

PARENTING

Our Duty, God's Grace

Both the Old and New Testaments have seminal passages on parenting that are our jumping-off point for understanding what God has called parents to do.

In the OT – **Deuteronomy 5:32-6:9**

In the NT – **Ephesians 6:1-4** and **Colossians 3:20-21**

JOHN MACARTHUR JR. (Ephesians, 308) - “When the other teachings of Scripture supportive of those verses are studied and applied, every parent and every child has all the foundational information necessary for godly and harmonious family living.”

I. OUR DUTY AS PARENTS

A. The What

While not specifically mentioned in these passages, it goes without saying that care for a child's material needs (provision and protection) is a fundamental duty of parents. However, the emphasis of scripture's instruction falls on the duty of caring for our children's spiritual needs. Scripture defines these as twofold – instruct and discipline.

FRANCIS FOULKES (Ephesians, 173) – “The discipline and instruction of the Lord is that which the Lord is able to bring into the life of a child if parents do their work of teaching and training in the Word of the Lord. This is the highest duty of Christian parents. As Dale puts it, ‘parents should care more for the loyalty of their children to Christ than for anything besides, more for this than for their health, their intellectual vigor and brilliance, their material prosperity, their social position, their exemption from great sorrows and great misfortunes.

1. Bring them up in the instruction of the Lord

In Ephesians the word used for instruction means to call attention to, mild rebuke and warning; the shaping of the mind through teaching. It is instruction that is not primarily academic but moral. The goal is to develop character and values.

A. SKEVINGTON WOOD (Expositors, 82) - “What Paul is referring to here is training in righteousness. ‘Instruction’ (*nouthesia*) is correction by word of mouth. Remonstrance and reproof are implied, but also advice and encouragement.”

Interestingly, Deuteronomy doesn't limit this instruction to only the commands of God (6:1) but includes also his character (**6:4-5**). In fact, instruction regarding His commands was to be founded upon instruction regarding His character. (See also **Exodus 20:2**, **Deuteronomy 4:9**) Our children's ability and motivation to obey God's commands is directly proportional to their

understanding of His character, and increasingly so the older they get. To fail to teach both the character and commands of God, including the gospel, is to put our children in danger of legalism and behaviorism.

Why? Teaching God's wonderful character inspires our children to love Him, which is the primary command out of which all true and lasting obedience springs. If you simply impose requirements, you are not giving your children what they need to fulfill those requirements. We too often start with rules and regulations and expect that our kids (especially unsaved ones) are somehow going to have the desire and ability to obey them. It simply won't work. Your children must be motivated to holiness and mission by their love for God and not simply by rules and regulations.

A.W. TOZER (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1) – “What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

J.A. THOMPSON (Deuteronomy, 122) - “Israel's obedience was not to spring from a barren legalism based on necessity and duty. It was to arise from a relationship based on love...It was love toward God and the remembrance of all His past mercies that moved men to obedience.”

2. Bring up in the discipline (training) of the Lord

In Ephesians the word for discipline means to nurture, educate and train, especially to train and control by inflicting punishment for the purpose of perfecting moral character.

There are times, because we are by nature fools and sinners, when instruction is not enough, when further reinforcement is necessary. Because foolishness and sin is “bound up in the heart of a child” (**Proverbs 22:15**), it is difficult to get rid of.

DEREK KIDNER (Proverbs) - “God's wisdom is not lightly picked up nor lightly imparted.”

B. The How

The how of parenting is to teach and model at home in a way that doesn't exasperate. Both the father and mother make unique contributions to this process.

1. Teach – includes the instruction and discipline mentioned above.

2. Model

Deuteronomy 6:6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

1 Timothy 4:16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

There is a prerequisite here. It (“the words) must first be “upon your (the *parents*’) hearts”. Our love for God, our obedience to God and our mission for God can’t just be external but must be internal.

WILLIAM FARLEY (*Gospel Powered Parenting*, 107) – “Kids internalize their parents’ passions. They alone see what or who you really love, and not what you merely pretend to love... When parents practice what they teach, God gives them moral authority in their children’s eyes. All teaching in the Bible starts with example.”

ED MOLL and TIM CHESTER (*Gospel-Centered Family*, 18) – “Often our true values are revealed in the expectations we have for our children. On Sunday in church we sing about how knowing Jesus is the greatest thing. But our priorities and hopes for our children suggest that what matters most in life is educational development, career development, social development, skills development.”

Our example is a critical element in our children’s instruction. This doesn’t mean that we must do everything perfectly, there are no perfect parents - but that we must present an authentic example of what a disciple of Jesus is to be. Your example will either confirm or contradict what you are trying to teach.

Proverbs 20:7 The righteous who walks in his integrity—blessed are his children after him!

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Scripture often connects this modeling to our fear of the Lord, i.e. love, reverence, awe, a desire for His favor and a dread of His displeasure.

Psalm 103:17 But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children,

Psalm 25:12-13 Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land.

Psalm 112:1-2 Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments! His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

J.C. RYLE (*The Duties of Parents*, 30) - "Instruction, and advice, and commands will profit little, unless they are backed up by the pattern of your own life. Your children will never believe you are in earnest, and really wish them to obey you, so long as your actions contradict your counsel. Archbishop Tillotson made a wise remark when he said, ‘To give children good instruction, and a bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head to show them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand, and lead them in the way to hell...Fathers and mothers, do not forget that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear.’”

3. At Home

Deuteronomy 6:7-9 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

How are you hoping your kids get this? Deuteronomy commands daily interaction with your children centered around life at home. The most time in the most crucial years of a person's life are spent with their parents. The foundational training in vision and values, character and theology, etc. is primarily entrusted to them - not to day care, school, or the church. There is no substitute for personal training at home. Both the father and the mother have a unique role in this training.

Fathers – Fathers are to be the head of their home. While duties are shared, the father is ultimately responsible for what goes on in the home. This is why the primary parenting scriptures address fathers. Sadly, many fathers, even Christian fathers, have abandoned this responsibility to their wives.

CLAYTON BARBEAU - "The notion of responsibility is at the crux of true fatherhood. The conscious sense of responsibility for the physical and spiritual well-being of others is the mark of a true father."

That means that the father is the primary manager and minister in his home. A manager is one who plans, directs, and guides.

1 Timothy 3:4-5 He must manage his own household well.

CHUCK SWINDOLL - "Effective family life does not just happen, it's the result of deliberate intention, determination, and practice."

The father is also the primary minister in his home, the pastor, and spiritual leader of his wife and children.

Mothers – As in marriage, a mother's primary role is as her husband's helper. However, while the basic tasks of parenting are the same, the ways we go about them are different because men and women are different. Mothers have a place in their children's lives that fathers can never have. They carried them for nine months and were their first source of nourishment, in many cases they will be the parent who provides primary care in the child's early years. Every child remembers his or her mother and father differently because of the unique roles they play and the unique grace they have. In general, fathers go off to provide, mothers stay home to care.

Titus 2:4-5 And so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-

controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

DOROTHY PATTERSON - "No one - not teacher, preacher, or psychologist - has the same opportunity to mold minds, nurture bodies, and develop potential usefulness like a mother."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN - "No man is poor who has had a Godly mother."

A note on stay-at-home moms: Society has put a lot of pressure on women regarding their roles. Secular feminism defines women's greatest problem as their male-defined roles as wife and mother. Departure from the role of wife and mother and the establishment of economic and professional independence is seen therefore as the key to women's equality with men. While I don't think Titus 2 commands women to stay at home, it is expressing a biblical priority. A married woman's first priority is to serve those in her home; her best is to go to her home.

There are many reasons to work outside the home: single moms or economic pressures (husband loses job or is underemployed) may necessitate doing so. Or there may be circumstances where employment is more possible - women whose children are older or in school.

My opinion only here: I think, before children, a woman should seriously consider working to help save money for the future or to buy some of the things that will help get your home established, pay off school loans, etc. However, care must be taken to not rely on two incomes. When children come, I would urge each couple to seriously consider the benefits of having mom stay home with their children, especially in the early years. I would suggest this standard – any work outside the home should only be undertaken after first considering its impact inside the home.

A note on marriage: One man said - "A husband and wife are apt to be successful parents when they put their marriage first. Don't worry about the children getting 'second best. Child-centered households produce neither happy marriages nor happy children." The best thing parents can do for their children is to love their spouse. Why? Because a healthy marriage produces security and stability in the home and models a loving relationship for children.

BRYAN CHAPPELL (Ephesians, 3:10) – "The love of one's spouse must take precedence even over the concerns of the children. A parent who pours affection and attention into children at the expense of honoring a spouse may seem to be serving the children, but such priorities actually jeopardize the ultimate welfare of the children. Because God intends for the parents' relationship to bring the reality of Christ's love into the home, a spouse who sacrifices the marriage even out of concern for a child jeopardizes the spiritual welfare of that child."

A note on the church. Although parents are called as the primary discipler in their children's lives, this discipling takes place in the larger context of the church's call to disciple. While parents are primary, you are not alone.

4. Without exasperating

This command highlights the importance of consistent, gracious, affectionate parenting which follows the Lord's instructions in this area. If the atmosphere of the home isn't one of conspicuous love, the good effects of instruction and discipline can be largely undone.

C. The Why

As with anything in the Christian life, it is not just important what we do but why we do it. Understanding the higher purpose behind parenting will serve to motivate parents particularly during the inevitable discouragements that accompany raising children.

PAUL TRIPP (*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 124) – "What is God's goal for your parenting? It goes way beyond clean rooms, good manners, proper dress, the right college, a good career, and marrying well. In all these things God calls parents to work toward something deeper and more lasting. Paul captures it in Ephesians 6 when he calls parents to bring their children up in the "training and instruction of the Lord." This radically changes the parental agenda. Gone is the horizontal focus. The call is to be part of God's work of heart transformation – to help the child change from a self-absorbed sinner to one who loves God above all else. Paul's model of parenting is distinctly redemptive, but when parents forget that moments of difficulty are moments of redemption, they stand in the way of what the Lord is doing."

J.C. RYLE (*The Duties of Parents*, 8) - "Precious no doubt are these little ones in your eyes; but if you love them, think often of their souls. No interest should weigh with you so much as their eternal interests. No part of them should be so dear to you as that part which will never die. The world, with all its glory, shall pass away; the hills shall melt; the heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll; and the sun shall cease to shine; but the spirit which dwells in those little creatures, whom you love so well, shall outlive them all, and whether in happiness or misery (to speak as a man) will depend on you. This is the thought that should be uppermost in your mind, in all you do for your children. In every step you take about them, in every plan, and scheme, and arrangement, that concerns them, do not leave out that mighty question, 'How will this affect their souls?'"

FRANCIS FOULKES (Ephesians, 166) – "Parents should care more for the loyalty of their children to Christ than anything besides, more for this than for their health, their intellectual vigor and brilliance, their material prosperity, their social position, their exemption from great sorrows and great misfortunes."

1. God's glory must always be our primary motivation

2. Your Children's Welfare

Deuteronomy 5:32-33 You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

Deuteronomy 6:3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

The direction, health, and closeness of the parent-child relationship will, in a significant way, determine the outcome of one's life, now and in eternity. If this command ("obey your parents") is not kept, it is probable that none of the others will be kept either. It is a parent's instruction and discipline that prepares one for conversion and obedience to the rest of the commands.

There are **serious consequences** for disobedience. Most children tend to see disobedience to parents as a minor sin. Scripture treats it as a serious sin. It involves not only the immediate sin, but the prospect of future sin and suffering for the one who won't be trained (**Proverbs 5:11-14**). It is so serious that in the OT the death penalty was attached to striking, cursing or being stubborn and rebellious toward parents (**Deuteronomy 21:18-21**).

But also **serious blessings** for obedience. The promise relates to both the quality and quantity of life your children will experience. Nowhere does scripture promise that our children will be saved but there are many promises that our children will prosper if we will be faithful in parenting. In this promise of prosperity, salvation is at least intimated.

Isaiah 65:23 They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.

Psalms 103:17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

3. Your Children's Mission

Parenting can't be compartmentalized. It has to be seen in the larger context of God's purpose for the world in general and for Christians in particular. The dominant theme of the Bible is

God's set purpose to redeem a people for His glory out of fallen mankind. This purpose goes on generation after generation from Adam to the Second Coming.

Our goal has to be bigger than raising nice kids who are well behaved, don't get into any serious trouble, get good grades, and enjoy the benefits of the "American dream." Not that these things are wrong. They just aren't enough.

The promise to Abraham and his offspring was not only to be blessed, but to be a blessing.

CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT (NIBC, 11) - "God's call of Abraham was explicitly for the ultimate purpose of blessing the nations... There was a universal goal to the very existence of Israel. What God did in, for, and through Israel was understood to be ultimately for the benefit of the nations."

CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT (NIBC, 8) - "Deuteronomy is a book for a people on the move, literally at first, spiritually and morally thereafter... It presents therefore, a God of sovereign worldwide purpose and a people with a sharp spiritual mandate and moral agenda... Deuteronomy bends every rhetorical, literary, emotional, and moral skill to the task of equipping and motivating God's people to live for the purposes of God in each generation."

The Great Commission is the way the church is to partner in this great purpose. We are to make disciples for Jesus Christ, and for parents that disciple making starts with their own children. Our job is to train disciples who will then take up this commission and themselves become disciple makers. As parents we must help our children to see that their purpose is not just to follow a certain set of rules but to live a life that brings glory to God and witness (blessing) to the nations.

II. GOD'S GRACE

Children are a stewardship from the Lord. Your children are more than just the product of a biological chance meeting of a sperm and egg. God gave them specifically to you. You are a part of His eternal plan for their life.

Psalm 127:3 Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Parenting is a tremendous responsibility. Children are a terrible (extreme, formidable) responsibility. The tremendous love we have for them, our sense of responsibility, their vulnerability, and the sense of their future in our hands stirs our emotions like nothing else ever can or will. I truly grew up the day my first child was born. There was a life in my care that could not do without me.

Parents face many temptations to anxiety, condemnation, and legalism (it's all up to me). We can think that perfection in parenting is required of us. I didn't raise up in the way he should go, I made mistakes, my child is doomed! Parental perfectionism is crushing and condemning.

A. Parenting is Hard Work - We have to fight the expectation that is it going to be easy. Faithful parenting is not for lovers of ease.

B. Parenting is a Process - Parenting involves patiently applying the principles expressed in the Scriptures. There are no magic tricks or easy steps.

C. Parenting is Beyond our Ability - We are insufficient for the task in and of ourselves, we need God's grace every day. Faith is needed because faith is the way we access daily grace.

1. **The importance of knowing your inadequacy** - Ok, teach me some techniques, some strategies, some methods; I will employ them and that will ensure smooth parenting. Can't do that!! Even if methods were enough we will never employ them perfectly.

2. **The importance of knowing God's all sufficiency** – BOB KAUFLIN – “parenting with God in the picture” – parenting with one eye on God and one eye on our children

Keeping “God in the picture” inspires faith. Is our reliance on some technique or strategy or on the Father?

There are things we can and must do and things only God can do. When we try to do what only God can do (specifically the Holy Spirit who regenerates and sanctifies) we are ruined – exhausted, discouraged, anxious. And our children will pick up the fear and striving and feel the pressure which doesn't serve them in any way. Be faithful to use means but never mistake the importance of your contribution with the importance of God's. Never lose sight of God in the process.

Psalms 127:1-2 Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. ²It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

ELYSE FITZPATRICK and JESSICA THOMPSON (Give Them Grace, 22) – “Although we long to be faithful parents, we also rest in the truth that our faithfulness is not what will save our children. Giving grace to our children is not another formula that guarantees their salvation or obedience. Grace-parenting is not another law for you to master to perfect your parenting of your children.”

ELYSE FITZPATRICK and JESSICA THOMPSON (Give Them Grace, 62) – “God doesn't promise our children's salvation in response to our obedience, because he never encourages self-reliance. It would be against God's character to give us a promise that our children will be saved

if we raise them in a certain way. That would mean that he was telling us to trust in something other than Christ and his grace and mercy. He would be encouraging us to trust in ourselves, and God never does that. The way of the Lord is the way of faith – faith in his goodness, mercy, and love. Our faith is to be in him, not in ourselves.”

PAUL TRIPP (*Age of Opportunity*, 99) – “It is important for us to look at our task as parents from the vantage point of the awesome power of God – the power by which he created the world, holds the universe together, raised Christ from the dead, and defeated sin. Our God is a God of glorious power far beyond what our minds can conceive. We cannot look at our parental responsibilities only from the perspective of our own weariness and weakness. We must remember that we are the children of the Almighty. He *is* Power! He *is* Strength.”

3. The importance of prayer

Prayer highlights our insufficiency and God’s all-sufficiency. I am of the conviction that the most important thing we can do for our children is to pray for them. It’s not the only thing but the most important thing.

CHARLES BRIDGES (*The Christian Ministry*, 178) – “It is faith that enlivens our work with perpetual cheerfulness. It commits every part of it to God, in the hope, that even mistakes shall be overruled for his glory; and thus relieves us from an oppressive anxiety, often attendant upon a deep sense of our responsibility. The shortest way to peace will be found in casting ourselves upon God for daily pardon of deficiencies and supplies of grace, without looking too eagerly for present fruit.”