

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

March 11, 2018, Pastor Jeff Harrison

Ambassadors at Home

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

I. Introduction:

A. BFAH Series – Ambassadors

Good morning friends. I'm excited to continue our Building Faith at Home sermon series. God's Word, in places like Deuteronomy chapter 6, Psalm 78, and Ephesians chapters 5 and 6, shows that home is an important place for spiritual nurture and mission. So Building Faith at Home is one of our church's values. We want all our homes, living with others or alone, married or unmarried, kids or no kids, to be loving, Jesus-centered homes.

So we're looking at the amazing truth that every Jesus-follower is an ambassador. In other words, we represent Jesus to others. We saw it in our memory verse this morning, we're ambassadors. Now a government ambassador is a representative in a foreign land, seeking good relationships with the local people and to speak on behalf of his or her home country.

And if your home has any Christians, it's an ambassador's home for King Jesus. We have the privilege of representing Jesus, inviting friends to join us as part of the worldwide, eternal family of God. Wow!

Pastor Dave kicked off our series by sharing some ways our homes can represent Jesus. Ambassadors "outward", representing Jesus to our neighbor next door, at school, at work, as so many of you faithfully do. And sometimes we even get to represent Him around the world. As we gather today, Chappy Dave from our church family is representing Jesus in the Dominican Republic, and we've got a team of 5 Jesus ambassadors in Chile this week. Manuel, our Spanish Ministry Pastor, describes that team's purpose as, "To lift up the name of Jesus; advancing the kingdom of God and walking firm in our calling; to bring lasting hope; spreading the love of God through conversations of hope, creative music, and compassion. The harvest is coming." Amen!

And then last Sunday we talked about how our homes must know our King if we are to represent Him well. So we've got to be in conversation, listening to His Word, the Bible, and responding with our words, prayer. Ambassadors "upward", conversing with our King.

Today is about being ambassadors "inward", representing Jesus in our home [and how appropriate after a child dedication]. We'll focus on parents representing Jesus to their kids. But

even if you have no plans to parent or have not yet met Jesus, God's Word speaks to you this morning too. So as we begin, let's ask God to help us all take a "next step" with Him...

B. Background on 2 Corinthians 5

If you've got a Bible, open to the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. If you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers. 2nd Corinthians is written by a major church leader named Paul to the church in the ancient city of Corinth, in modern day Greece. The Corinthian church was no model church. They had many struggles and sin issues, the kind of church that shows us more what not to do.

And so the Corinthians, like the church today in our struggles, needs to remember the resources and calling we have as Jesus' ambassadors. So the Apostle Paul does that here in 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

II. Our King richly resources (2 Corinthians 5:14-19)

A. Parenting brings challenges

Please follow along in your Bible or on the screen as I read starting in verse 14, which says:

¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Now parenting has incredible blessings, but it's not for the faint of heart. Parents face really hard things, and as we are ambassadors in hard places, it helps to remember how Jesus richly resources us in that messiness. And if you don't yet know Jesus, I'm so glad you're here to hear what God's Son wants to be in your life.

B. Jesus richly resources parents

Look back at verse 14. Here we remember that Jesus loved us enough to die for us, a compelling love. He chose to take on humanity and experience the hardships of our sin stained world, even choosing to be nailed to a cross and take the wrath we deserve for all our sins. Verse 14 tells us the good news that one, Jesus, died for all.

And when you come to Lord Jesus, trusting that He died for our sins and rose from the dead, verse 17 says you become a new creation in Christ.

So parents as you face things like lost sleep, potty accidents, temper tantrums, unique needs, unending bills, troubles at school, sibling rivalry, bullies, a lack of appreciation, injuries, smart aleck comments, regrets, addictions, illnesses, an overwhelming to do list, your children's rebellion, let's pause and remember how our King has made us new creations in Christ.

That, as verse 15 says, Jesus rose from the dead, displaying His victory over sin and death, to gift us with solutions to our biggest problems. As verses 18 and 19 say, our sins no longer counted against us. Our once utterly broken relationship with God now healed because Jesus acted on our behalf. Parents, we are new creations in Christ, God's Spirit in us, helping us to know and represent Him.

III. Our King gives a sacred calling (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

A. Jesus forgives and calls despite our flaws

It's a sacred calling. Listen to how verses 18-20 say it,

¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

In these verses Paul is not just talking about himself as a big-time church leader. No, he says, "God gave *us* the ministry of reconciliation... that *we* are Christ's ambassadors". The messed-up Corinthians and us parents in our messiness, we represent Jesus.

As I talk with Christian parents, I see healthy reflection on how we can better represent Jesus, and godly sorrow over how we've hurt our children. But I think I also see some unhealthy guilt, even condemnation, some of which is not even about sin issues, guilt over things like feeling we didn't breast feed long enough.

So when we mess up as parents, and we've all failed, and also when we're just being too hard on ourselves, let's receive the good news. It's right there in verse 19, God's not counting people's sins against them. God's not counting your parenting sins against you.

Just to be sure we're straight, we weren't called as ambassadors in the first place because we're so wonderful. Jesus gives us this sacred calling because He is wonderful. Look at what verse 21 says God has done for us in Christ, it says:

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

It's the greatest exchange of all time, and when I struggle with parental guilt, I've got to see verse 21.

"God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us." Jesus treated as if He committed our sins, bearing the penalty we deserved on the cross. So Jesus took your sins, they're totally removed from you, as the Bible says, "as far as the east is from the west."

And Jesus also shares His righteousness with us. As verse 21 says, "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." So it's not just that your sins are removed and you're neutral before God. No, you're connected with righteous Jesus, He lived His perfect life on your behalf.

So no matter our failures, we've been washed clean, and today is a new day. We can't change our past, but we receive, by grace, that our identity is not "divorced dad who doesn't live with his kids" or "mom struggling with an addiction" or "parent who doesn't feel they're measuring up". The devil would love for us to stay in that place of condemnation.

B. Parents really are Jesus' ambassadors

But Jesus took our sin, and in its place, shares His righteousness with us! And by His grace, we can start new patterns with our kids today. You can begin by apologizing to God and your kids. And then seek God's help in growing as an ambassador. All the while marveling at how God is not counting our sins against us, how we share Christ's righteousness, and how God gave us this ministry as ambassadors. God's Word says it to us in verse 20, we are Jesus' ambassadors.

And your kids and your grandkids really need you to represent Jesus. And one way you do that is by giving them a front row seat to how much you need God's grace and how His grace is changing you.

And if your kids have not yet trusted in Christ, you get to invite them to be reconciled to God. And if you'd like help sharing the good news of Jesus with your kids, we've got a resource out in the foyer. Big Thoughts for Little Thinkers: The Gospel, by Joey Allen. It's geared for

kids ages 4-7, so if you've got a kid or grandkid of that age, take a free copy and share the greatest news of all time.

And if you aren't sure you understand the gospel yourself, this good news of Jesus I'm talking about, please take a copy. It's clearer than I am. It explains the gospel simply, in sentences a child or English learner can understand, and it has Bible verses. So if you'd like help understanding the gospel, please take one as our gift to you, and I'd love to hear what you think about it.

Now parents, even once your child follows Jesus, they still need you to represent Jesus to them. And like an ambassador for a country, we communicate about Who we serve. If the American ambassador to Greece is talking with the Greek government, the look on his or her face communicates, as does word choice, and tone of voice. It all communicates about America because the ambassador is the physical representative of America there in Greece.

And parents, you are Jesus' physical representative in your home. You are the look on His face to your kids, the tone of His voice, the touch of His hand.

I heard pastor and author Paul Tripp discuss this at a parenting conference. That as Jesus' ambassadors, in everything we do with our kids, we are to represent Jesus' message, methods, and character, to be a beautiful picture of Him.

So, to give an example, when it's getting late and my child disobeys, am I more concerned that they're breaking God's law, or making things inconvenient for me? Is my attitude more, "I can't believe you did that" or "I get how you got in this mess because I mess up too"? Is my discipline more about trying to control my child through fear, manipulation, or trying to help my child see their need for God's grace and power and walk in His ways. Thinking less about what my kids better do for me if they know what's good for them, and more about what God wants for them in that moment.

One tool Paul Tripp shares with parents to help kids see what's in their heart and their need for your parenting and God's grace is a set of questions. Tripp came up with the questions after his boys were arguing about toys and he realized he needed something better than, "Well who had it first?" Tripp came to that realization one morning watching one of his sons touch every toy in the playroom and then proclaim he had them all first.

So Tripp came up with five questions to help his kids see what's in their heart and thus their need for help and grace. They're on the screen and they'll be on the website later this

week. He shared about the questions using an example of a time when his young son hit the other one for taking the truck he was playing with. To help his child see what's in his heart Tripp first asks.

1. *What was going on?* Tripp starts by trying to understand what took place and listening. His young boy said, "He took my truck." Then Tripp asks:

2. *What were you thinking and feeling as it was happening?* With this question he's inviting his child to look inside. His son said, "Mad." Then Tripp asks:

3. *What did you do in response?* With this question he's trying to help his son start to see how his actions flow from what's going on his heart. His son says, "I hit my brother." Then Tripp asks:

4. *Why did you do it?* With this question he's trying to help his child see what he was trying to accomplish. His young son says, "My truck." Then Tripp asks:

5. *What was the result?* Now he's trying to help his child own the harvest of his actions. His son says, "Trouble".

You can use these questions, or something else, but the point is to help your child see what's going on his heart. And by God's grace, through these conversations, your child grows in their awareness of their need for your help in guiding them, and much more importantly, their need for God's grace and help in their life.

In my good parenting moments, I at least kinda like how Paul Tripp frames those times when our children sin in front of us. Tripp calls them "moments of grace", opportunities from God to be His ambassador; God using you as a tool of His rescue and transformation in your child's life.¹

Now you don't have to parent for very long to know how hard this is. We've got to keep returning to verses 14-15, which say:

¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

The love of Jesus is essential to being His ambassador. It's why we've been talking about the incredible ways Jesus resources us. His sacrificial love compels us, as verse 14 says,

¹ Paul Tripp 2017 Conference *Parenting: Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*.

helping us to live the hard truth of verse 15, that we are no longer to live for ourselves as parents, but instead for our gracious Savior.

C. Chandler illustration shows the high stakes

He'll help us live out our calling as we look to Him, His Word, and His people for help. The stakes are high as ambassadors. Of course, we can't ensure our child walks with God. We talked about that last Sunday. We know adults who grew up in loving Christian families who currently deny Jesus, and we pray for them and love them and remember their story isn't over yet. And we also know adults with no faith background who now follow Jesus.

So we all depend on God to work in our kids. Yet God still calls parents to be His ambassadors at home, working powerfully through our imperfect efforts. I recently heard a message from Pastor Matt Chandler that shows the high stakes of our calling as ambassadors. Chandler pastors a mega church in the Dallas area that has partnered with Fuller Seminary's Youth Institute. So Chandler is learning about Fuller's most recent research on young people and faith and shared it recently in a sermon. It didn't make me all warm and fuzzy inside, but I need reminders, in the busyness of life, of the importance of helping my kids see what's most important. Here's what Chandler shared:

“Here's what we learned. There's data now to back this up. Kids are not being secularized in college. They're being secularized at home before they're sent to college by well-meaning Christian parents who can't tease out the value balance between sports, activities, and the gathering of the people of God.

They just get disoriented by it, and I'm watching it even play out in my children's peers... I can use my son as an example. My son loves football. He loves basketball. He *loves* it. He is disciplined around it. He is eager for it. Sometimes he doesn't want to come to church, but guess who doesn't get to decide that? Reid!

Do you know why? Because he is 12. I don't let him choose what he gets to eat, or he would eat terribly. I don't let him choose what time he can go to bed. I don't let him handle a firearm whenever he wants to. Do you know why? Because I'm Dad, and I love him. I have a long view for his life that at 12 he couldn't possibly fathom.

What ends up happening... I'm telling you. I have a front-row seat to this right now because of the age of my kids. I just hear these nonsensical things from moms and dads. “Oh,

you know, just trying to get them out of bed on Sunday morning is just like a whipping. I just want to give him the freedom to kind of figure this stuff out.”

Would you do that in any other area of your kid’s life?... Can you imagine going and trying to wake up your kid for school at whatever time you have to wake them up and them just going, “I’m not feeling it. I’m not going”? “Oh, okay. Well, never mind then.”...

Listen. I’m for you. I’m not against you. I’m not trying to shame you. To parent this way... This is what’s true about the data. Half-hearted obedience to Jesus Christ in this generation leads to full rebellion against him in the next...

Now I’m dedicated to as best I can (and I don’t control it) helping my children see and understand what is of supreme value and what’s a good gift.... Football is a good gift. Basketball is a good gift. Softball, soccer, band are good gifts but terrible gods. They’re terrible gods!”²

IV. Conclusion

A. Our King richly resources us for our sacred calling

“Helping my children see and understand what is of supreme value and what’s a good gift.” We represent Jesus to our kids, so let’s keep it up and keep growing. Who you are in Jesus and what you do matters to your kids. It matters that you’re there for them, extend grace to them, listen to them, pray with them, love them, play with them, teach and discipline them in godly ways, apologize to them, receive God’s grace and extend it to them, and help your kids to see “what is of supreme value and what’s just a good gift.”

Thankfully, Jesus resources us for this sacred calling. Our Savior living for us, dying for us, and rising from the dead to make us new creations in Him. Adopted by God, our parenting sins no longer counted against us, counted as righteous through Jesus’ work.

Gifted with His Word and His Spirit to help us no longer live for ourselves. Ambassadors not in our strength, but in our weakness, living in dependence on God’s power, crying out for help in our need.

B. Let’s help each other represent Jesus

And God also gifts us with His people. Stephanie and I can’t represent Jesus to our kids alone. So let’s be a church where we support our parent ambassadors. Speaking a needed word of encouragement, praying with a parent for their struggling child, helping everyone’s kids feel God’s love here. A place where experienced parents humbly share what they’ve learned, when

² <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/enter-the-story-of-jesus>. Accessed March 8, 2018.

advice is desired. A place that remembers and celebrates that Jesus forgives all our parenting sins. A place where we believe that God can go great things through parents and kids as we depend on Him.

What a lifeline we can be to each other, no parent alone. Not only impacting the parents and kids of this church, but all the people our kids will impact, over their lifetimes, as they serve as Jesus' ambassadors.

Godly impact with all the kids our kids grow up with. The countless people they'll touch as adults over a lifetime at work, and with all the friends they'll ever have, and with all the people they'll live next door to. The church they serve. If they get married and have kids, the godly impact on their spouse and kids and grandkids. Our kids have so much capacity for influence, so let's be the kind of Jesus ambassadors that they need, showing them what's of supreme value, and what's a good gift.

Let's pray...

Dismissal – Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.