



Theme – PG: Parental Guidance Needed

“PG – Permanent Grace”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, April 15-16, 2023, at Summit Church, Durango

VIDEO PG Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “PG – Permanent Grace”

Today we begin a new series of sermons For anyone who is investing in the lives of the next generation, whether it be your own child, a grandchild, a grown child, a nephew or niece, or anyone that is in need of guidance. I remind you that Jesus did not have any children of his own and yet on several occasions in the gospels invited children to come and sit with him so he could bless them. I would suggest to you that each of us is called to care for those who are younger and in the next generation and that is one of the values of our church. I saw this poem many years ago and thought it was an appropriate way to start this new series we are beginning on parental guidance and what it is we need when it comes to the scriptures and the teachings of Jesus.

***Child raising theories did abound,
Before my children were around,
Then one day I had my own,
Now, all those theories I disown.

Energy was once my friend,***

***Now I am at my strengths end.
Fortune gone, the fridge is clean,
My child has now become a teen!***

We laugh a bit at those words, but they also remind us of several truths in today's world. First, there is no parenting book that covers all the bases and gives us everything that we want to know because it seems like each generation creates **new rules for parents** as we face new realities. Second, investing in the next generation takes **work and sacrifice**. We're going to discover that Jesus and the scriptures speak into both challenges.

Another challenge is captured in this phrase I found on several occasions from different authors. ***The days are long, but the years are short.*** I found this was so true when it came to our own children. On the front end it feels like we have plenty of time and we go from one exhausted day to another, and then we blink, and they are 10 years old, and then 15, and then they are driving, and then they are gone, and then for many of us, they return! We wonder if our children are ready. We worry about whether we shared with them everything they need to know for the life that sits out in front of them. I think one of the reasons they often return is because there are several things we often fail to teach our children, and God is giving us another chance, but that is always challenging the second time around.

I remember when we adopted our children in Ukraine and this terrifying moment of being left by our translator at the airport and wondering how in the world we were going to do this thing called parenting. I couldn't believe they were trusting us with these two children because the first thing we did as parents was watch them both fall over when they tried to use an escalator for the very first time and they wrote it upside down the entire way up. My wife and I looked on in horror and wondered what the security guards were thinking and those at the passport check area at the top of the stairs. We spoke no

Ukrainian and they spoke little English and we were sure that every person watching us was judging us.

Maybe some of you remember that day when you were handed your child for the first time or you realized that there was someone depending on you. I remember one father telling me how silly it was that the hospital staff placed them in a car with their child for the first time, shut the care door behind them, and waved as they left the parking lot. How could they think that somehow they were going to be able to do this without someone from the hospital going with them? What were they thinking? I believe we all feel ill equipped in those moments and my hope is that this series of sermons will be encouraging. I should begin by being honest and telling you that I am not a perfect parent and I have learned mostly by failing and making mistakes. I will share with you some things I have learned and some things I think the scriptures teach us about parenting, but feel free to take what is helpful and question everything!

What I realized in that moment when we brought our kids home into our house for the first time is that just because I have parents doesn't mean I know anything about being a parent, especially for children from another country who we've adopted and brought to a new land, having very little knowledge of their background. And just because I was a kid once doesn't mean I know how to raise one! Do some of you remember the terror and the excitement all wrapped into one when you realized you were responsible for a child?

Tami and I stumbled through the parenting experiment and we're like sponges soaking up all the parenting advice we could get, going to conferences, watching videos, and reading books. My wife and I both served as youth pastors before we adopted our kids and so we also had an advantage and that we saw lots of parenting that showed us both the pitfalls and the joyful moments of what it would be like. One of the things I do know from being a pastor all these years and seeing

hundreds of families is that no matter how children come into your life, there will be uncertainty and challenges. There will be things that you control and things that are totally out of your control.

The one constant I saw in parents that seemed to be doing a great job was that they maintained their relationship with their children from the infant seat to the driver's seat. Nobody has a plan to undermine the relationship with their kids, but I saw disconnect and brokenness between parents and their teenagers and adult children, and I saw parents who navigated their children into adulthood and had beautiful relationships which seems to be the key when it comes to parenting in today's world. There did seem to be several patterns that we saw emerge from parents who maintained strong relationships with their kids, even though they often couldn't name them out loud or specifically.

SLIDE Fewer Rules

This blew my mind, but the parents who seemed to maintain strong relationships with their children through middle school and high school and into adulthood had fewer rules and not more rules than those who struggled with their kids, and whose kids were always breaking the rules or not following them. It was interesting that kids that were often struggling seemed to always be on restriction or grounded or in time out because of something they had done. I noticed that many of these students never seemed to get any better when it came to behavior that was expected by their parents. Those parents who maintained strong relationships with their kids through middle school and high school and into adulthood rarely, and sometimes never, used grounding or restrictions as a tool for parenting.

We also find this is true in the scriptures as Jesus came to build relationships with those who seem to be breaking the rules during the 1st century and invited them to live differently because of a

relationship he wanted with them. You might remember that Jesus summarized the 613 Jewish laws and rules and boiled them down to two things.

BIBLE

³⁷ Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Jesus made it clear that he wanted a relationship that was built on love of God, others, and yourself. He didn't want us having to memorize a bunch of rules or be punished because we didn't follow the rules, which is why Jesus went to the cross, to take all of the broken rules and broken relationships so that we wouldn't have to bear that burden. This biblical idea is at the heart of our relationship with God and with others and even with ourselves. We'll come back to that in just a minute.

SLIDE No Fear

The second pattern we see in parents who maintain good relationships with their children throughout their lives is that that you're not afraid of teenagers or adolescents or their children. If you don't have kids that you might not get this, but as parents it is easy to become afraid of our children. When we fear our children for whatever reason, they become in charge of the relationship. We often fear the rejection of our children and that puts tremendous pressure on parents to make the relationship work. Fear can never be the cornerstone of any healthy relationship and yet it often takes center stage when we're not careful. Fear in any relationship will make it unstable. Parents who are not afraid to discipline their children because they know it won't damage their relationship, have a much better time guiding their children into adulthood. We'll come back to this idea of discipline later

and what makes for healthy discipline and what is unhealthy.

In his first letter, John writes these powerful words in 1 John 4.

BIBLE

¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.

Love is what binds our relationships together, both with god and with others and with our children, and fear of punishment in particular is what drives a wedge between people and generations. When people are afraid of God or their parents or their children, those relationships will never bear fruit.

SLIDE Focused on Strengths

The next pattern I noticed is that parents that seemed to be successful in guiding their children into adulthood helped their children focus on their own strengths and interests, rather than things that interested the parents or weaknesses that parents felt the children needed to get better at. Instead of the athletic dad or mom insisting their kid be like them, parents stood back and became students of their children and watched what seemed to interest them. They asked questions and they encouraged their students to experiment with different activities. They didn't force their children in different academic areas or insist they get certain grades. they did push their children to do their best, but saw them as well-rounded human beings and not so focused and so pressured that their children felt anxious and couldn't come to them when they failed or something wasn't working out. They invested in the natural flow of their children rather than forcing them into something they were not.

We have all seen what happens when the opposite happens and kids are forced into something into which they are not gifted or interested. Maybe that is your story, where you had your own interest

but your mother or father forced you into something that interested them instead. I often visit with adults today who still say their parents are disappointed they are in a certain career or followed a certain path that brought them joy because it wasn't what their parents wanted for them. Do you want to guess what their relationship is like with their parents now that they are adults?

Once again, we find a biblical correlation to this way of relating to our children as one of the main images that the apostle Paul uses when he talks about followers of Jesus is that we are the body of Christ and we each have unique gifts to bring to the world that are given to us by God. He writes these words in 1 Corinthians 12.

BIBLE

²⁵ This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

This scripture points to another truth when it comes to our children and investing in the next generation as we understand that each of us has certain gifts and none of us has every gift. The parents who seemed to maintain a strong connection with their children through adulthood resisted the temptation for their family to do everything and for their kids to participate in every activity and every sport. Instead, they focused on what was most important. They left room in their lives for margin and time to relax.

SLIDE Focused on what was most important.

They didn't fear their children missing out. They prioritized relationships over experience. They prioritized their relationship with their kids and their kids with each other over doing everything and being worried that they were missing out. In today's world, whether it's because we're busy on Facebook or some other social media app or watching everybody else enjoy life on TikTok or feeling like we have to

watch every single streaming show that's a hit, we lose focus and we miss out on each other. Specifically, they focused on experiences that would give them time together then on things that would take them in a million different directions, going 1,000,000 miles an hour.

Finally, the last thing that seemed to be apparent in families where parents and their children had strong relationships into adulthood was that the adults took care of themselves and were striving to be healthy. They weren't perfect, but they were seeking to be healthy in their relationship with others and in their relationship with God. Often this was a healthy marriage and, when a marriage had ended, the adults prioritized maintaining as healthy a relationship as possible through the divorce.

SLIDE Healthy Adult Relationships

I realized that for some of us, we might stop taking notes right now because we are discouraged. We are discouraged because we feel this might be unattainable depending on the state of our marriage or other relationships in our household or our life. I was tempted to actually leave this out of the sermon just so it wouldn't derail things for any of us. It's easier in some ways to separate parenting from what is happening in the adult lives of the people in our household. It would be easier if we could just focus on the children and how to get them straightened out, but it actually begins with us. This points to the uncomfortable tension that is inevitable when we talk about things like parenting or marriage or any intimate relationship.

SLIDE Tension between what is IDEAL and what is REAL.

What is ideal often feels out of reach and so we want to keep it out of sight. As a result, we sometimes avoid the conversation altogether because of what is real in our lives which is that all of our families are imperfect. The irony is that there is not one great example of an IDEAL nuclear family in the Bible, so we as followers of Jesus

should be very comfortable having this conversation. The Bible is our go to source for real world family dysfunction. From the very beginning of the book of Genesis we read about sin and brokenness entering into the world because of that first married couple BEFORE THEY EVEN HAD KIDS! They immediately started blaming each other for their problems and while we don't know much about their kids we know that one of their sons murdered his brother because they were jealous.

Just about every Old Testament story involving a family is bad. Actually, you could say that every family in the Old Testament is horrible and so dysfunctional that we wonder why we included them in this holy book which is meant to tell us about God and God's relationship with us. Why are these stories included? They are included so that we could actually be really good at taking into account what's really going on in many families in our world. We should be excellent at taking into account anything that's going on in human families because our text, our book, is full of bad examples.

What's so fascinating is that the authors of the New Testament embrace the broken families of their past and then point us towards an IDEAL of what could be in our human relationships. They did this because of a very important truth, that if we remove the IDEAL from the equation because it feels out of reach for our generation then it will not be possible for the next generation either. Part of our responsibility as parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles and friends and neighbors who follow Jesus is to give the next generation something to aim for which can be more than what we have experienced. Isn't that what we want? Don't we want the next generation to have it better than we do?

Jesus was the master at teaching in the messy middle, between what is real and what is ideal. Remember that Jesus is born into a human family and his beginnings were humble and painful and difficult and very real. We celebrated last week that he experienced the worst

the world had to offer and then offered his life for what could be ideal. The gospel story is about Christ dying for our sins and then being resurrected so we would know the worst thing is not the last thing, in our families or in anything we might experience in life. The gospel assumes brokenness and that we are going to get it wrong. The gospel assumes what is real in our world while points to what can be ideal. We remembered last week what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 about the Gospel and purpose of Jesus.

BIBLE

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

God showed up in the person of Jesus in a disordered world that felt very real in order to point to the ideal that God dreams of for everyone. Remember what John tells us about the Gospel in maybe the most famous verse in the New Testament in John 3.

BIBLE

¹⁶ “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

Which world did God so love? It wasn't paradise but was this real world in which we live today. God came into your world and my world and this broken, less than ideal world. The tension between ideal and what is real is imbedded in almost every single one of Jesus' teachings and interactions with people in the world. Jesus would often start his teachings with...

SLIDE The Kingdom of God is like...

Jesus would then tell a story that seemed outrageous like a merchant searching for pearls, which none of them had or would ever have. The disciples would quickly remind him that this was not the Kingdom of God but the real world! Jesus would take teachings they had all heard before and take them one step further and make them very uncomfortable, like in Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, his central body of teaching.

BIBLE

²¹ “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ ²² But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

The people who heard this would have heard the first part but not the second one and that would have made them very uncomfortable. It may have even made them feel bad about themselves because they weren't living up to the ideal but instead were living in the real. They didn't want Jesus to say things like that anymore because it was too unrealistic to expect people to live that way. Jesus consistently pointed beyond the lowest expectation to the ideal of what it would be like if we followed him and would live in this way. This is constantly giving us something to live up to and to live into that will lead to life.

But then, when he ran into people who didn't live up to this expectation, unlike the religious leaders of his day, he did not condemn them. In fact, Jesus usually condemned the condemners, and then, he would go to the cross for the condemned. Instead of lowering the standard, Jesus turned up the grace and made it permanent. There is nothing you or I can do to deserve it or fully live up to it, it is simply a gift that we are invited to receive so that we can then live up to the ideal.

SLIDE Permanent Grace

Jesus made every one of us a murderer and then went to the cross so that we could be forgiven. Jesus often turned up the expectations so high so that we all know that none of us is perfect and we all fall short. Religious leaders tried to trap him with his own words during a discussion about divorce. In Jesus' day, women couldn't get divorced, but men could leave women for just about any reason they wanted to if they felt like moving on. Jesus raised the marriage standards so high that he slammed the door on men's opportunity or to wiggle out of their responsibilities and abandon women in their families. Jesus raised the bar so high and made the ideal seem so far away that the disciples responded with these words of exasperation in Matthew 19.

¹⁰ Jesus' disciples then said to him, "If this is the case, it is better not to marry!"

They were basically saying, "Jesus, you made it sound so permanent. This is so unrealistic. Things happen and people change." Jesus made it clear that this is why he came, to offer forgiveness and grace and mercy. Of course, Jesus was against divorce because it causes pain and hurts people. Divorce leaves broken lives and wounds and families in pieces. When the religious leaders asked Jesus what he's gonna do about divorce people then, Jesus replies like he does to every other question about broken people.

SLIDE "I'm going to give me life for them!"

SLIDE Permanent Grace

That is Permanent grace. This is why we follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior because none of us, if we're honest, live up to the ideal that we hoped for in our lives whether it is about parenting or marriage or any other relationship. This is the beauty of the gospel. This is the reason why, if you've walked away from faith, perhaps it is time to reconsider. Jesus never waffled on the truth and he always turned up

the grace which is permanent when none of the scars of our past are. John captures this in his gospel in the opening words which are poetry meant to capture what he witnessed as he watched Jesus interact with broken people and offer them grace, and at the same time point them towards the ideal of what life could be.

BIBLE

¹⁴ So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

Jesus did not give us more rules and regulations from afar but instead came to earth to navigate our broken world and point us towards the ideal of what life could be in the new family of Jesus. He entered into our reality with us and showed up in human form.

SLIDE “unfailing love and faithfulness” = grace and truth

Jesus came to be the perfect balance between grace and truth. Jesus was fully grace and fully truth. Jesus was all grace and all truth, all the time. Jesus came to love us just the way we are and loved us enough not to keep us there but point us towards the ideal. Truth without grace creates pretenders and hypocrites. Grace without truth leads to deeper brokenness that hurts everyone. Grace and truth together, as personified in Jesus, is powerful and life changing. Jesus lived in the tension of the messy middle and brought together what our lives are really like with what they could be like and will be like in the Kingdom of God.

Yes, this is difficult and challenging to live out, but it is what we who are followers of Jesus Christ and seek to be his presence in the world seek to do. It's why we love God and love others and then seek to share that good news of the truth and permanent grace. As the Church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ, we are called to live in this tension as we comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, being the conscience and the comforter to those who are hurting. A properly

informed conscience is what keeps us from losing our way and keeps us moving towards the ideal instead of being satisfied with the brokenness and the pain. Our conscious reminds us when we are moving into dangerous territory and may find ourselves in a place of hurt.

SLIDE Healthy Adults Raise Healthy Children

Healthy Adults who understand this tension between grace and truth raise healthy children and invest in them in ways that help them to know the boundaries and the limits and also know grace when those boundaries are limits are exceeded. While communities can help create an atmosphere where we can do this together, it is adults investing in the lives of the next generation which has the most positive effect. When healthy adults are not raising children and some sort of home where there is grace and truth, what happens is that we then depend on the schools or government agencies or orphanages or other people in ways that typically don't lead to health.

GRAPHIC The Hope Effect

I had the opportunity to meet a few weeks ago with Joe Durago who lives in Pagosa Springs and helps lead the organization The Hope Effect. Millions of orphaned and vulnerable children around the world are growing up without the love of a family. But there is clear and compelling research on the damaging effects of traditional, institutional orphan care. Children should not grow up in orphanages...kids do best when they are raised in families. The Hope Effect is changing orphan care by providing innovative family-style care, which allows every child to flourish and thrive. They are going into countries and finding tremendous success in helping those countries transition from institutional care to family care because we know that is what works best in the life of a child.

GRAPHIC Lucy – Chihuahua, Mexico

Joe gave me several of these cards telling stories of some of the children they have worked with.

Lucy was placed in an orphanage because she was not being properly cared for and had suffered violence in her biological family. At three years old, Lucy had developmental delays and poor physical and emotional health. The orphanage was not equipped to provide Lucy the support she needed to work through the traumatic events of her past. She went through a failed adoption because her behavior was deemed uncontrollable. Thankfully, she wasn't sent back to the orphanage. Our team in Chihuahua, Mexico was contacted, and Lucy was placed in family style care. Through the love of a family, Lucy began to heal. Today, she is a different child – a sweet playful little girl. Lucy was recently adopted by her forever family, and she is happy, healthy, and thriving!

Every once in a while, we all need to be reminded of what should be and what could be, not just for us, but for our children. Every once in a while, we all need to be invited back into the tension between grace and truth, between what is ideal and what is real. When it comes to parenting, being in a healthy family matters to children. Having healthy adults who are seeking to live in the tension between grace and truth is critical.

Andy Stanley tells the story of Rick who grew up in a family where there was alcohol and violence and horrible dysfunction. He talked with an uncle who told him about how to put himself into the foster care system. His uncle cashed his next Social Security check and then he and Rick took a cab to social services where Rick opted out of his family and into the system. He spent some time in an orphanage and then was placed with the family and said that for the first time ever he saw people sit around a dinner table and eat without drinking and screaming and throwing things. He saw parents bring home paychecks and provide for their family for the first time ever. He saw parents embrace their children and tell them they were loved for the first time ever. He then said these powerful words about that experience.

SLIDE “I just needed to see it to aim for it.”

“Once I saw it and experienced it, I knew what I wanted at 13 years old. Until then I didn’t know that such a thing even existed. Once you see it, you can't unsee it. Once you see it, you can't forget it.” Many of you have brought children into your home through foster care or adoption and given them a picture of something they didn't even know even existed. Millions of children each day won't aim for an ideal because they have no idea that it exists. They have never seen it or experienced it and have no idea that it's out there. Thank you if you have done that for children who have no home and thank you for those of you doing that in your own home with your own children. We all need to have an ideal, even as we live in the real world, because that is where Jesus lived and where he invites us to each and every day.

My hope and prayer for us as a community of faith and as individuals who are raising children in many different ways is that we would create families and communities where we can have...

SLIDE Fewer rules (have fly in)
No fear
Focus on strengths
Focus on what's important
Healthy adults
Grace and Truth

These things can help us cast a compelling vision for the next generation regardless of where our lives have taken us. Every one of us has shortcomings as a parent and if we are willing to leverage those and learn from them and become healthy ourselves, we can point the next generation, our children, to what is ideal and a future with hope and grace and truth. Let's have the courage to aim for ideal in the midst of what is real and paint a picture for our children to live better lives and create a world which looks more like the Kingdom of God. Let's not steal the dream of family from our children but instead help them

dream of what that family could look like. Let's live and parent and follow Jesus through the tension of what is and what could be. Let's remember that Jesus came and lived among us and was full of grace and truth, unfailing love and faithfulness.

SLIDE **Prayer**

Gracious God, you know each person sitting here and you love them more than they can imagine or believe. You love us when we are broken and when we are whole. You love us right where we are in the tension between what is ideal and what is real. Help us not to be afraid to live in that tension ourselves and to discover your grace and truth as we seek to invest in the next generation as parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, counselors, friends and neighbors. I pray you will fill our hearts with your hope, unfailing love, and faithfulness as we become healthy adults that paint a picture for the next generation. In your holy name. Amen.

April 15-16 Order

1. Ely welcomes people. ***Today's message focuses on the most important part of being a parent AND faithful follower of Jesus, and that is being before doing, accepting God's permanent grace so we can share that with others.***
2. Two songs.
3. Jeff welcomes.
 - a. QR code.
 - b. Invite people to greet each other, however we are comfortable.
4. Announcement Video
5. Sermon and Prayer
6. One Song
7. Prayer and Lord's Prayer
8. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Easter Offering and Missions)
9. Care Ministers (If any are present)
10. Basecamp after Saturday and 9 AM Sunday
11. Closing Prayer
12. Guatemala Mission Team and Africa Team Table with Thomas Agutu after 9 and 10:30 service