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WHY I WENT TO A LUAU Ephesians 6:1-9

Some years ago humorist Dave Barry wrote a column on the work of Dr. Ian Kelly of the University of West England. Dr. Kelly was working on a robot that when perfected would power itself by catching slugs and using them as fuel. He called his invention Slugbot. The robot would detect slugs, scoop them up with a long arm and put them in a drawer. It would then use a chemical process to convert the slugs into electrical power. Barry wrote, “Dr. Kelly’s goal is for Slugbot to be able, without any human assistance, to catch slugs, turn them into energy, then use this energy to proceed with its mission, which is, well, catching more slugs. If that sounds pointless to you, ask yourself this question: In what significant way is Slugbot’s lifestyle different from yours?”

Do we do anything more than just work to keep ourselves going so we can work, to keep ourselves going? Surely we need to have more of a point to our lives than that. In order for us to have a life that’s about more than that we will need a big time shift in how we see life. In an unexpected way you will see what I mean as we look at Ephesians 6:1-9 today.

SUBMISSION IS KEY IN THE HOME

The theme in this section is submission. In 5:21 Paul had said, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” He is expounding on that theme. That principle comes into play in every situation in which we relate to other people. Paul could have written an entire book showing how that principle comes into play in the many different relationships we encounter. In 5:22-33 he wrote about how it applies to wives and husbands. Now, in the beginning of chapter 6, he tells us that the same principle applies to the relationships of children and parents. He will go on to discuss how it applies to slaves and masters. That doesn’t show up directly in our society, but it has implications for when we are slaving away at that salt mine job.

The first part is not very surprising. He tells children they should obey their parents. He says literally, “this is righteous,” or “this is just.” It is the right and reasonable thing to do. Paul started with the command to “obey” parents, then in verse 2 he said we must “honor” parents. When children are young and living in their parents’ home they are to obey their parents. They should do as the parents say, even if the only reason a parent can come up with is “because I said so.”

But a time comes when children have grown up and have launched independent lives. In the day when Paul wrote that often would have been in their late teens. Today it seems like it's getting to the place where it's in their early 30's in some cases. There was even a movie about that called *Failure To Launch*. We know of people who literally have a 33 year old adult child who is still living in their basement. However, that is not the norm. When that child becomes independent he or she no longer must do whatever the parents say. But the command to submit to parents still applies. At that point what it means is they still must honor their parents. Still treat them with respect. The adult child may not do everything the parent says, but they are not to be rebellious. Rather they must treat those parents with love and respect, even if they must disagree.

One of the classic moments in parenting is when your 4 year old says to you, "that's not fair." That is a moment rich in absurdity. What does "fair" mean to a 4 year old? It means "I get what I want." If I don't get what I want then that's not fair. A 4 year old simply does not have enough knowledge, experience, maturity and wisdom to understand and determine what "fairness" actually is in a given circumstance. That's why parents sometimes respond to that complaint, "Life's not fair." What they are really saying is, "I cannot explain to you what is really fair because you are not yet able to understand and accept it."

The problem with childhood is that in our culture that inability to even be aware of one's lack of wisdom and maturity actually tends to get worse as kids get older. Many teenagers have no doubt that their parents are at worst dimwitted and selfish, and at best just archaic and anachronistic. They are totally out of it, and the teenager is certain that he or she knows so much better than those old fogey parents how life should go. Unfortunately just as the 4 year old doesn't have the wisdom to know what is fair, so the teenager doesn't know what is best either.

Have you ever noticed when you rent a car that the rental agencies require that drivers be at least 25 years old? Not 16, when they can get a driver's license, not 18, when they are legally adults, and not 21. No, they want them to be 25. I find it slightly funny that neuroscientists are just now catching up with those companies. The rental companies somehow knew long ago something that neuroscientists have just determined in the past couple of decades. It is that human brains aren't fully developed until we are 25. The last part to be completely developed is the prefrontal cortex, which helps us organize, plan, and use good judgment. It has been discovered that teenagers actually think differently than adults. I know, that's sort of a "well, duh," but I mean they literally, physically use their brains

differently. It seems teenagers operate a lot of the time out of their amygdala, which is a key part of the reward and pleasure system and involves the emotions, while adults use the prefrontal cortex. That's why the promise to young people is if you obey your parents it will go well with you. You are going to make much better decisions if you listen to your parents who have the good judgment that you lack, because they have the full use of a part of their brain that is not yet fully functioning in you. Sometimes parents see what their teenagers do and wonder if they are completely brainless. Not completely, but partially, they are. So young people, obey your parents.

But parents also must submit to their children in a way. The way they are to submit is to not exasperate them. That seems like a problematic instruction. My experience both as a parent and now as a grandparent is that first our kids and now our grandchildren got exasperated a lot. There was no end of ways we caused them to be upset and frustrated.

Recently we were driving with our two granddaughters in the back seat. We were talking about the names of some of the streets in San Clemente where they live. Ella, for some reason, really likes the name of a street called Camino De Las Ramblas. She likes to say it. But I mentioned this street and discovered that for some reason she doesn't want me to say it. She likes to say it and she likes it when Laurie says it, but she adamantly did not want me to say it. "No, Yapaw, don't say that." So I said, "Well can I say Camino De Estrella?" Distracted, she said, "No, Yapaw, you're breaking my heart." Apparently I was exasperating her.

So we are never to upset children, but always let them do whatever they want? After all, we don't want to exasperate them. Laurie and I once went out to dinner at Chili's restaurant. We were seated across the aisle from a large table at which there were two women having dinner accompanied by their 78 children. Okay, there weren't 78. There were just 5, but it seemed like 78. Actually it seemed more like 178. They were near the end of their meal, fortunately, but their table at that point looked kind of like those towns in the south that have been hit by big tornadoes. The devastation was literally indescribable. The kids themselves, the human tornadoes that had wreaked all that devastation, were loud, insistent, demanding, annoying and totally out of control. They were climbing all over the booth and the table, bothering other patrons, fighting with each other. The noise level they produced was ear splitting. At one point one of them laid down in the middle of the aisle and just stayed there. The wait staff of the restaurant had to either step over or around her to get to their tables. The moms, did nothing. They just let it all happen.

They made zero effort to calm the storm. Have to let their precious kids do what they wanted, right? After all, they wouldn't want to exasperate them. When they finally paid their bill and left there was visible relief on the faces of everyone in the area. I said to our server, "Wow, it got a lot quieter in here after that group left." She said, "You have no idea," and then gushed out all the frustration over the difficulty those kids had caused her. Is that the price of not exasperating our children? You exasperate everyone else?

No, that's not what Paul meant. The opposite of exasperating kids is to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." The same word translated "bring them up" is used in 5:29 and translated "feed and care for." Another translation could be "nourish." So Paul said instead of exasperating your kids, nourish them in the wisdom and instruction of the Lord. It means making an effort to teach them and discipline about how the Lord would have us live, which includes loving others and having consideration for them. It means making an effort to teach them how to be loving people.

In his book, *A Father For All Seasons*, writer Bob Welch told of an incident in the life of his son, who was in 7th grade at the time. His boy was playing baseball in a league for 12 and 13 year olds. The problem is at that age there can be great disparity. Some of those 13 year olds would turn 14 during the season and have already hit that growth spurt of those adolescent years, while many of the 12 year olds are still little boys. Welch was in the 3rd base coaches box when his 12 year old, 4 foot, 9 inch son, Jason, came to bat. On the mound was a man child more than a foot taller than his boy, a guy throwing blazing fast balls. The first pitched rocketed past his son for strike one. The second pitch scorched across the plate for strike two. The poor boy was clearly overmatched. The third pitch accidentally came right at Jason. He turned and fell to the ground in an attempt to avoid the screaming fastball as his helmet flew off and his bat went flying. The ball seemed to skim his shoulder. The umpire said, "Take your base." Welch said he was happy just to see his son alive, much less getting a free base. But as Jason stood up and collected his equipment he said, "It didn't hit me." The ump said, "Take your base, son." Welch wrote, "Our fans were most likely thinking the same thing I was thinking. Take your base, son. You've been wounded, soldier, your war is over. You're going home." But Jason insisted, "Honest, it didn't hit me." The umpire looked at the infield ump, who just shrugged. Then he said, "Okay, then the count is one and two." Jason dug his cleats in the batter's box. The huge pitcher went into his windup and fired another bullet right down the middle, a pitch that surely would send Jason back to the dugout with a strikeout. Instead, Jason swung and connected, ripping a screaming line drive to the wall in left centerfield, and ended

up on second with a stand up double. The crowd roared. The manager of the opposing team was standing a few feet away from Welch and did not know Jason was Welch's son. He spit out a sunflower seed, slowly shook his head and said, "Man, you gotta love that."

All good parents want to see their kids succeed like Jason did, both physically in the game, but also in showing integrity like he did. They want to be proud of them. But unfortunately that desire for success can become the focus. They can aim at trying to mold their kids so they succeed or make the parents proud. That's a subtle focus shift that can easily lead to exasperating their kids. In effect their parenting becomes more about themselves and proving something through their kids than about loving and teaching their children. At some point the kids will begin to sense their parents' love is dependent upon their ability to perform.

Parents can exasperate children by not giving them attention they need. They can exasperate them by being inconsistent in their discipline and parenting, so the kids never know what the rules are. They can exasperate them by being demanding and failing to affirm the kids. They can exasperate them by never disciplining them. They can exasperate them by being harsh, by having love that is conditional. To submit to their children parents have to avoid all of those errors. They have to love their kids the way our heavenly Father loves and cares for us.

Recently Toby and Anna were at our house with their 2 little girls. Ella had been playing with some My Little Pony figurines we have. Toby had picked up one of them. When Ella noticed this she wanted to get it from her Dadden. But Toby played a little keep away from her. It didn't take long before she began to get very frustrated because she really wanted to get that little pony from him, and he kept laughing and keeping it out of her reach. Her frustration hit a peak, nearing tears level because she felt helpless. So she trotted out the big gun. She said to Toby, "The Bible says you need to listen." Oh, the Bible says. Can't argue with that. I think she was the one who had heard that the Bible says you are supposed to listen, which it absolutely does in this passage. But when Toby didn't immediately relent she tried again. She said, "You're being mean, and the Bible says you have to be nice to kids." At 3 years old she's already learned to use the Bible to get what she wants. But the truth is, the Bible does say that right here in this passage. You are supposed to be nice to your kids and not exasperate them.

SUBMISSION IS KEY IN THE WORKPLACE

Submission also comes into play in the work place. Paul tells slaves they are to obey their owners, to respect them with sincerity. He tells them to serve

wholeheartedly as if they were actually serving Christ himself. That would make for a much higher standard than people typically operate under. We know how much Christ loves us and what he has done for us. Responding to his love would surely make us serious in our efforts to serve him. Furthermore, he knows the truth about us and is not fooled by our attempts to look better than we actually are. So if a slave served his owner the way he would serve Christ, there would be no pretense, no slacking off, but genuine best effort from the heart at all times.

Human beings are naturally expert at creating an image or a front that is better than we really are. Years ago in my former church there was another person who worked for the church, an individual I knew for many years and who seemed to be a very good friend. Every interaction I had with this person, and those interactions were frequent, occurring on a nearly daily basis, this person communicated friendship and positive messages to me. But toward the end of my time there another friend warned me that the reality with this person was not what it appeared to be. He said this individual actually had been doing damage to me for quite some time behind my back. I doubted him at first, but I eventually learned that he was right. From the way that person related to me there was no way I could ever have known what they apparently really felt about me or what they were really doing. I came away from that experience amazed at how duplicitous people can be, and how good they can be at appearing to be one thing while being something entirely different.

People can do that in the workplace. All of us have seen it. We've seen the person who is good at appearing to be the ideal employee when the boss is looking, when in fact they are a disaster area. Paul calls on slaves to never be that guy, but to be the best we can be, to give the best effort we have within us.

Pastor and author Tim Keller tells of a man he knows in New York City. His name is Mike. He came to this country from Croatia. He works as a doorman at a Manhattan co-op building where about 100 families live. Mike is exceptional at his job. He is invariably cheerful, knows the names of all the children in the building, helps residents and guests alike unload their cars and find parking spaces, keeps the lobby area looking pristine and generally is incredibly diligent at every aspect of the job. He does this for the professional people who live in the building, people who mostly would find the job he does beneath them. Yet he is kind, respectful and friendly to them all continually. When asked why he works so hard at this job every day he says part of the reason is he is grateful for the opportunity he has in this country. But then he says, "It's just what I need to do to be able to look at myself in the mirror...I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do my best every day."

But Paul also says that masters must treat their slaves “in the same way.” In other words, in a sense they must submit to their slaves by relating to them as they would to Christ himself. So that means they would need to treat them with kindness and respect, never being harsh or cruel to them. They must always be fair and patient just as Christ is. In fact, they must look out for the best for their slaves as Christ does for us.

IMPLICATIONS

ADOPT A WHOLE NEW PARADIGM

I suspect you have been bothered by something as I’ve gone through this passage, wondering why I have not said anything about it. You quite likely are concerned about why Paul didn’t address the matter of slavery. As I have sought to apply this passage to our context, the closest we can come is at work, how employees and employers treat each other. But that is a far different matter from slavery.

Why didn’t Paul tell slaves to rise up against the injustice of slavery? The even bigger question is why didn’t he tell masters that owning slaves was wrong and they should set them free? Why did he make no comment whatsoever about the injustice of slavery as an institution? Why did he not make some effort at social change?

A high percentage of the population in Ephesus was made up of slaves. One estimate I came across that I think was probably high was that as much as two thirds of the population were slaves. The slavery in first century Rome was not as awful as that which existed in our nation prior to the Civil War, but it still was a matter of one human owning another as property that could be bought and sold, and that’s just wrong. But the puzzling thing is that in the entire New Testament that issue is never addressed at all. Peter merely said much the same to slaves as Paul did in this passage. In 1 Peter 2:18-19, “In reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters; not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.” Wow, it is a good thing to bear up under unjust suffering to serve God? That’s all we have for slaves?

Not once does the New Testament ever rail against the injustice of slavery! The closest it comes to saying anything about it is in 1 Corinthians 7:21. “Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you – although if you can gain your freedom, do so.” That’s it. Hey if you’re a slave and you have the chance to gain freedom you should do that, otherwise, don’t worry about it.

As I said, part of the reason for this is that ancient slavery was not the same as slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries. Slaves typically would be paid wages just like employees and could gain their freedom after 10 years or so. But another part of the reason Paul did not address this as a social justice issue was it was not his primary concern. He understood that you could change a person's circumstances, make their situation much better, and that would do nothing whatsoever for the central issues of their lives. Changing circumstances could not deal with the spiritual issues, nor could it change their hearts, make them more joyful, loving people, bring them peace and enable them to honor God.

What every human needs most is to be forgiven, to be connected to God, to have a life full of meaning and purpose, to experience peace and joy, and to be able to give up self in order to love others. We need to be loved unconditionally. And we need to have the hope of eternal life. If a person was a slave and had all of those things, that person would have life, would be full of life and joy. But if a person was free, even wealthy and powerful, and did not have those things, he or she would be miserable. What we all need is a source of overflowing, full life that is completely independent of our circumstances. And there is no circumstance on earth that can give us that life.

Our focus most of the time is on our circumstances. We pray that God will give us healing from the disease we have, he will give us the job or career we think we need, he will provide the finances we want, and so many other things like that. But none of those can bring us forgiveness. None of them can give us the hope of eternal life. None of them can connect us to God. And none of them can give us meaning, peace, hope, joy and make us able to love and serve others. If, in fact, those spiritual things are the sources of real life, then the things we tend to focus on are actually a diversion from what really matters.

We need to see the world differently and think differently. We need to remember that the core issues in life are spiritual. While we were on vacation recently Laurie and I did something we've never done before. We went to a luau. I know, all the times we've been to Hawaii and we've never gone to a luau? How is that possible? Everybody who goes to Hawaii goes to a luau. Well, not everybody. We had never done that because we knew what the show is and what the food is, and we just have never been interested in spending the time and money to go to something we were pretty sure we would not enjoy much. But this last time we went to one. Why the change? It just so happened that Dylan and Amy Burcombe were also on the Big Island when we were there. Amy played at a wedding there, and their stay overlapped ours by one day. We all wanted to get together on that one day. They

really wanted to go to a luau, as it was their first time to go to Hawaii together, and this was their last night there. And they wanted us to go with them. We said, “Sure, we’ll go because we want to be with you guys.” Honestly, the food was fine, nothing special, and pretty much what I expected. The show was exactly what I expected. The whole experience was the reason we’ve never gone to a luau before, because it was all right, but not worth the cost. If I never go to another one I’ll be quite happy. But here’s the thing. The circumstances of the evening, the food and the show, were not the point for us. If it would have been amazingly good that would have been cool, but it would not have changed anything. It would not have made the evening more of a success. It was a joyful successful evening for us because the point was to get to enjoy being with Dylan and Amy, and we got to do that. The rest of it was kind of irrelevant. And that’s what was going on with Paul here. What is the point of life? It is to honor God. It is to live as full, meaningful, peaceful and joyful a life as possible. It is to love others. And none of those things have anything whatsoever to do with our circumstances.

Do you get tied up in knots about politics? Here’s a news flash. Politics is 100% about circumstances. That means it is not about the central and most important issues of life. So if you’re interested in that, go ahead, be involved, but don’t see it as the core of life, as what you are all about, as something that will impact your ability to live genuine life. Do you get stressed out about finances? News flash number two. Finances are 100% about circumstances. They can never bring you hope, meaning, joy, peace or love. They can’t bring you forgiveness, or God’s love, or give you eternal life. So be smart about your finances, but realize this is not what life is all about. It is not the core of who you are.

AIM AT A NEW TARGET

Notice verse 6. Paul told slaves, “Obey them (your masters) not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.” According to that verse, what should be the goal of our lives? It is to do the will of God from our heart.

Slave or owner, parent or child, husband or wife, single or married, rich or poor, black, white, brown or any other color, this is the goal of life. It is to do God’s will from the heart. As Paul said in verse 7 that means doing it whole heartedly. To do it with our whole heart means holding nothing back. It means diving in head first with reckless abandon. It means pursuing it passionately, enthusiastically and with dogged determination and persistence, never quitting. It is saying, “Today, my life is about doing God’s will, and I have no other agenda. If I come to the end of the day and everything has gone wrong, it’s one of the worst days of my life in terms

of circumstances, but I have done the will of God, then I will be happy. I will have succeeded.”

In John 6:38 Jesus said, “I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me.” We should follow in his footsteps. When we flew home from Hawaii our trip started with a flight from Maui to Honolulu on Hawaiian Airlines. But then we flew back to the mainland on Delta Airlines. Because we booked the trip with frequent flyer miles these were on different reservations. But we had a bag we had to check through. It carried our tennis rackets, snorkel masks, shoes and other items too big for our carry on bags. When we checked in I asked the Hawaiian airline agent to transfer our bag to Delta airlines in Honolulu. She said they couldn’t do that. Excuse me, but how hard is it to take a suitcase off a plane, send it over to Delta and have them put it on another plane? That is not rocket science. We had 2 and a half hours in Honolulu for them to manage that simple task. I pointed this out to the agent. Didn’t matter. They couldn’t do it, she said. Well that’s not quite accurate. The problem wasn’t that they couldn’t do it, but that they wouldn’t do it. This meant we had to get off our flight in Honolulu, go to baggage claim, get our bag, then go to Delta and check the bag in there, then go through TSA again after having already gone through it on Maui. It was going to be a real hassle. I was frustrated and wanted to vent my frustration on this woman. My circumstances were not what I wanted them to be. But what is the goal of my life? It is not to have the circumstances I want. If they had taken care of my luggage as I desired, it would not have brought me forgiveness. It would not have made my life meaningful. It would not have connected me to God. It would not have given me eternal life, filled me with peace and enabled me to love and serve others. It just would have made life a bit easier. So the goal of my life in that situation still needed to be to do the will of God with all my heart. And that meant treating that airline agent with respect and kindness, along with the other airline agents and all the TSA people, including the one who located the electronic reader that Laurie tried to sneak through security in my back pack. Actually he was very nice about it. The point of it all is to do the will of God, and that changes how I approach just about everything in life. If we have this attitude, it is going to change us into an entirely new kind of people that the world is not going to completely understand. It is going to change us into people who experience life as God intended us to have. Let’s aim at doing the will of God with passion, with our whole heart, every moment of every day.