A nation that is arrogant, that shows no respect for the elderly, and no compassion for the young.”

A society where people complain, “The voices of elementary school children are too loud, do something about it,” or a world that refuses to respect the wisdom of the elderly—this is one of the signs that appear in people who have lost sight of the one true God, the Word teaches us.

### **Part Three**

Then comes the question, “What about you?”—that is, “What about me personally?”

Today’s message (well, I always prepare my sermons each week while writhing and wrestling in agony), but today’s message in particular is a real struggle. I don’t know how or what I should speak, and all I can do is confess that I myself am an utterly ungrateful, irreverent child and a father lacking in love.

Standing here, knowing that my wife and children—who know everything about how I really am—are listening, I feel I truly have nothing to say. And yet, I have no choice but to speak. I stand here shamelessly, and all I can say is that it is hypocritical for me to do so.

I feel deeply sorry that I have done nothing for my parents as a child, and also sorry that I have not been a good parent to my children.

Of course, my father and mother were not perfect people.

Honestly, there were times when I was hurt or felt unhappy.

Still, they loved me earnestly in their own clumsy way, protected me, and were always on my side—they are irreplaceable and precious parents to me.

However, the feeling described in Second Timothy—“loving only oneself”—is too strong in me, and whenever I interact with my parents, rather than gratitude, all I can feel are selfish thoughts like, “They didn’t do this for me, they didn’t do that either.”

They really poured themselves out to love me, to love their son, and yet what always comes to mind is “still not enough, still not enough.” I feel so ashamed of this.

My wife and children at home know very well what a poor child I have been. They always say, “It’s your fault. Daddy’s the one to blame.” And yet, my attitude toward my parents just

doesn't change. I have to confess that I fail in living out today's message, and I have no choice but to accept that I have failed completely.

Yet, one thing I am grateful for is that despite all this, I still somehow want to live out God's command: "Honor your father and mother."

I want to try to obey God's command. I want to remember it and not forget.

Though my father has already passed away, I now try—just a little—to love my elderly mother, who lives alone, and also my wife's mother, who lives alone too. Through my tiny heart's effort to love, and the very small, seemingly insignificant words and actions I try to practice, I hope they may feel some happiness. I am thankful to feel that way.

I don't want to give up on God's Word. I don't want to give up on the most basic and important happiness that God has established for humans to feel and experience. I don't want to give up on the expectations Jesus has for me. I'm simply thankful that I can still hold on to this desire.

It's only by the Lord, only in the Lord, and 100% thanks to the Lord Jesus that I can feel this way. Along with my feelings of remorse, I can only give thanks.

Today's passage from Ephesians 6:1 continues directly from Ephesians 5:18: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." It is one of the most important practices we should strive for if we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit is not just about getting emotionally fired up and saying, "That's the end." If we are filled with the Spirit, where does it appear? Where is it revealed? One place is in loving your wife and respecting your husband, and at the same time, in "obeying and honoring your parents in the Lord."

And most of all, without the help of the Holy Spirit, without being filled with the Holy Spirit, without God the Holy Spirit working within us, we cannot arrive at the joy of obeying and honoring our parents in the Lord. We wouldn't even struggle or wrestle with it.

So then, "What does it mean to honor and obey one's father and mother **in the Lord**?"

Is it buying them a car, buying them a house, giving them what they need, taking care of them, listening to what they say, doing everything you possibly can for them? That is certainly a respectable and necessary form of filial piety, but is that alone truly what it means to do so "in the Lord"?

As I pondered this, one memory came to mind.

It was when I had just become a Christian during my junior year in university, while I was studying in the U.S.

I had encountered the Holy Spirit through a Bible study led by a pastor and came to believe in Jesus. The fog and clouds that had hung before my eyes—things I hadn't even realized were there—cleared away in an instant. Though the world around me hadn't changed, it now appeared radiant and shining. In that dramatic experience, the very first people who came to mind were my parents.

They were living in a bath-less apartment in Adachi Ward, Tokyo, scraping by to send me funds for my studies abroad and living expenses.

Even now, I am self-centered. But before I believed in Jesus in my junior year, I could only see myself, think about myself, care about myself. I didn't know or care about my parents' love or sacrifices. Looking back now, I think I was a heartless person. But for the first time ever, a thought crossed my mind: "I need to write to my parents and tell them thank you." I wanted to tell them, "All your hardships have been repaid in full by my encounter with Jesus."

I went to the nearest supermarket from my host family's house and bought a few cheerful postcards from sunny San Diego, California.

I was too embarrassed to write much, so I kept it very short—something like, "Dad, Mom, thank you for everything. In the name of the Lord Jesus, I love you both"—and sent it.

My parents were puzzled by this strange, cheerful postcard from their son, but they were happy and kept it as something precious.

That was, I think, my very first, very small act of "honoring my father and mother in the Lord."

Looking back now, it was the first thing I was able to do only because the Holy Spirit had come to dwell within me. It was, I believe, a sign that the Holy Spirit had come to live in me.

Of course, after that, I still rebelled against my parents, made them sad, and hurt them. But each time, the words "Honor your father and mother" echoed in my mind, and I was led to pray that this promise of happiness would come true.

And the thing I am most thankful for is that six months before my father passed away, under the officiation of Pastor Seino and the presence of Pastor Shiraishi, he confessed Jesus as Lord and was baptized, and was called to the kingdom of heaven.

My mother was baptized too and is now living a church-centered life.

My wife's mother, while we were in the U.S., chose of her own will to be baptized and now enjoys church life. It feels like a miracle.

That might just be the greatest act of filial piety done **"in the Lord,"** and I am truly thankful.

#### **Part Four**

Lately, through various media, we have come to see and hear words like "toxic parents" or "parent gacha."

If we think according to the teachings of the Bible, I believe that both the words and realities of toxic parents and parent gacha are results of the fact that we human beings have ended up creating a society that does not seek to keep and practice the Word and commandments of God.

Because God is a God of love, in other words, it can be said that we have built up a society that has lost love.

In such a world, as a result of no longer being able to experience the assurance that comes from unwavering love, the certainty of being loved, and love that becomes an absolute foundation, though no one should desire to become someone labeled as a “toxic parent,” due to the thirst for love, they end up becoming so without even realizing it.

Parents and adults who are referred to with terms like “toxic parents” or “parent gacha” are, in truth, in a certain sense, also victims, and I think it can be said that they are suffering from a deficiency of the true love that is the love of God.

That being said, I am not trying to say, “Do not leave parents or adults who cause harm or impose unjust suffering; endure and stay together no matter what.”

Unfortunately, depending on the situation, I believe there are times when it is necessary to separate and keep distance, and in some cases, even to temporarily cut off the relationship. It is sad, but I believe that is also reality.

Even so, what can be said for certain is that no matter under what kind of parents one is raised, the chance to become a parent or adult whom children can honor and obey—starting from oneself—is something given to everyone.

And I believe that the essential condition for making the most of that opportunity is “in the Lord,” “in Christ,” “in the Holy Spirit.”

As we learned last time, the Word, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord,” is spoken to wives, but the responsibility for that Word becoming reality lies with the husbands. Likewise, the Word, “Husbands, love your wives as your own bodies, just as the Lord loved,” is spoken to husbands, but the responsibility for putting that Word into practice lies with the wives. In the same way, the Word, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, honor your father and mother,” is addressed to children, but I believe it is an important intention of this Word that we remember the responsibility lies with the parents and adults.

Originally, the original Scripture of “Honor your father and your mother,” in Exodus chapter 20—the Ten Commandments—was not spoken to young children, but to adults who had already come of age, was it not?

In other words, the important message hidden behind the words “Honor your father and your mother” is that we, the adults and parents here now, are to seek **in the Lord** to become parents and adults who children want to obey and want to honor—on an equal level with the command for children to honor their parents.

The intention of this Word is not that parents forcibly impose or children push responsibility onto parents, but rather, the important point of this Word, I believe, is exactly the **mutual** submission and **mutual** love “out of reverence for Christ.”

And there, the promise of blessing is given: “That it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

## **Part Five**

After this, in the response hymn, we will sing the praise song “You Were Born to Be Loved,” but this praise was originally created in Korea. About thirty years ago, many young people from Korea began to come to Japan for short-term missions during summer vacation, and they themselves translated the song into Japanese and sang it in churches throughout Japan where they were sent. That was the beginning.

So at first, there were a few different Japanese versions, but after a few years, the current Japanese translation became established.

And more than anything, God greatly used and blessed this praise, and at one time, there was even a movement to sing it together at the New Year’s Eve “Kōhaku Uta Gassen” (Red and White Song Battle).

It was ultimately rejected because it is Christian music, but still, it’s surprising, isn’t it?

The person who created this song is now a pastor, but I have heard a testimony that, though it is outwardly said to have been made for a friend’s birthday when he was a young man, in truth, it was made with a heart of prayer, thinking of his father—wanting to forgive him and love him with the love of Jesus.

It is said that his father was what we might call a “toxic parent,” as mentioned earlier.

A father who indulged in alcohol, became violent, and did not fulfill his responsibilities as a father—this pastor continued to hate such a father for a long time.

However, God revealed to him the reality that he could not forgive his own father, and he struggled with that.

And in prayer, with tears, this praise was given to him, and through this praise, he was led to forgive and bless his father.

I was shocked to hear that there was such a behind-the-scenes story.

Until then, I only had the image of a happy praise sung with lots of smiles and joy, blessing someone—but in truth, I came to know that it is a song filled with pain, steeped in resolve, and that it blends in the desire of a believer who wants to fully live out their faith “in the Lord” and be sincere before God.

It is a song made with the heart of clinging to the Word of God shown in “Honor your father and your mother,” trusting in the promise of happiness in God’s Word, and praying with that belief.

Ever since learning this, when I sing this praise, instead of just singing with joy and smiles, I have come to sing with a somewhat solemn feeling.

## **Conclusion**

Since we are born as human beings, every person has parents.

There are good parents and bad parents. There are parents who have both good and bad sides. There may be more parts we see as bad than good, or perhaps there are more good parts than bad.



I believe it is true that there are many kinds of parents, but remembering that all of them are weak human beings who need to have their wounds and pains healed in the Lord, and yet are still our parents—we want to keep praying that we, as children, may be given the right actions to take.

If possible, I hope that, holding onto the words of blessing in the praise “You Were Born to Be Loved,” we can pray for our parents.

And I pray that we, as adults and parents, may become those whom children want to honor and obey—and that we may pray for that with humility.

Let us pray.

**Benediction: Ephesians 6:1**