The
EQUIP
Series

Teach Them Diligently

A Biblical Approach to Parenting

Edited by

Stephen Salinas

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Teach Them Diligently: A Biblical Approach to Parenting

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This book is dedicated to the young families
of Creekside Bible Church.

May God bless you as you seek to honor Him
in your parenting and may He bring your
children to know and love Jesus.

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Introduction

A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO PARENTING

By Stephen Salinas

The Blessings and Challenges of Parenting

Parenting is a tremendous responsibility that can lead to both great joy and great difficulty.

On the one hand, parenting is a blessing because God has entrusted you with another human being to care for and raise. There are a myriad of joys associated with parenting; from the snuggles of a newborn to the delight of playing with a young child to the satisfaction of seeing an older teen become more independent. Truly, there's joy to be found at every stage of parenting. Watching your children grow and develop into adults is a tremendous privilege.

However, since we live in a fallen world, parenting can sometimes be incredibly challenging. Sin has infected everything in life, including child-rearing. What can make parenting so challenging is that it involves sinful parents and sinful children attempting to relate to each other in daily life.

Parenting can also be difficult because of the burden of responsibility we may feel in caring for our children. If parenting could be confined to a series of straightforward tasks, it would be hard enough. However, the situations we encounter with our children can

often be daunting or complex. It can be a challenge to understand how you should lead your children through all the stressful and complex situations that you may encounter in life. For example, what should you do if your toddler is experiencing significant health challenges? How should you discipline and disciple your five-year-old when they're having a meltdown in the grocery store? How do you protect your ten-year-old when they're being bullied at school? How do you respond if you find out that your twelve-year-old *is* the bully at school?

For Christian parents, the weight of parental responsibility may feel even heavier than what non-Christian parents feel. Not only do we need to fulfill the common daily responsibilities of caring for our children physically, emotionally, and socially, but we also know that we need to care for them spiritually. Our children have eternal souls and we have commands from God as to how He wants us to raise them. In Deuteronomy 6:7, God issues the following command to Israelite parents regarding His statutes:

> 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.

As Christian parents, we want to instill in our children the nurture and admonition of the Lord by teaching them about God, the gospel, and the ways of Scripture. We know we need to teach them frequently and diligently, but how can we do that when everything in the world is pushing in the opposite direction?

Thankfully, God has not left Christian parents adrift in the sea of parenting. He has provided us with guidance and empowerment. He has given the Bible to instruct us and the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to navigate the joys and challenges of parenting.

God Has Provided Everything Parents Need

The presupposition of this book is that God has given Christian parents everything they need to parent in an effective way that is pleasing to Him.

The authors of this book believe that the Bible is sufficient for every aspect of the life, including parenting. The believer doesn't need to adopt the methods of the world to effectively parent. In Scripture, God has either directly told us what we are to do or has given us principles that we can implement (with wisdom) to handle situations that are not directly addressed. That means that the Bible should be the ultimate

guide for Christian parents to inform their parenting goals, values, methods, and techniques. While that approach flies in the face of modern parenting experts, we must look to God's eternal truth (and not the shifting sands of popular opinion) regarding the family to both honor Him and parent effectively.

Additionally, God has provided Christians with the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us in our weakness to fulfill what God has called us to do in Scripture. How? He provides assurance of our salvation in Jesus. He gives us strength when we are weak. He illuminates His Word so we can understand and apply it. He guides us in obedience. He convicts us of sin when we're not following what He commands. And He grows us spiritually to produce more spiritual fruit in our lives, such as love, joy, peace, and patience.

The key message that runs throughout this book is that God *has already* gifted Christian parents with all that they need to raise their children in a way that is pleasing to Him.

The Origin and Goal of This Book

The content of this book originated as lessons for an ongoing Sunday morning class for young families attending Creekside Bible Church in Cupertino, California. The goal of this class is to explore what Scripture teaches about all things related to the family. That includes both foundational truth explicitly linked to God's design for marriage and parent/child relationships, as well as truth regarding topics that are implicitly related to the family, such as inter-family communication and family finances. Even if the Bible does not directly address a topic, such as choosing a method of education for your children, we can glean wisdom from the Bible to navigate our freedom in Christ in these and other gray areas.

In this class, we go to the Bible each week to understand what God has told us in Scripture and then we seek ways to practically apply His Word in our lives. That approach corresponds directly with the goal of this book: to explore what God has said about specific topics related to parenting and then to discuss ways to practically implement that teaching within our families.

This book is intended for new parents, seasoned parents, or couples who are thinking about having children. Put simply, this book is meant to serve as a tool for anyone who wants to know what the Bible teaches about parenting and has a desire to obey that in daily life.

The Structure of This Book

This book is divided into two major sections:

I. The Biblical Foundation of the Family
II. Applying Biblical Principles in Family Life

In the first section of the book, we'll explore core truths related to God's design of and expectations for the family. This section opens with an examination of the sufficiency of the Bible for all of life and explains why God's Word should be the authority for the Christian's approach to parenting. This sets the table for the rest of this section which surveys foundational teaching from the Bible related to God's creation of the family. We will review how God created the first man and woman and brought them together in marriage, His commands to husbands and wives, His commands to parents and children, as well as a general theology of what the Bible says about children. This section is necessary to lay the underlying foundational truths of Scripture that the rest of the book can build upon. These chapters should be read sequentially, because without an understanding of the basic truths about God's Word and what it teaches about the family, we can't move on to practically apply these truths in our lives.

In the second and final section of the book, we'll consider how to apply biblical principles to day-to-day family life. We'll explore a wide range of topics related to parenting to understand what biblical faithfulness looks like in the real world. For example, the Bible commands us to discipline our children, but what does that look like in practice? We'll dive into topics as diverse as a biblical evaluation of the influence of psychology in modern parenting to managing family finances to loving our parents and in-laws while building our own independent families. This section seeks to show that biblical principles can be applied to all the varied aspects of family life, even if there is no specific Bible verse explicitly telling us what to do. These chapters can be read sequentially, but the reader can also jump around to specific chapters of interest as the chapters in this section are topical in nature and can stand alone.

As you read this book, remember that application should always be the goal of understanding. As followers of Christ, we don't want to merely understand the content of what Scripture teaches; we want to understand how it applies to our lives and how we can practically obey it. We want to be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

The Authors of This Book

As mentioned previously, the content of each chapter originated as a lesson from a Bible study for young families. It should come as no surprise then that the authors of this book were all teachers for this class. Each author serves as a pastor or deacon at Creekside Bible Church. Additionally, each author is an experienced father. Their experience spans a wide gamut, from those who are grandparents to those who are currently raising teenagers. (The appendixes also have input from experienced mothers and a grandmother.)

Just as each primary author has his own unique experiences, each also has his own unique writing style. Yet, each man loves the Lord and has sought to raise his children in obedience to Scripture alongside his spouse. To a man, each author would say that he has not parented perfectly but is resting in the grace of the gospel and the sovereignty of God over his family.

The Gospel and Parenting

While the Bible is God's standard for our lives, it must be acknowledged that no Christian parent, no matter how committed or well-intentioned, will be able to perfectly parent their children in accordance with Scripture. We are all still sinners and fall short of the glory of God. We *will* make mistakes parenting and we *will* sin in the process. Rather than despairing or feeling helpless when that happens, we need to remember the truth of the gospel.

We need to remember that God sovereignly sent Jesus Christ to rescue us from our sins. As God in human flesh, only Jesus has lived a perfect life. He took our sins on the cross and bore the wrath of God for all who would turn from their sins and place their faith in Him. In His death, Jesus purchased our forgiveness. In raising Himself from the dead on the third day, Jesus has conquered death and provided us with eternal life. We are united with Christ and when God looks at us, He now sees the righteousness of Christ instead of our sin.

As Christians, we can (and should) seek to honor God in our parenting, but we know that our parenting is not the basis for our standing before God. When we fall short in parenting, we don't have to beat ourselves up as punishment for our sins. We can confess our sins to God and find peace and comfort in knowing we are forgiven. We can trust in God's sovereignty over our lives and the lives of our children. We must regularly look to the gospel to experience joy and peace amid the challenges of parenting.

Furthermore, we must regularly discuss the gospel with our children. Rather than teaching them a series of rules and regulations, we must diligently teach them about what the Bible says about salvation. We must teach them about their sin and about Jesus Christ. Our primary goal should not be to raise perfect children; it should be to point them to Jesus.

As you read this book, keep the gospel at the forefront of your mind. While we can't be perfect parents, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can honor God and love our children in our parenting.

Part I:

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF THE FAMILY

Chapter 1

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE FOR PARENTING

By Derek Brown

Is the Scripture sufficient for parenting? It depends on who you ask. Not every Christian pastor, teacher, or scholar will agree with the straightforward statement, "The Bible is sufficient for parenting." The reason for this reluctance is mainly due to the prominence of modern psychology in Western culture.

Psychology is viewed by many as a system of thought and practice that provides people with objective, evidence-based insights and techniques to help us overcome troubling behavior (in ourselves and others), find true fulfillment, and cope with the trials of daily life. Furthermore, some psychological resources appear to help people overcome serious ailments—anxiety, depression, erratic behavior, aggression—so it shouldn't surprise us when believers take an interest in these resources. Some Christians even suggest that if such resources offer genuine help to hurting people, it would be *wrong* to reject them. There is a necessity, therefore—an obligation—for Christians to make use of the valid insights and discoveries of modern psychology.

Christians who take this view of psychology are commonly referred to as "integrationists." An integrationist is someone who believes that to truly help hurting people, the truths of Scripture must be supplemented by the insights and discoveries of modern psychology.

Some of the most influential integrationists in the last three decades have said plainly that the Bible is not sufficient for counseling.[1]

But why mention views of counseling when addressing the sufficiency of Scripture for parenting? Because the concerns of counseling overlap with the concerns of parenting. Take Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) for example. ADHD is one of the most common psychological diagnoses given to school-aged children in America.[2] ADHD is listed in the current version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (*DSM*) and is a mainstay of modern psychotherapy and psychological intervention. Yet, ADHD clearly intersects with the interests of parenting.

Integrationists, therefore, would say that effectively treating ADHD must include the use of psychological insights. If Christian parents are going to help their children successfully navigate the challenges of ADHD, they must be willing to use both Scripture and the resources offered by modern psychology.

But is this a legitimate view? Are Christian parents obligated to utilize psychological insights and discoveries in their parenting? In answering this question, we must first note that modern psychology is not an objective, purely evidence-based science that offers Christian parents time-worn truths about their children. As we will see in chapter 10, secular psychology is a framework for understanding the human person that is built upon naturalistic philosophical assumptions. It is not objective science—it is shaped by an anthropology that is contrary to the biblical view of man.

For these reasons, it is naïve for parents to assume that counsel about parenting is true and useful simply because it comes from a trained professional psychologist. Given the nature of psychology as an academic discipline and professional practice, parents should be *even*

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[1] Stanton Jones and R. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 27. Christian psychologist Eric Johnson argues that common grace—God giving temporal blessings to all people, regardless of their spiritual status—obligates Christians to use the discoveries of modern psychology. Eric Johnson; *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 115. Please see my response to this position in Derek Brown, "On the Use and Misuse of Common Grace in Christian Counseling," in *The Cornerstone Journal of Pastoral Theology and Ministry* (2025).

[2] Melissa L. Danielson, et al, "ADHD Prevalence Among U.S. Adolescents in 2022: Diagnosis, Severity, Co-Occurring Disorders, and Treatment in *The Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychology*, vol. 53, num. 3 (2024): 343-360.

more on guard when they hear plausible-sounding parenting advice from a psychologist (Col 2:1-8).

What Do We Mean by "Sufficient"?

When we say the Bible is sufficient for parenting, we are referring specifically to our child's spiritual needs. Will parents need to consult medical resources when their children are sick with a physical illness? Absolutely. Utilizing the best medical resources available is an aspect of wise, loving, and godly parenting. Learning from others about the biological needs of our children is vital, especially in the child's early months. But reliance upon resources that aid our understanding of our child's physical needs can often give way to prioritizing resources that help us to understand our child's spiritual needs. When it comes to addressing and treating our children's spiritual needs, the Scripture is sufficient.

But we must also answer the question, "Is the Bible sufficient for parenting?" by going to Scripture itself. Before someone claims that the Bible is insufficient for something, it is necessary that we first exhaust what Scripture says about that particular topic before rendering a verdict about its sufficiency.

What Is the Bible?

The Bible is the written Word of God. This is a rudimentary truth, but it is easy for us to take it for granted. It is astounding to ponder the truth that the God of the universe has given us His very words in a book. Where are God's words? They are right here in our Bibles—sixty-six books, penned by men but breathed out by God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 2:21). What wisdom and goodness are displayed by God's choice to give us a written word and deposit those words in an accessible format. By placing His words in a book, God ensured that they would remain fixed and unmovable. We can now read those words, enjoy them, obey them, and use them to settle doctrinal debate. We can carry His words with us and pass them on to others.

Scripture, being God's very Word, is precious to the believer. David said that because the Bible was perfect, true, and pure, it was more valuable to him than fine gold and sweeter to his taste than honey (Ps 19:7-10). Another Psalmist, so enraptured by the goodness and power of God's written word, composed a 176-verse prayer extolling the worth of Scripture (Ps 119). God's Word guides, protects, instructs, empowers, delivers, regenerates, sanctifies, emboldens, and instructs

God's people. It equips us for every good work (2 Tim 3:17) and is more essential than physical food (Matt 4:4; John 4:34; cf. Job 23:12).

It is for this reason that Peter could say this:

> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises (2 Pet 1:3-4a).

We have everything we need for life and godliness because we have access to the knowledge of God and His promises in the Bible. The phrase, "life and godliness" certainly encompasses our work as parents, as does Paul's phrase, "every good work" (2 Tim 3:17). When it comes to parenting, we have everything we need in the Bible.

The Bible and Parenting

The Bible has a lot to say about parenting. Some of it is direct: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger" (Eph 6:4). Some of it comes by way of cautionary tales, such as the story of Eli's worthless sons and their father's parental passivity (1 Sam 2:12-25). Some of it comes in the form of wisdom, as we listen in on Solomon's exhortations to his son (Prov 5:1ff). We learn about parenting as we behold God's ways with his children in the Old Testament (Isa 1:2), and we glean insights as we ponder the various examples—good and bad—of parents all throughout Scripture.

While the Bible doesn't offer us a long-form, systematic manual on raising children like what you would find in your local bookstore, it does provide parents with everything they need to train their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4). The question is, what does the "fear and admonition of the Lord" entail? The integrationist would argue that while the Bible is sufficient to address *spiritual* issues, other resources are needed to address *psychological* issues. This distinction, however, is the result of a profound category mistake.

As we will see in chapter ten, psychological issues are, by definition, spiritual issues. The only difference is that these issues have been relabeled and recast in a naturalistic mold. Psychology is the study of human thought and behavior; it is concerned with the inner workings of a person's mind and their motivations. Yet a person's inner life, motivations, and behavior are the primary concerns of Christian discipleship. Modern psychology is dangerous precisely because it attempts to address spiritual issues from naturalistic assumptions.

When integrationists distinguish between spiritual issues and psychological issues, they reveal that they don't fully comprehend the nature of the Christian life or the nature of psychology as a philosophy-laden theoretical system.

The Bible speaks about the nature of our children's hearts (Prov 22:15; Rom 3:10-12), their deepest spiritual needs (Prov 29:15, Eph 2:1-3), the nature and necessity of discipline (Prov 22:15; 23:13), and the importance of constant biblical instruction (Deut 6:1ff). We are told to train our children in righteousness, discipline them so they might learn right and wrong, instruct them in the truth, and require their obedience (Prov 22:6; Eph 6:1; Col 3:20). The Bible gives parents crucial insight on work, money, romance, integrity, our motivations, the nature of the Christian life, friendship, sexual purity, true joy, suffering, family, the church, manhood and womanhood, and much more. All of this wisdom must be passed down to our children.

Yet, although all of this may sound daunting, the parenting task is simple. Not easy. But simple. God calls parents to love their children, enjoy their children, teach their children God's Word, and discipline their children. That's it.

While someone might fault the Bible for not saying *more* about parenting, the simplicity of Scripture at this point is an expression of God's wisdom and kindness. With these simple requirements, parents are freed from the tyranny of the multiple obligations that modern-day parenting experts often lay upon us.

In a sense, when a Christian teacher or pastor tells parents they need to utilize the insights of psychological experts, these teachers are engaging in a kind of legalism. That is, they are making extra-biblical insights a *requirement* for their basic Christian responsibility to train their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. As a result, they are both burdening parents in ways God never intended, and potentially disabling them from obeying the actual commands of Scripture.

Jesus warns His disciples against this kind of legalism in Matthew 15:1-7. In this passage, we find the religious leaders confronting Jesus about His refusal to wash His hands before eating. God's law didn't require this pre-meal purification, yet the Pharisees viewed it as an extra way to please God, display their righteousness, and distinguish themselves from others. When asked about His neglect of hand washing, Jesus responds by noting the Pharisees' pattern of replacing God's Word with man-made instruction.

> And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, "Honor your father and your mother," and, "Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die." But you say, "If anyone tells his father or his mother, 'What you would have gained from me is given to God,' he need not honor his father." So for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God (Matt 15:1-6).

Along with handwashing, the religious leaders in Israel had also developed a tradition that allowed adults to set aside a certain amount of money that could be designated as "given to God." While this tradition may sound godly, it was a means by which people could avoid providing financially for their parents.[3] God's Word gave a simple command: honor your father and mother (Ex 20:12). This "honor" required both personal reverence *and* financial provision (see 1 Tim 5:4). By adding an extra-biblical tradition, the religious leaders established a way by which adult children could bypass an actual commandment of Scripture. The tradition, then, "made void the word of God." This practice earned the religious leaders one of Jesus' strongest rebukes:

> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt 15:7-9).

We must be careful, then, that, in our attempt to help parents, we are not engaging in a kind of legalism that requires the use of extra-biblical instruction in fulfilling their task to train their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Not only does this place a burden on parents that God never intended, but these extra-biblical insights can begin to supplant God's Word. We must also be aware of the possibility that our fascination with extra-biblical instruction is an indication that our hearts have started to drift from God and his Word. If we start to become enamored with the alleged spiritual insights of a naturalistic discipline and less enthralled with the truth of Scripture, we should take this as a warning that our hearts need some serious attention.

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[3] R. T. France, *Matthew*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 580-81.

Additionally, we must acknowledge that the *amount* of guidance God provides in Scripture regarding parenting does not undermine Scripture's sufficiency. On the contrary, this selectivity of material enables us to prioritize our knowledge. Jeremy Pierre helpfully comments,

> Yet it is precisely because Scripture does not contain everything God *could* say that we must pay careful attention to what he *has* said—it reveals what He intends to be the priorities of our knowledge …. In short, sufficiency is not just a matter of specific information contained in the Bible … but of how those divine words demand a priority of perspective on information *not* contained in the Bible.[4]

In His matchless wisdom, God has only given us a limited amount of instruction and information about our children and the necessities of parenting. But this reality shouldn't cause us to question the Bible's sufficiency, but to adjust our method of parenting to prioritize what *is* contained in Scripture. To say that God's Word is sufficient for parenting is not to say that God has given us everything we *want* to know about parenting; only that which is most important to God and most essential to us for parenting. I may want to know more about the stages of child development, for example, and some of this information may or may not be useful. But my personal desires are irrelevant. What matters is what God has revealed, and this knowledge must fundamentally shape how I approach parenting and assess outside counsel about parenting.

A Test Case for Biblical Sufficiency: Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

In the remaining portions of this chapter, I will use ADHD as a test case to demonstrate that Scripture is sufficient for parenting. As I noted above, ADHD is one of the most common psychological diagnoses among school-aged children. Do Christian parents need the help and insight of secular psychologists in order to effectively parent their children who show signs of ADHD, or is the Bible a sufficient guide

[4] Jeremy Pierre, "Scripture is Sufficient, But to Do What?" in *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World*, eds. Bob Kellemen and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 97-98.

for Christian parents who desire to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord? In what follows, I aim to answer that question.

The Definition of ADHD from the *DSM-5*

We begin by defining ADHD from the most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. The *DSM* says that a child may be diagnosed with ADHD if they have exhibited specific symptoms over the last six months. It is important to note, however, that the *DSM* deliberately uses the word "symptom" because it assumes that problematic behavior ultimately derives from our biology. This assumption fits with psychology's underlying anthropology—that we are unitary, not composite, entities. That is, we *are* our physical selves; we are not body *and* soul. Thus, behaviors are classified as "symptoms" much like you would identify "symptoms" in a patient with a physical disease, such as a cough, lethargy, or chest pain in a patient with lung cancer.

In this way, although ADHD is presented as a medical problem, psychological diagnoses are unlike medical diagnoses because they never identify a root organic cause of the "symptoms." Instead, the "diagnosis" is simply an acknowledgement of a person's symptoms. It is more fitting, therefore, to replace the word "symptom" with "behavior." A child who is having a difficult time paying attention in class is exhibiting a behavior; he is not necessarily demonstrating a symptom of an underlying biological disorder.

According to the *DSM*, an ADHD diagnosis is warranted if a child exhibits the following behaviors over the last six months: he or she fails to give attention to details, has trouble sustaining attention in tasks for play activities, doesn't appear to listen when spoken to, exhibits little to no follow-through on school assignments, often avoids activities that require sustained mental effort (like schoolwork or homework), often loses items that are necessary for assigned tasks, exhibits forgetfulness, fidgets, leaves his or her seat at inappropriate times, runs or climbs when such activity is unfitting, often seems "on the go," is unable to play quietly, talks excessively, blurts out answers, and often interrupts others.[5]

Is There Universal Agreement About ADHD?

Before we address this so-called diagnosis biblically, however, let's first ask a few relevant questions. First, is there agreement among the

[5] *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 59-60.

psychiatric, psychological, and scientific communities about the existence, nature, cause, and effective treatment for ADHD? The answer to this question is a surprising "no." I say "surprising" because popular depictions of psychology and the *DSM* itself give the impression that there is widespread agreement about what ADHD is and how to treat it. In truth, the psychological community is fragmented on these very points.[6]

Although those psychologists who reject the common interpretations of ADHD do not turn to Scripture for help in understanding and treating behaviors classified under the ADHD label, their disagreements nevertheless underscore an important implication: Christian parents should feel no obligation to embrace an alleged psychological diagnosis that is strongly contested among psychologists themselves. We should expect a system built on naturalistic assumptions to suffer from an irreparable crack in its ideological foundation. When working from naturalistic assumptions, one's assessment of human thought and behavior will always be deficient and often self-contradictory.[7] Psychologists are starting to recognize the logical problems that exist within many psychological diagnoses, including ADHD.

Is ADHD a Physical Disease?

We've already alluded to this question above, but I will answer it more directly here. By framing behaviors as symptoms and referring to ADHD as a neurological disorder, the *DSM* gives the impression that ADHD is a physical disease that originates in the physical brain. The truth is that ADHD is *not* a physical disease, and recent attempts to locate it in brain abnormalities have fallen woefully short of proving this hypothesis.[8] The *DSM* concedes that, "No biological marker is

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[6] See for example, Fred A. Baughman Jr. *ADHD Fraud: How Psychiatry Makes "Patients" of Normal Children* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2006); Thomas Armstrong, *The Myth of the ADHD Child: 101 Ways to Improve Your Child's Behavior and Attention Span without Drugs, Labels, or Coercion* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2017); Allen Frances, *Saving Normal: And Insider's Revolt Against Out-of-Control Psychiatric Diagnosis, DSM-5, Big Pharma, and the Medicalization of Ordinary Life* (New York: William Morrow, 2013); Daniel R. Berger, *The Truth About ADHD* (Taylors, SC: Alethia International, 2014).

[7] Please see my article, Derek Brown, "Defining Mental Illness," at With All Wisdom, May 12, 2023, https://withallwisdom.org/2023/05/12/defining-mental-illness-psychiatry-and-psychologys-internal-contradiction/.

[8] Estelle Dumas-Mallet, PhD and Francois Gonon, PhD, "Messaging in Biological Psychiatry: Misrepresentations, Their Causes, and Potential Consequences," *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 28.6:397, (11/12 2020); *Michael Corrigan and Robert Whitaker,* "Lancet

diagnostic for ADHD."[9] The label, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, is merely a naturalistic label placed upon a collection of specific problematic behaviors—a renaming and reframing of spiritual issues already addressed in Scripture.

It is crucial for Christian parents to grasp the significance of this point. If ADHD is not rooted in an organic disease or physical abnormality, then it cannot be classified as a medical diagnosis. If it cannot be classified as a medical diagnosis, then it must be treated with non-medical means. In other words, the behaviors classified under the ADHD label flow from the inner person and thus are under the jurisdiction of Scripture as a *spiritual* issue.

Parents should also recognize the moral implications of rooting ADHD behaviors in the brain. When psychologists classify problematic behaviors as symptoms of a biological malady, they remove moral responsibility for that behavior from the person exhibiting it. According to conventional psychological wisdom, unwillingness to attend to schoolwork, for example, is not laziness: it is the result of neurological imbalances. Thus, the basis for applying moral compulsion to change the behavior is weakened, and, instead of requiring the child to apply himself and improve his work ethic, the burden is placed upon the parents and teachers to accommodate the child's alleged disorder. It is for this reason, also, that medication is often recommended for children who exhibit behaviors classified under the ADHD label.

How Should We Assess ADHD Behaviors Biblically?

We see, then, that the behaviors classified under the ADHD label fall directly under the purview of God's Word. Parents do not need advice from professional psychological experts to effectively parent their children when they exhibit the behaviors the *DSM* identifies as ADHD. Indeed, taking the advice of psychological experts on this issue may

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Psychiatry Needs to Retract their ADHD-Enigma Study," April 15**,** 2017, Mad in America, https://www.madinamerica.com/2017/04/lancet-psychiatry-needs-to-retract-the-adhd-enigma-study/. The most important reason why these studies fall short is that a naturalistic anthropology cannot distinguish between cause and effect when it comes to the interaction between the immaterial self (the soul) and the physical brain. Does a specific brain abnormality cause ADHD, or does a person's brain change because of one's thinking and behavior? Modern psychology cannot answer this question because it assumes that we are only biological entities, not body and soul.

[9] *DSM-5*, 61.

undermine your attempts to train your child in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

First, much of what we see in the *DSM's* description of ADHD behaviors is typical of young children, particularly boys. Overall, young boys often possess high amounts of energy. They love to run, jump, climb, explore, and roughhouse. This is how God designed them. Furthermore, although energetic boys can be challenging for moms and teachers, their high energy should be seen as a gift, not a glitch in the system to be classified as a disorder and modified through medication. The Bible reminds us that, "The glory of young men is their strength" (Prov 20:29).

High amounts of energy are needed for leadership, establishing and growing a business, excelling in sports, attending to difficult scientific and mathematical problems, developing musical talent, and pursuing useful knowledge through diligent study. In other words, boys need lots of energy to do what God has made them to do in this world as they become men. It is no coincidence that history's most successful leaders, entrepreneurs, inventors, musicians, scientists, and athletes have been men with massive amounts of energy.

Second, some of the behaviors listed under the ADHD moniker are personality traits and non-moral weaknesses that differ from child to child. Some children are more forgetful than others. Some kids are better at personal organization than other kids. That's not necessarily wrong or evil, nor an indication of a disorder; it's just an indication that God made us all different, and we each have different strengths and weaknesses.

Third, beyond the behaviors that may be the result of youthful energy or simply due to non-moral weaknesses or personality traits, every single behavior listed under the ADHD label is addressed by Scripture. It is interesting to note that Solomon, in speaking to his son in the Proverbs, exhorts him often to pay attention. "*Hear*, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8). "Son, *be attentive* to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding" (Prov 5:1). "And now, O sons, *listen to me*" (Prov 5:7). Giving one's attention to important matters is a struggle for young men that they must overcome, which is why Solomon so often tells his son to listen up.

At the basic level, a failure to listen is an indication that the heart is not drawn to what is being said. This is not a necessary sign of a neurological disorder, but a signal that a child's heart doesn't treasure what is being taught. This lack of interest may be regarding a particular

subject in school, or, more seriously, in God's Word. Either way, general indifference to a particular topic is a window into the heart and what it loves, not the brain and how it functions. This basic point is easily demonstrated by noting how boys who have a difficult time paying attention in class can spend countless hours watching movies or playing video games. They can rivet their attention for long periods of time on a particular movie or game because their heart values those activities.

Other behaviors can be classified as laziness. For example, it is not unusual for a child to "avoi[d], dislik[e], or [be] reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort."[10] For most people, our initial response when confronted with tasks that require serious effort is to procrastinate engaging in those activities or avoid them altogether. It is true that a child may struggle with certain concepts or not possess certain academic strengths. The answer, however, is not to classify their behavior as a disorder, but to help them see that there are certain areas where they will need to apply greater diligence to compensate for the lack of natural talent. Often, those with less natural gifting who learn to work hard outpace those who merely rely on their innate abilities and never learn how to apply diligence.

However, it is also true that laziness can afflict any child, and Scripture often speaks to this tendency. Again, Solomon reminds his son that material and spiritual poverty always follow the sluggard (Prov 6:6ff; 13:4; 15:19; 21:25; 24:30ff). The lazy person is characterized by an unwillingness to do hard things and work when it is time to work (Prov 20:4). When our children are unwilling to do what they've been assigned to do, we may need to consider whether our expectations are unrealistic. But we should also consider that our children, as sinners, will have a *penchant* toward laziness, particularly when it comes to that which is challenging or does not interest them. Children must be *trained* to pay attention to details, listen carefully, impose order on their lives, remember important items and truths, and bring their bodies under control precisely because these qualities are not natural to them.

Solomon also addresses behaviors such as talking excessively and interrupting others. Excessive talking is a sign of pride (Prov 18:2), a lack of self-control (Prov 13:3; 21:23) that will lead inevitably to more sin (Prov 10:19). Interrupting people is also a sign that we think too highly of our own opinions and are concerned mainly about ourselves instead of others (Prov 18:13). What we say and how much we say is a

[10] *DSM-V,* 59.

gateway into our hearts (Matt 12:34). How we manage our tongues, therefore, is a dominant theme throughout the Bible (James 3:1ff). It is folly for parents to conclude that such behaviors—even when extreme—are somehow better handled by professionals who assess them apart from divine revelation and therefore have no categories for understanding children's inherent sinful tendencies.

Finally, some of the behaviors should be classified as disobedience. I mentioned above that some behaviors are due to a child's non-moral weaknesses or high energy. We should be aware of these possibilities and parent our children accordingly. Concerning high energy, it shouldn't surprise us when we find our children are likely to run and climb in situations where it is inappropriate.[11] But, children must also be trained to control themselves when the situation calls for it. One of the greatest needs for boys and young men is self-control (Titus 2:6). A child who wants to climb on the stair railing at the grocery store does not have a disorder. A child who refuses to stop climbing on the railing after his mom has instructed him, however, *is* being disobedient. The answer in either case is not to conclude after six months of difficult trips to the grocery store that our child has a biological malady, but to train them through instruction and, if necessary, discipline, to obey their mommy, exercise self-control, and climb on the play structure at home.

But in every case, Christian parents do not need the insight and so-called expertise of professional psychologists to assist them in parenting their children. All that they need in terms of instruction and worldview is found in the Bible. The Bible also tells us that parents who desire to train up their children in Christ must locate themselves in a sound local church where they will be taught the Word of God, shepherded by faithful pastors, and learn wisdom from other parents who have successfully raised their own children (Heb 3:12-15; 10:24-25; Titus 2:1ff). The practical insights and ideas that some Christians claim can be found in psychological counsel are found, rather, in the community of faith, the body of Christ, among parents whose lives are saturated with the Word of God.

Conclusion

Let this be an encouragement to you. Scripture is sufficient for the task God has laid before you. Children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps 127:3). They are precious treasures entrusted to us so that we might

[11] *DSM-V*, 60.

instruct them in the ways of our Savior. We do not need the alleged insights or discoveries of modern psychology to parent our children in a way that glorifies God and sets them on a trajectory of spiritual success. Thankfully, God has given us all the instructions we need in the Bible to parent our children effectively.

Chapter 2

GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILIES

By Cliff McManis

There is a lot of confusion today about marriage; what it is, its origin, its role in society, and more. This is especially true in America. In the United States it seems the basic definition of marriage is up for grabs and in constant flux. Evidence for such confusion is everywhere and is even being aggressively promoted by the secular world. This confusion has been spread by news outlets, Hollywood actors, athletes, musicians, academicians, independent podcasters, self-made influencers, and an endless parade of progressive politicians.

There hasn't always been such rampant confusion and disagreement about what marriage is. Historically, since its inception, traditional marriage has been universally upheld in America as the sole form of marriage until just recently. There are many variables that have contributed to the decline of a biblical view of marriage in recent years, but three factors have served as primary catalysts that sought to ensure its demise in the past generation.

The first was the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s, which was typified by drugs, rock 'n' roll, and "free sex." The decade of the '60s mainstreamed and legitimized sexual immorality on a private and public level in a way never before known in America.

The second catalyst undermining a biblical view of marriage was the rise of the homosexual movement which began in the '70s, rose in the '80s, and then flourished in the '90s in terms of winning over popular sentiment and approval from culturally recognized power brokers, such as influential politicians, popular entertainers, and wealthy financiers.

The third catalyst which formalized the trend was the US Supreme Court rulings in January of 2013, and again in 2015, which, in effect, redefined marriage on a federal level. In 5-4 votes in each instance, the justices claimed that same-sex/gay partners should be included in the definition of marriage. Five judges decreed that three hundred and thirty million Americans must now add homosexuality to their view of marriage. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in particular, was influential in undermining the biblical view on marriage as evidenced by her formal rulings, suggesting that marriage is a human convention subject to ever-changing sensibilities of a given society.[1] In other words, she alleged marriage is a byproduct of evolution; God had nothing to do with it. Unfortunately, this view reigns supreme today.

As Christians, we should not be surprised that God's most fundamental created human institution, marriage, is under siege by the world. Everything beautiful and blessed that God creates, Satan and the world try to distort and destroy. Two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul predicted that "in the last days" evil people, controlled by demonic forces and sinful passions, would overtly attack and assail "marriage" as God designed it (1 Tim 4:1-3). He further prophesied that "in the last days" evil people would attack the family in general, including the basic roles God has assigned to it, such as loving parents and submissive children (2 Tim 3:1-4). Paul said wicked people would attempt to turn the institution of the family on its head. And that is the case, for today we are living in those very "latter days" that Paul spoke of.

Despite all the attacks on traditional, biblical marriage, and the resultant confusion and chaos surrounding it, God in His grace has given us His Word to maintain clarity regarding the institution of marriage as He gave it at the time of creation. God is also committed to preserving His model of marriage until the return of Christ, so Satan and the world will not be able to do away with traditional marriage as they intend. Biblical marriage is a Divine creation and gift from heaven, so no human powers, nor demonic ones, will be able to dismantle it.

[1] Cf. Adam J. Macleod, "The Common Law: Ginsburg Gets It Wrong," May 4, 2015; www.lawliberty.org.

The Bible literally begins by explaining marriage as originally created by God. This is found in the Book of Genesis, the first book of Scripture. And it also provides the necessary principles for understanding marriage and family life in a way that pleases God, despite the hostile onslaught of competing views. The rest of this chapter will survey the foundational general truths and principles of marriage that God has preserved for us in His revelation as contained in Genesis 1-3.

Genesis Is Inspired, Literal History

Before surveying the specific principles about marriage revealed in the Book of Genesis, it is imperative to first say a word about the reliability of Genesis as a historical record. Today the Book of Genesis is under siege just as the institution of marriage is. In secular academic circles, Genesis is considered myth and non-historical, a man-made fabrication by uneducated and unsophisticated ancient people. As such, it has no relevance to how we live life today, nor does it help answer any of the main questions of life. So say the "scholars" of today.

Sadly, this erroneous view has seeped into the Church and is actually the majority viewpoint among professing evangelical Christians. Countless well-meaning professing Christians, Bible teachers, and pastors try to tell us that Genesis 1-11 is poetry and is therefore not to be taken literally or as strict history. They go on to allege that the creation story of Genesis 1-3 is like a "parable," and as such it only communicates a few "theological truths," not "historical realities." After all, Jesus' parables are not to be taken as historical accounts, but instead as generic, allegorical "stories" to teach simple, general theological and religious principles. So, those who surmise that Genesis 1-11 is poetry argue that Adam and Eve were not real people, the snake did not talk to Eve, Cain did not kill Abel, nor was there a man named Noah or an ark, and there was no universal Flood. Those are all said to be fictitious, non-historical, religious fables. If you believe Genesis 1-11 is literal history, then you are in the super-minority, even among professing Christians!

But Jesus and the apostles believed Genesis 1-11 was real history. And they knew it was written by Moses (John 1:45) around 1446 BC as historical narrative recounting real people and real events. They used the Book of Genesis, especially chapters 1-3, to answer questions related to marriage and family life (cf. Matt 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-9; 1 Cor 11:8-9; Eph 5:25-31; 1 Tim 2:9-15). They considered Genesis to be the inspired Word of God just as all the other books of the Hebrew Bible (Luke 11:51). In fact, Moses was led by the Holy Spirit, so that the Book

of Genesis as we have it today is reliable, inspired, inerrant history. Jesus was the greatest Bible teacher in history and so we must follow His lead in taking Genesis as literal history, and as such it serves as the foundation for understanding the institution of marriage which God created.[2] Jesus warned of false teachers who would undermine the historicity of the Book of Genesis when He said that "if you do not believe his [Moses'] writings" then you will not believe Jesus' words (John 5:46-47). To reject the authority of Genesis is to reject the authority of Jesus.

One of the main reasons that professing Christians have so many problems in married life and family life in general is because so many of them don't take the Book of Genesis literally, especially the first eleven chapters. In doing so, they ignore God's guidance for what constitutes a godly family and marriage. So, instead of looking to Genesis for abiding principles about marriage, they look elsewhere, often to the wisdom of the world. Unfortunately, wordly wisdom is not wisdom at all, but a dangerous counterfeit.

So, following the example of Jesus the God-Man, and His sanctioned apostles, let's glean some divinely inspired foundational principles of marriage from God's inspired Book of Genesis.

Marriage Was Created by God

The first truth about marriage from Genesis is the fact that God created it. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The phrase, "In the beginning" refers to the very beginning of human history, the very starting point in time when God began to create our physical universe and world. According to biblical chronology, this was about 6,000 years ago (Gen 5).

The rest of Genesis 1 goes on to recount all that God created in the first six days of human history. The six days of creation were real, literal days. On the sixth day God created the first two humans, Adam and Eve, and on that same day He created the institution of marriage. Moses, the author of Genesis, summarizes the miraculous creation of the first two humans:

[2] To read more on Jesus' view of Genesis as literal history see, "Jesus' View of the Age of the Earth," by Terry Mortenson in *Coming to Grips with Genesis* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008) and *The Genesis Account*, by Jonathan D. Sarfati (Powder Springs, Georgia: Creation Book Publishers, 2015).

> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:27-28).

In Genesis 1:27, the Hebrew verb for "create" is *bara*, the same word used in 1:1 and 1:21. There are other Hebrew words for "make" (1:7), "form" (2:19), and "fashion" (2:22). But *bara* is unique when used with God as the subject as in Genesis 1:1 and 1:27, for in such cases it highlights that He is the autonomous, independent, transcendent Creator. Also, it is a "telic" verb, signifying it only finds meaning at the end of a process; so, with respect to God as the subject, *bara* only refers to a completed act of creation (cf. Deut 4:32; Ps 89:12). As such, it cannot mean that, in the beginning, God began the process of creating the cosmos.[3] This rules out any kind of naturalistic evolution or theistic evolution being foisted upon the creation account in Genesis 1-2. And regarding marriage, which God instituted on day six of the creation week, it was complete, with all the elements in place just as God intended and designed.

In Genesis 1:28, God's first command to the first husband and wife was to "be fruitful and multiply." This is a Hebrew euphemism meaning, "As husband and wife, engage in sexual intimacy and produce offspring." Amazingly, the first command in the Bible given to the human race is with respect to the basic function of marriage, namely procreation. So, for God the Creator, the institution of marriage has been a sacred priority from the beginning of human history.

Moses repeats the amazing truth about God creating marriage in Genesis 5:1-2:

> This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created.

And again, in Genesis 6:7, in the days of Noah (about 2500 BC), God Himself says, "I created man." And around 2000 BC, Melchizedek testified to Abram that God was "the Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:19), which includes all things within it, including marriage.

[3] Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 58.

Moses the prophet was clear and emphatic in the Book of Genesis about the origin of marriage: God created it.

Moses gives more details in Genesis 2 of when God created the first two humans and the first marriage as mentioned on the sixth day of creation. Genesis 2 is actually a description of day six on the micro level, so Genesis 1:26-28 and all of chapter 2 are perfectly complementary and harmonious.[4] Moses gives the highlights of day six as follows:

> Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being …. Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said,
>
> "This is now bone of my bones,
> And flesh of my flesh;
> She shall be called Woman,
> Because she was taken out of Man."
>
> For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (Gen 2:7, 18-25).

Genesis 2 is an actual accounting of real events. It is not mythology or a parable. God actually made the first man, Adam, out of dirt (Gen 2:7) instantaneously and supernaturally on day six. On that same day, He

[4] In fact, all of Genesis 2 goes between Genesis 1:26 and 1:27 chronologically. Moses routinely uses this literary feature of first giving a general summary then going back to give greater detail of a specific event. Not only was Moses led by the Holy Spirit as he wrote, but on a human level he was a literary genius; cf. Acts 7:22.

made the first woman from Adam's rib—also instantaneously and supernaturally (Gen 2:22). This is where we came from. We're a direct creation made in the image of God. We didn't come from a long process where we randomly evolved from monkeys. We're the by-products of a Higher Life Form, not lower life forms! Jesus and the Apostles affirmed that Genesis 2 is an accurate portrayal of how the human race began (see Matt 19; Mark 10; Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 11:8-9) and how marriage began: God created it.

Over 1,400 years after Moses wrote Genesis 1 and 2, the author of the Book of Hebrews affirmed that the institution of marriage belongs to God since He created it. Hebrews soberly warns all people to remember that marriage is a holy and sacred institution of God, and if they abuse it, God will judge them.

> Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage* bed *is to be* undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Heb 13:4, NASB).

God has the right to judge anyone who abuses the institution of marriage as God designed it because He created it. The phrase "marriage bed" in this verse is from the one Greek word, *coite*, from which we get our English word "coitus" which refers to sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. God is very specific as He wants to protect sacred marriage. This verse teaches that God forbids any kind of sexual activity outside the confines of biblical marriage.

Marriage Was Established "In the Beginning"

The second basic truth about marriage as revealed in Genesis is that God created marriage "from the beginning." This truth has already been alluded to since it is wrapped up in the first truth that God created marriage. God created marriage on the sixth day of creation. So, marriage as God designed it has been around for 6,000 years. There was never a time in human history when traditional biblical marriage did not exist. Nor did the model of traditional marriage evolve over time, developing from something less.

Those who reject the Bible also reject this basic truth about marriage. They argue that monogamous, heterosexual, permanent marriage is a convention, a fabricated creation and by-product of a patriarchal and misogynistic Western society. They actually think that traditional marriage as God created it is evil. But God said it was "very good" (Gen 1:31). And because of their skewed thinking, they are

continually trying to redefine and eradicate God's pattern for marriage, seeking to replace it with dangerous counterfeits.[5]

But the Bible is clear. Traditional marriage has been in existence since the very beginning of human history. Jesus affirmed this in His discussion about marriage when His critics were trying to discredit Him. They asked Him a trick question about marriage and He responded by quoting from Genesis. He said marriage has existed "from the beginning" (Matt 19:4), affirming that God created it on the sixth day. Jesus went on to affirm Moses' entire description of how God created traditional marriage from the beginning of time (Matt 19:3-6). Traditional marriage was created by God "from the beginning" and it is here to stay until Christ returns.

Marriage Is Heterosexual

The third truth about marriage from Genesis is that God designed it to be heterosexual, meaning between a man and a woman. "Hetero" is a prefix that means "different," an appropriate designation for biblical marriage which is to be between the two different sexes: a man and a woman. Genesis 1:27 is clear on this as it recounts what God did on day six: "God created humanity in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

The human race, as created by God, constitutes only two genders: male and female. Remember that God's first command to these first two humans was, "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). This rules out same-sex or homosexual marriage. Two people of the same gender cannot "be fruitful and multiply." "Gay" couples cannot fulfill God's inherent plan for a married couple which is twofold: coitus (Heb 13:4) and procreation.

Genesis 2:18 gives further details on the importance of the heterosexual nature of biblical marriage. After creating Adam from the dust of the ground God knew that Adam was not yet complete and that he needed the perfect partner, which would be a woman. Moses recounts:

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[5] Examples abound of popular voices today who argue that traditional marriage is a man-made invention, including Joe Rogan (cf. episode #1897 of the Joe Rogan Experience), Whoopi Goldberg, and more. And they do so to justify all kinds of alternatives which the Bible condemns as sin. They are simply echoing the sentiments first forged in the sexual '60s when the popular sociologist and "theologian" Peter L. Berger foisted this view on the world from a "scholarly" perspective in his 1964 article, "Marriage and the Construction of Reality."

> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

This verse makes clear that God made woman specifically to complement and fulfill the man. Only a woman can complete a man. The Hebrew terms for "helper suitable" are very specific in meaning. "Helper" is *eizer* and means "assist," "partner" or "support," and is appropriately translated often in the Old Testament as "help" or "helper." *Eizer* is neither a demeaning term nor a word to describe a second-class citizen, for this word is used to describe God Himself, as in Exodus 18:4 when Moses testified that God was his "helper." The reason Genesis 2:18 says that it was "not good" for man to be alone is because he needed a helper, a partner, a soulmate, and a friend to be complete. And at the deepest level, only his wife would fulfill that role. Man was not designed to live in isolation. Humans were created as social beings, made to be in fellowship with other people. The word "helper" also informs the woman's basic role in the marriage and family life: she was designed to be a loving helper to her husband.

The second word in the phrase "helper suitable" is the Hebrew word *kenegdo* and is a rare, yet picturesque term translated variously as "fit for," "comparable to," "corresponding to," and "suitable." Two elements are inherent in the term: appropriateness and difference. An appropriate partner to fully complement Adam had to be someone equally corresponding to and on the same level ontologically as Adam, namely another human. But also, the appropriate person who would be a counterpart and complement to Adam had to fill in the holes and deficiencies perfectly that are in every man, like a key to a lock or a hand to a glove, which emphasizes a complementing and fulfilling difference. Thus this phrase, "helper suitable" spells out in detail what God intended in Genesis 1:27 when He said marriage was to be between a man and a woman.

Throughout most of human history, all cultures have recognized that heterosexual marriage was the only appropriate form of marriage. It hasn't been until just recently, in the late 20th century, that the counterfeits of homosexual marriage and transgender marriage has been forced onto the general public, and that by coercion. Homosexuality has been around a long time; but not legalized homosexual "marriage."

In 2014, Facebook introduced the notion that there existed as many as 60 different genders. That's actually a demonically inspired lie, because it is a direct attack on what God determined at creation when

He pronounced for all time that the human race is composed of only two genders, "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). And only the two genders of male and female reflect the innate "image of God" which the Creator imparts to every person at conception. Tampering with God-given genders bestowed at the time of creation or conception is an assault on God and His plan. Gender cannot be altered by human methods anyway, for God codified the genders genetically in the human DNA: every person is either conceived as XY (male) or XX (female) and that cannot be altered. And when each person dies, they will stand before God the Judge where they will give an account to Him based on how He originally made them, ether male or female. God formed us in His image from the womb as either a male or female and His creation cannot be altered (Ps 139). As God said in Ezekiel, "Behold, all souls are Mine …. The soul who sins will die" (18:4).

Jesus reaffirmed the reality of heterosexual marriage when He declared, "from the beginning of creation, God 'made them male and female'" (Mark 10:6). The biblical prophets and the Apostles affirmed heterosexual marriage as God's only option, and they appropriately condemned the practice of same-sex unions and homosexuality as sin and rebellion against God (cf. Lev 18:22; Rom 1:18-32).

Marriage Is Monogamous

The fourth truth about marriage revealed in Genesis is that it is monogamous, between only two people: one man with one woman. This was made clear on day six of creation and explained in detail in Genesis 2. In Genesis 2:24 Moses explains how God performed the first wedding, which was between one man and one woman:

> For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother,
> and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Adam and Eve coming together in marriage in the beginning became the precedent for all marriages to follow in history. One man married to one woman became the established model. That is what Moses intended when he wrote the defining phrase, "For this reason." This principle of monogamous marriage is repeated throughout Scripture as the Divine standard. Any deviation is considered sinful by God. In the Old Testament, the Book of Proverbs affirms that marriage is between a "wife" (singular) and a "husband" (singular) (Prov 12:4). Malachi the prophet refers to this monogamous relationship as a "covenant" made before "the LORD" (2:14-16). Jesus taught that marriage was monogamous when He quoted Genesis 2:24, affirming that "the two

shall become one" (Matt 19:9). The Apostle Paul also quoted Genesis 2:24 as authoritative and binding, defining marriage as monogamous between one man and one woman (Eph 5:28-31).

God created marriage as monogamous, so He ruled out all other alternatives such as bigamy, polygamy, free sex, philandering, prostitution, adulterous romantic affairs with people who are not your spouse, and all occurrences of fornication. God intended the two married partners to be faithful, loyal, and committed in every way to their sole married partner. That is what Moses meant when he said that the two were "joined" together when describing the first marriage ceremony. The Hebrew word for "joined" in Genesis 2:24 is *dabak* and means "to stick like glue," which is a graphic, concrete verb emphasizing the permanence of marriage.[6]

The Ten Commandments affirmed monogamous marriage with its prohibition, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14). To cheat on your one spouse in any way was to commit adultery. To marry a second spouse was to commit adultery. To commit adultery warranted the death penalty according to the Law of Moses. Polygamy was a common practice among pagans in the Old Testament and it crept in as a practice among believers at times. But when it did it was always sin and a violation of God's pattern of monogamous marriage. And it always came with divine consequences, for the Bible is clear that all people will reap what they sow when it comes to compromised living. When Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, and other believers engaged in polygamy, they reaped troublesome consequences as a result. Paul reaffirms that monogamy is God's only acceptable option for marriage (cf. 1 Cor 7:2). And he goes on to say that one of the qualifications for being an elder and pastor is that he is to be a "one-woman man," meaning he is to be faithful and loyal to only his one wife and give his desires and affection to no other.

Moses concludes Genesis 2:24 by saying that the man and woman are "one" flesh when they are glued together in the moment of holy matrimony. The Hebrew word for "one" here is *echad*, a term used over 900 times in the Old Testament in various ways. It is not a simple term of arithmetic. It's more diverse than that, as it emphasizes unity, diversity, and exclusivity, especially when used to describe persons as opposed to things. This word is used to describe God in Deuteronomy 6:4, one of the most famous and sacred verses in the Bible used by the

[6] Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2009), 88.

Jews to describe the nature of God. They refer to it as the *Shema* and it reads as follows:

> Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is **one**!

Scripture teaches that God is triune, existing as three distinct Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet, the triune God is "one," meaning one entity. The three distinct Persons exist as one in nature, essence, glory, and purpose. The three divine Persons always function in a perfect harmony. This is true of a married couple. Although they are two persons, they are considered one indissoluble entity before God. A Christian husband and wife should be one in every way: relationally, socially, legally, financially, spiritually, emotionally, and sexually. The greatest expression of this divinely imparted "oneness" is when the two of them conceive a child, for that offspring is the two of them producing one new being.

Marriage Is the Primary Relationship

A fifth truth about marriage from Genesis is that marriage takes priority over other institutions and relationships. This principle follows from Moses' statement that a man "shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife" (2:24). This phrase has two main parts: one negative and one positive. The negative statement is that a man is to "leave" his parents. The Hebrew word here, *asav*, literally means to "forsake" and even "abandon." It is used in Genesis 39:6 to describe how Potiphar "abandoned" everything that was his and gave it into the hands of Joseph to care for. The positive part of the phrase that follows "forsake" is "be joined" which was discussed earlier. When a man is ready for marriage, he is to forsake all dependence upon his parents and give full loyalty to his new wife and stick to her like glue. For a Christian man, this means he "forsakes" his parents to marry only a believing wife (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14).

With the onset of marriage, a new, independent human entity and institution is created. Once married, the husband no longer submits to or "obeys" his parents, but instead totally commits to his wife. He loves her, supports her, leads her, serves her, and protects her above all others. And the wife has a new loyalty and obligation to her husband in the same manner. Every other human relationship comes second to the marriage. This has appropriately become known as the "leave and cleave" principle. The husband still honors his parents but shifts all his loyalty to his wife. And the wife does the same. Massive marriage problems arise when spouses fail to honor the "leave and cleave"

principle by giving undue loyalty to their parents that belongs only to their married partner. (See chapter 15 for an in-depth look at what this looks like in practice.) Interestingly, Malachi 2:14 uses this verb, *asav*, commanding the husband to never "forsake" his wife.

Because God makes man and wife "one" upon marriage, their reciprocal loyalty remains even when they have children. Parents are to love their children, but parents are never considered to be "one flesh" with their children relationally. Children are not peers with their parents. The mom who says her sixteen-year-old daughter is her "best friend" while she still has a husband is misguided and not functioning biblically. Parents are to maintain a diagonal, mentoring relationship and posture with their children until they reach adulthood. And, all the while, the husband and wife are to keep the marriage primary. Parents need to resist the temptation of being child-centered, neglecting or abandoning their basic obligations and loyalties to their spouse in favor of lopsided service and attention given to the children. Children are actually welcomed, temporary members of the family who will someday launch out on their own, becoming a part of their own independent family, beginning with a marriage. Technically, a family is comprised of a husband and wife. Children being added does not suddenly trigger the formation of a family unit. Children are welcome, blessed *additions* to the family.

The New Testament teaches that the marriage relationship comes before church ministry or church relationships. Paul says that before a man is to be considered as an elder or deacon in the church, he must first be a "one-woman man" (1 Tim 3:2; 12; Titus 1:6). This means his wife is his priority. He loves and serves his wife before he loves and serves the church. Many pastors have done great damage to their own families and their churches by having these basic priorities out of order. A man who is more committed to "ministry" than to his family is not qualified for ministry (1 Tim 5:8).

Marriage Has a Divine Purpose

The sixth fundamental truth about marriage taught in Genesis deals with the purpose of marriage. God created marriage and He did so for a few reasons. It was noted earlier that the first command God gave to the first married couple was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:27). This shows that God created marriage for the purpose of procreation, to populate the earth. And many of those populated on earth would end up populating heaven and God's kingdom on earth after being saved. God created all the angels by divine *fiat*; angels don't procreate

(Matt 22:30). Humans on the other hand, come into immortal existence though God's plan of procreation.

God's command for married couples to procreate has never been rescinded. The view of Scripture is that human conception is always a work of God. The Old Testament says that when a woman became pregnant what actually occurred is that "God opened her womb" (Gen 4:1; 30:22). In truth, there are no "accidental" or "unwanted" pregnancies (Ezek 18:4; Rom 8:28). Pregnancy is not simply a naturalistic, mechanical, biological happenstance with no meaning as the world tries to tell us. Every human conception is a special work of God (Ps 139:13-18). Every baby in the womb is made in His image and is inherently sacred as a person.

Since God has not rescinded the command for married couples to "be fruitful and multiply," Christian couples should joyously pursue having children as God blesses. Having children is a blessing and a privilege from God. Psalm 127 reminds us of this great truth:

> Behold, children are a gift of the Lord,
> The fruit of the womb is a reward.
> Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
> So are the children of one's youth.
> How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
> They will not be ashamed
> When they speak with their enemies in the gate (Ps 127:3-5).

Some who reject the Bible say we should not have children at all, or that we should not have many of them. This is another lie which comes from demonic sources (1 Tim 4:3).[7] Jesus loved children (Matt 19:14-15; 21:15) and still does.

A second purpose for marriage as taught by Genesis is companionship. God said "it is not good for man to be alone" after He created Adam (Gen 2:18). This was the only thing that God said was not good at the time of creation. In Genesis 1, during the six days of creation, God said His work was "good" seven times (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). A man in isolation, without a wife as his helper and partner, is "not good" in that he cannot fulfill all of God's intended purposes for him. Again, humans were created to be social beings, in relationship with other people, beginning with one's spouse. God's intent is that husband and wife enjoy one another and be best friends. That is a key

[7] This lie was popularized on a grand scale in America with the publication of the 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, by the alarmist, Paul Ehrlich.

element of the "oneness" of marriage. Spouses who are at odds with each other and constantly antagonistic with each other undermine God's plan for marriage. Paul reminds Christian couples that the home should be characterized by civility and harmony, "for God has called us to peace" (1 Cor 7:15). Peter says husbands and wives should enjoy each other, considering each other as "joint heirs" (1 Pet 3:7). The Song of Solomon illustrates that Solomon and his first, legitimate wife were best friends who enjoyed each other's companionship.

A third purpose of marriage is sexual fulfillment. Husband and wife are to please one another physically. That is what Moses meant through the euphemism in Genesis 2:25 that says, "they were naked and not ashamed." This means they enjoyed the gift of sex from God freely, without guilt or shame. God made humans as sexual beings and all sexual desires are to be fulfilled only within a God-ordained marriage that is heterosexual and monogamous.

Proverbs 5 is explicit about this as it commands husbands to enjoy their wives intimately:

Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.
As a loving hind and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
Be exhilarated always with her love.
For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress
And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?
For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord,
And He watches all his paths.
His own iniquities will capture the wicked,
And he will be held with the cords of his sin.
He will die for lack of instruction,
And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray (Prov 5:15-22).

In like manner, the Apostle Paul tells married Christians that they are obligated to fulfill their spouse sexually—it is their duty before God, and to deprive your spouse of sex is selfish and evil (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-7). Unfortunately, all throughout Church history, many Christians have

had an unbiblical view of sex, especially within marriage. Many have wrongly taught that sexual abstinence in marriage is acceptable or that being single is more spiritual than being married. Some "biblical" counselors today say the desire of a single person to be married is an "idol." That's another lie and explicitly contrary to biblical teaching (cf. Gen 2:18; Prov 18:22; 1 Cor 7:9). The desire to be married is natural and a gift from God (1 Cor 7:7). Hebrews 13:4 literally says, "coitus is undefiled," which means that sexual intercourse between married couples is a blessing from God to be enjoyed. One of the practical benefits of enjoying ongoing, regular sexual intimacy with your spouse is it helps maintain sexual purity…so said the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 7:1-9).

Another purpose of marriage that God imbedded in the institution is not explicitly stated in Genesis but definitely flows from the model of marriage created by God in the beginning. And this purpose is probably the most significant one, as it has abiding and even eternal implications. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament because the Apostle Paul was the first person in history to reveal it as he was led by the Holy Spirit to unveil it to the Church of the first century and to the world. And Paul calls this grand purpose for marriage a "mystery" (Eph 5:32).

The word "mystery" is from the Greek word *musterion* and is used consistently in the New Testament by Jesus (Matt 13), John the Apostle (Rev 17), and Paul. The meaning of *musterion* in the New Testament does not carry the same meaning that we associate with the term "mystery" today. For us, a "mystery" is something beyond our ability to fully understand; it refers to something hidden we can't see. Paul's usage carries the exact opposite meaning. A "mystery" in the New Testament is something that was previously hidden but is now being clearly revealed for all to understand. So, Paul says the greatest purpose of earthly marriage was hidden until God gave him this new, special revelation. Paul says the purpose of earthly marriage is to serve as a living metaphor of a greater marriage yet to come at the end of history–namely, the marriage of Jesus the glorified Christ to His Bride the glorified and perfected Church. Jesus is the Divine Groom and the Church is His precious bride. The heavenly wedding of the two will commence at the end of the age, upon Christ's glorious return to earth (Rev 19:7-9). Paul's explanation of this mystery is as follows:

> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify

> her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless …. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Eph 5:25-32).

So, as you live out your marriage as a Christian, remember first and foremost that your relationship to your spouse should reflect Christ's love and commitment to His Church. (For an in-depth examination of Ephesians 5:25-33 and the corresponding implications for marriage roles, see chapter 3.)

Husbands and Wives Have Different God-Ordained Roles

A seventh basic truth about marriage from Genesis has to do with roles: God made the husband the leader of the marriage and the wife as the helper. Having different roles has to do with function, not with value worth, or dignity. God made both man and woman in His image (Gen 1:26-27). As such, the husband and wife are equals as sacred persons and have equal value ontologically, that is, in their essence and being. But they do differ in their roles and function. And that is by God's design. Just as the human body has different parts that function together harmoniously for one purpose, so also the husband and wife team have varying roles as they pursue the same goals and purposes.

The New Testament reaffirms the distinct roles for spouses that God established in the beginning at creation. The Apostle Paul, taking his lead from Genesis 1 and 2, says that man is the leader of the marriage relationship by virtue of the fact that God created man first and then the woman from the man (1 Cor 11:8; 1 Tim 2:13). Adam came first and then Eve. Paul also notes that man is the leader and the wife the helper, because woman was created for the man (1 Cor 11:9). Here Paul is highlighting that Eve, the first wife, was created by God with a specific role as helper in the marriage relationship. And that is true of every wife in every marriage: her main role is to be the perfect helper and complement to her husband.

That God intended the man to be the leader in the marriage relationship is also evident from Genesis 2:24, which says the man is the initiator, for he is the one who takes the lead in leaving the parents

and securing a wife. And in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sin, God first confronts Adam and holds him primarily responsible for the joint disobedience even though Eve sinned first. God did this because accountability starts with the leader who was involved in the sin. This basic paradigm of the husband as leader and the wife has helper was to be the permanent model for all marriages. It is still God's plan for today's marriages.

This view of man as leader and wife as helper is called "complementarianism." It means that the husband and wife are different by design and they complement each other in every way perfectly, just as God intended. Man and woman are not the same in all ways. God made this clear in Genesis when He called man "Adam" and Eve "Woman" (Gen 2:23). God named her and her name spoke to her identity. Her name "woman" meant she was forever different and distinct, yet also complementary to the man.

The popular sentiment of today that says, "A woman can do anything a man can do" is patently false and contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible. The converse is also false which says, "A man can do anything a woman can do." A man cannot have a baby…despite all our scientific, medical, and technological advances. Sadly, there are those in the church today who hold and teach this erroneous view, arguing that men and women are equal in all ways. This view is called "egalitarianism," a word that simply means "equality." Egalitarianism seeks to illegitimately level the playing field, assigning roles to men that God never intended, while at the same time explicitly usurping roles for men that God requires, such as those who say the wife should work full-time and the husband should stay home, keep house, and care for the children. That is turning God's plan on its head.

Sin and Satan Disrupted God's Plan for Marriage

The eighth and final abiding truth about marriage revealed in Genesis is the bad news. The first seven truths were all blessings from God intended to make marriages flourish in a way that pleases Him, gives Him glory, and fulfills our human desires. This bad news about problems that will plague marriage and family life is described in Genesis 3. In Genesis 2, God commanded Adam not to eat from a certain tree and if he did then he would die (2:16-17). Genesis 3 then describes how Adam and Eve succumbed to fleshly weakness, disobeyed God, and ate from the forbidden fruit. This was an actual historical event. This was the first act of human sinful disobedience against God the Creator.

Two main problems result from the catastrophic events of Genesis 3 with respect to marriage: the first is that there are dire consequences for sin and the second is that Satan is a real personal being who seeks to undermine God's institution of marriage. Every act of sin brings a negative consequence, whether temporal or eternal. God is the one who determines the consequences for sin, and in Genesis 3 the worst consequence inflicted by God the Creator and Judge is death. Death is separation from God, and in the Bible, there are three kinds of death: physical, spiritual, and eternal. Adam and Eve were punished with the penalty of death because of their sin. And sin would adversely impact their marriage. One of them would die and leave a spouse behind alone. This is still true today. Because people sin, they die, and countless marriages suffer when a spouse dies, which brings great sorrow.

Another consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience was the impact of sin on their marriage relationship. Because they sinned, they became sinners and would act like sinners. As such their marriage relationship would be plagued with ongoing conflict, strife, and animosity. This would result from their inherent selfishness that resulted from their disobedience. As a sinner, Adam would no longer seek the good of his wife, but instead he would naturally be typified by authoritarian behavior or, going the other way, becoming passive and isolationist. These are the tendencies of all sinful husbands today. And because she was now a sinner, Eve would first serve her own interests instead of seeking first to be her husband's gentle, loving helper. Rather, as a sinner she would constantly try to usurp her husband's God-given authority and right to be the leader in the marriage (Gen 3:16). And every sinful wife today has this propensity due to sin inherited from Adam and Eve (Rom 5:12).

In addition to sin and its consequences undermining the biblical ideal of marriage, there is the reality of Satan. He is the greatest of the evil, fallen angels. Satan hates God and he hates everything good that God created. God created marriage, so Satan attacked marriage in the beginning. He appeared to Eve in the garden of Eden and tempted her to sin by disobeying God's Word (Gen 3:1-6; 1 Tim 2:14). Six thousand years later, Satan is still on the prowl, like a vicious lion seeking to destroy marriages, especially godly marriages (1 Pet 5:8). One of his main tactics is to distort God's truth by putting forth deceptive counterfeits and disseminating them through people.

Why do you fight and argue with your spouse today? Because of Genesis 3. Why do husbands abuse their wives and children? Because of Genesis 3. Why do Christian wives get bitter at their husbands?

Because of Genesis 3. Why is there rampant adultery and divorce, even in the Church? Because of Genesis 3. Why are wives so routinely "unfulfilled" by their husbands? Because of Genesis 3. Why do husbands fail to lead their marriages and families as God requires? Because of Genesis 3. The universal problems listed above all result from personal sin and are exacerbated by the work of Satan. Seeking to diagnose these problems in any other area or for any other reason than what the Bible says is futile. Psychology, psychiatry, medication, Hindu yoga, and all the other countless panaceas are simply man-made counterfeits. But because the Bible properly diagnoses the root to all these common problems, the Bible offers the only solution to resolve these problems. And that is what this book is all about. We are providing information from God Himself, from His Word, to encourage you and help you in your marriage and family life. Contrary to what many in the world say, and sadly, what even many in the Church would say, it is possible to have a fulfilled marriage and family life just as God intended. Following His ways and His model is the key.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we argued that Genesis 1-3 reveals all the abiding, fundamental principles we need to know about marriage as God created and designed it. Those who ignore Genesis or dismiss it as myth or poetry and say that it is not true history end up with a compromised and deficient view of marriage. Such people, including therapists, scholars, and Bible teachers, have no real answers to help and counsel those with marriage and family problems. Those who take Genesis at face value, and take it seriously, along with the rest of the Bible, can find God's sufficient heavenly wisdom for every question, challenge, crisis, or sorrow that may confront them as they live the Christian life (John 15:11; Col 1:28; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3).

From Genesis 1 and 2, we learned seven blessed truths about marriage. The first was that marriage was created by God; it is not a man-made institution or human convention. Second, Genesis teaches that marriage was created in the beginning, during the first week of creation. As such, it has always been the same for 6,000 years; it is not subject to evolution or change based on cultural differences or supposed civilized advancements. It doesn't need modern-day improvements. Third, marriage is heterosexual: it is between a man and a woman. Homosexual marriage is not marriage. Fourth, marriage is monogamous: it is between one man and one woman; and the two become "one" before God in that authorized marriage. And that

oneness is intended to be permanent. God hates divorce (Mal 2:16). Fifth, marriage is the primary relationship among human institutions and relationships. God created marriage before He created government, the nations, Israel, and the Church. Married couples have personal loyalty to their spouses first, then to their children, parents, the church, ministry, the government, their fellow man, or themselves. Sixth, God created marriage with purpose, or purposes. We listed four: procreation, partnership, purity, and as a picture (or living metaphor) of Christ's marriage to the Church that is yet to come. Seventh, God designed marriage with distinct roles: the husband is the leader and the wife is the helper. These complementary roles enable perfect harmony and unity in the relationship, just as God intended.

The eighth and final truth was the negative one that came from the Fall of the first two humans into sin in Genesis 3. In that chapter, Moses showed how Satan attacked God's holy institution of marriage through lying and deception and succeeded in getting Adam and Eve to rebel against God's Word. As a result, God inflicted ongoing consequences on all the guilty parties who participated in the first sin including the snake, Satan, and Adam and Eve. The greatest consequences inflicted on Adam and Eve were the penalty of death and ongoing animosity toward each other as a married couple and ongoing animosity with Satan. Those consequences still abide and afflict everyone on earth. God has graciously promised that sin and Satan can be overcome by knowing and obeying Him in light of His Word.

Chapter 3

THE ROLES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES[1]

By Stephen Salinas

The Foundation of the Family

Before we discuss biblical parenting, we need to step back and first set the foundation for the family by examining what God requires from a husband and wife.

As chapter 2 explored, God's design for marriage is one man and one woman coming together for life to become one flesh before the eyes of God. If that is God's design for marriage at a macro level, what does God expect of husbands and wives at a more practical level?

One of the clearest examples in Scripture that ties together the meaning of marriage and God's expectations for married couples is found in Ephesians 5:22-33:

> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

[1] This chapter has been adapted from Stephen Salinas, *Walk Worthy: A Practical Study of Ephesians*, 151-166. Used by permission of With All Wisdom Publications.

> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.
>
> "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The main idea of Ephesians 5:22-33 is that marriage symbolizes the relationship of the church to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands and husbands should sacrificially love their wives.

In this chapter, we will explore this passage in-depth to understand the foundational responsibilities of husbands and wives. We want to carefully examine what the Bible really says about the roles of husbands and wives. Why? Because it's only when a husband and wife are fulfilling their biblical responsibilities in marriage that they're in the best position to be able to honor God in parenting their children.

What Does God Require of Husbands and Wives?

There are certain biblical topics that are easy for all Christians to rally around—love, kindness, and honesty, for example. However, there are some topics that are extremely controversial, even within the church. A key topic covered in this chapter is one of those controversial topics: wives submitting to their husbands.

As believers, we must obey all that God commands and embrace His truth. However, many do not like this straightforward teaching and reject it outright. On the other hand, I've seen some of the verses we'll review get twisted by people in the church to condone misogyny and excuse abuse.

At a church I attended when I was a teenager, I met several single men who were so excited by this passage. "I can't wait to get married so I can have a wife who will do whatever I want." This is a sexist, un-

Christ-like attitude. And it's no wonder why these men were single into middle age (and are probably still single today).

When we handle Scripture carefully and contextually, we're kept from developing an erroneous or unbalanced view of the Word. We must, therefore, submit our own wills to the truth of Scripture in obedience to God's revealed truth.

It is God's command for wives to submit to their husbands because God has appointed the husband the head of the family. Husbands are not called to submit to their wives in obedience, instead, they're called to lead their wives in sacrificial love. We'll see that the most of this passage is directed at husbands needing to sacrificially love their wives. This call for wives to submit to their husbands' leadership and for husbands to give themselves up in sacrificial love for their wives is God's perfect design for marriage. It's also symbolic of something greater: Christ's relationship to the church.

Wives: Submit to Your Husbands

This opening section is specifically directed toward married women.

> [22] *Wives,*

Paul isn't talking to men or children. He's not even talking to women in general. He's talking to wives and he's going to give them a command from the Lord.

> *Submit*

This is a military term that means to "arrange under" or to "fall in line under the authority of." It carries the idea of deferring to the leadership of someone or obeying someone.

Even reading that right now, this may feel a bit jarring. "Submission? What is this—the 1950s? Did John Wayne write this message with his macho view toward women?"

Why is the command for wives to submit so hard for us to hear? Because the Fall has distorted God's view for marriage and perverted the roles of husbands and wives.

> To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you (Gen 3:16).

Because of the curse, as sure as pain is associated with childbirth, wives will bristle under the leadership of their husbands and men will seek to be domineering over their wives.

For most of history, men have subjected women in a domineering way and viewed them as their inferiors. Husbands treated their wives like slaves or property or lesser humans. And women didn't want to submit to their sinful husbands. Even today, everything in our culture rejects the concept of submission.

Let's move on to learn more about God's true design for marriage:

> *to your own husbands,*

Note that Paul is not calling for women to submit to men in general. Paul calls for women to submit to their own husbands. However, that does not mean that husbands are better than their wives or that men are better than women. All are equal before God in Christ.

> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

In God's plan of creation, God has appointed men to be the head of the family. He will hold men accountable for their leadership of their families. Again—they are not better than women, but this is the role God has determined that men will play.

I worked in the technology industry for almost twenty years. We had a concept of a "Single-Threaded Owner" at work. If there isn't a clear owner for a project, it was easy for tasks to get dropped and then for people to claim that they thought someone else was responsible. Appointing someone a "Single-Threaded Owner" meant that while there were many people involved in the project, there was one person who was ultimately responsible. That person was the "single throat to choke" if something went wrong and he or she weas given the authority to ultimately make final decisions.

God has determined that men are the single-threaded owners of the family and women are to submit to the leadership of their husbands. However, this should not look like men barking orders and always making unilateral decisions. Wise husbands discuss everything with their wives, seek their input, and strive to bring alignment in decision making.

The call for wives to submit to their husbands is not contingent on the husband being smarter, more skilled, or holier than his wife. (I

know this from experience—my wife is far more skilled than I am in so many areas.) This is ultimately about the roles that God has determined husbands and wives are to play. Other examples of God-given roles include parents and children, bosses and employees, and pastors and church members.

Why should wives submit to their husbands? Because husbands have been given the God-given role of leading the family. Wives who are submitting to their husbands are really submitting to Christ.

> *As to the Lord.*

Ultimately, submission is a heart issue about submission to the Lord. Don't submit to your husband because he's so great; submit to your husband because Jesus is so great. As you read on in Ephesians, Paul will continue with this theme of submitting to others to honor Christ:

> Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Eph 6:1).

> Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man (Eph 6:5-7).

Wives should submit to their husbands because they love Christ. A wife could defy her husband's leadership about a decision and be correct about the outcome of that decision but be in sin because of disobeying the Lord. It is much better to obey the Lord and trust the outcome to him. God will bless that obedience.

Paul goes on to describe the God-given roles of husbands and wives.

> *[23] For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.*

God has appointed the husband to be the head of the wife and the family as a picture of Christ's relationship to the church. This has huge implications for both husbands and wives. This should shatter that misogynistic and abusive form of "leadership" that would seek to misuse these verses. Christ never has been and never will be a harsh, abusive leader of the church. He is a sacrificial leader who gave his life in love for the church. (More on that later in this chapter.)

[24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit

As the church should align itself under the leadership of Christ, wives should align themselves under the leadership of their husbands. The church never leads Christ or has authority over Christ. Likewise, wives are to submit to the leadership of their husbands as to the Lord.

In everything to their husbands.

Paul says "everything" but there's something we need to call out: he is not calling wives to submit to sin or abuse. As the Bible makes clear, wives are ultimately responsible before the Lord, so they cannot disobey Him or tolerate sin even if their husbands are leading them in that direction. This is a God-given protection for them from sin or abuse.

As Paul moves forward, we'll see the perfect balance in what God commands for husbands.

Husbands: Sacrificially Love Your Wives

In verse 25, Paul is switching gears to address husbands.

[25] Husbands,

As the head of the family, what is Paul going to tell husbands? Be authoritative and confident?

Love your wives,

First and foremost, husbands are to lead with love. They're to love their wives. Paul is going to make this command even stronger:

as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Husbands are not just following the world's example of love: "Feel affection and passion for your wife." Sure—do that, but the bar for husbands is higher. Much higher. The bar is perfection. Christ loved the church perfectly. He came not to be served, but to serve. He gave his life for the church. He suffered and died for her.

Husbands—your love for your wives needs to be perfectly sacrificial, just like Jesus' love for the church is. No big deal, right?

This teaching was extremely countercultural in Paul's day. Women were treated poorly and viewed as second-class citizens. Husbands had full authority to do whatever they wanted to their wives. That was not what God intended for marriage.

God gives us this passage as a counterbalance to his command to wives. How can wives submit to domineering husbands? Husbands shouldn't be domineering. They should be tender, attentive, and gentle in their leadership. They should put aside their own wants, needs, and desires to serve their wives. They should be totally unselfish. They should display the perfect love of Christ. This is *agapē* love we're talking about—active, sacrificial love. The Apostle Peter gives husbands a similar command:

> Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Pet 3:7).

You might say: "That's all well and good if husbands and wives are perfect, but they're not. What now?"

As we said before, we live in a fallen world. Christian wives won't submit perfectly, and Christian husbands won't sacrifice perfectly. Paul doesn't give us a pass. Obey the Lord and entrust yourself to God. God will bless your obedience. (Again—I want to call out that wives don't need to submit to sin or abuse—God gives them protection with the police and with the elders of the church. Anyone who is experiencing spousal abuse should go to the police and the elders of their church to get the help that they need immediately.)

What is the ultimate goal of a sacrificial husband as modeled by Christ? The spiritual purity and growth of his wife.

> *[26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,*

The husband must serve his wife and give himself up for her so that she might grow in obedience to the Lord. Her relationship with the Lord is the husband's ultimate priority. He should be leading and shepherding her in the Word of God. Ultimately, this is benefits him as well.

> *[27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

Christ has washed and redeemed believers as a gift to himself. Likewise, a godly wife growing in the Lord is a blessing to her husband.

Paul is going to give even more context as to how husbands should love their wives.

> [28] *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*

No one needs to be taught how to love himself. We know how to do that naturally. We look out for ourselves and our interests. We seek our own good. We want to protect ourselves and bring ourselves joy. Paul is saying we need to love our wives that way. Love your wife like you would love yourself and your own body.

> [29] *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it,*

It's unnatural for people to hurt themselves. I knew a girl growing up who was depressed because her parents were divorced and she was forced to live with her dad in California. She always wore long-sleeve sweatshirts, even in the summer. Eventually, I found out that this was a way to hide that she was a "cutter." She would cut her arms as a way to deal with her sadness and anger. She was causing herself pain in order to feel some measure of control. That's unnatural and not something most people do. We generally don't want to cause our body pain.

What comes naturally is feeding yourself when you're hungry. Resting when you're tired. Making yourself warm when you're cold and cool when you're hot. We nourish and cherish our own flesh. We generally seek to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Nourishing and cherishing (or "valuing," "esteeming," and "respecting in love") our wives should come natural to Christian husbands as we follow the example of Christ.

> *Just as Christ does the church,*

Christ suffered and died to save us. He loved us more than he loved comfort or protection. He seeks our good to this very day. Why?

> [30] *because we are members of his body.*

We are united in Christ. We are part of His body.

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ…Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor 12:12, 27).

Paul is going to expand on the union of Christ and the church to drive home his final point.

Wives and Husbands: Symbolize the Church and Christ

Because of the implications of what Paul just said—we are united with Christ as members of His body—he's going to issue a command:

> [31] *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

Paul is quoting Genesis 2:

> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:18-24).

When a man and woman marry, their primary family allegiance shifts from their families of origin to the new family unit they form together. They are literally united in the eyes of God as one flesh in marriage and sexual intercourse.

This has huge implications for family dynamics. For married couples, interacting with parents and in-laws can often lead to drama. There may be pressure around expectations from parents or in-laws. As a husband and wife, you are told to "leave and cleave." We still honor and respect our parents, but the husband-and-wife relationship takes precedence now. We don't need to obey our parents any longer. We need to give primacy to the needs of our husbands or wives. I know this is counter-cultural to many of us, but this is God's design for your marriage. Obeying this will lead to blessing. Ignoring this will lead to

heartache. (For more on honoring parents and in-laws while having your own independent family, see chapter 15.)

Paul goes on to explain how marriage is a representation of a much greater spiritual truth.

> *[32] This mystery is profound,*

What he's about to explain is something that was previously hidden to Old Testament believers. Even though they understood the one flesh concept, they didn't understand what it was ultimately pointing to:

> *and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

The institution of marriage is a symbol of the relationship of Christ to the church. Jesus is united to the church and will dwell with believers forever. (See the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Rev 19:6-9.) That's why distortions of the marriage relationship are so dishonoring to God. Homosexuality, adultery, fornication, incest, polygamy, and other categories of sexual sin distort the image of Christ and the church.

Paul then closes with a final summary to wrap up this passage:

> *[33] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Paul's call to action is clear:

- Husbands—love your wives sacrificially as you would love yourself.
- Wives—respect your husbands by submitting to their leadership.

Husbands and wives who follow God's expectations for marriage will be displaying the amazing reality of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Marriage and Parenting

So, what does this have to do with parenting? Why dedicate time to what God expects of husbands and wives when this is a parenting book? Shouldn't the focus solely be on parents and children? The short answer to these questions is that for family life to truly be honoring to God, we must seek to obey Scripture in all our family relationships.

If we want to honor God with how we're raising our children, yet we're neglecting to honor Him as husbands and wives, we're not fully obeying God's Word.

A husband who is not loving his wife and sacrificing himself for her like Christ loved the church is not honoring God, even if he is parenting based on biblical principles. If he's not leading his family like Christ leads the church, he's not meeting God's standard for a husband. Likewise, a wife who is not submitting to her husband's leadership but is parenting biblically is not fully honoring God. As believers, we can't pick and choose the parts of Scripture that we want to obey.

The husband/wife relationship is the foundation of the family. It is the most intimate relationship in life. Nowhere does Scripture say that parents and children are one flesh, yet that is how God describes the marriage relationship. If we're not honoring God in our marriages, we're setting a bad foundation for our family. We must seek to honor God both in our marriages and in our parenting. Out of love for God, we must seek to obey His Word in all areas of life. A biblically faithful marriage relationship provides solid footing for a biblically faithful parent/child relationship. If we want to be faithful parents, we must also strive to be faithful husbands and wives.

Chapter 4

THE ROLES OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

By Cliff McManis

The basic family unit is a team, and that team is composed of a dad, a mom, and children. For any team to be successful and to function in harmony, all the team players need to know their basic roles. Every team member has a specific role or function to play. This is true in much of society. All sports teams function best when the many members know and operate according to their specific roles. On a basketball team, the point guard needs to manage the ball and call out the plays. On a football team, the quarterback functions as a coach on the field as he verbally directs traffic, telling all the other players what to do, reminding them of their roles and keeping them on task. A musical choir is a team, and the conductor makes sure that all the singers chime in according to their specific assignments based on their specific roles. In the business world, many of today's most prolific companies operate in "teams." The concept of "team" is universal and as such, it is an ideal metaphor to describe how members of a family should function.

All healthy teams have rules, roles, and goals. And that is also true of the family as it has been designed by God. This chapter will survey the basic rules, roles, and goals for the family that are given in the Bible to help your family live in a way that pleases God and also brings practical harmony, which will benefit all the team players in your family.

The New Testament is the authority for Christian families with respect to their roles and functions as team members. The key passages that inform each of the family roles include Ephesians 5-6, Colossians 3, and Titus 2. There are many other passages that complement these main passages, including a few key Old Testament passages. So, we will survey the main truths in all of them. This chapter will specifically zero in on the role of the parents in relation to the children as well as the role of the children within the family. (See the previous chapter for a study of the roles of husbands and wives within the family.)

God left it primarily to the Apostle Paul to give the divine Christian guidelines for family life, especially God's expectations for parenting. The four Gospels highlight the ministry of Christ and the non-Pauline writings address other issues not directly related to family roles. Of Paul's thirteen letters, only three directly lay out the roles of family life. The most thorough discourse on this subject is what he wrote in Ephesians 6:1-4, which says the following:

> Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **Honor your father and mother** (which is the first commandment with a promise), **so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth**. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Similar to these instructions are the ones Paul wrote in Colossians 3:20-21, which says the following:

> Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

General Principles

Beautiful Simplicity

Before getting into the details of these verses, a few general observations from this passage regarding parental roles are in order. First, it should be noted how little specific information God gives to Christian parents about how to parent. In the entire New Testament, there are only two verses directed to parents on how to raise children: Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21. And even more amazing is that there is only one command in the entire New Testament given to

children with respect to their role, which is to "obey" their parents (cf. Eph 6:20; Col 3:20).

The takeaway from this beautiful simplicity and brevity from God is to show Christian parents that good, biblical parenting should not be that complicated and difficult. There are very few specific principles to follow. Raising kids is not rocket science. This is similar to the Ten Commandments in that God summarized everything that we need to know about the priorities of religious morality in ten short statements (cf. Ex 20). God has a masterful and incomparable economy of words. He can speak both comprehensively and concisely. And He did exactly that in delineating roles for parents and children.

Contrast God's brevity and simplicity about what parents need to know with the many of today's "parenting training programs" that offer basic education and techniques for parents that are composed of twelve, to eighteen, to even twenty-four-week sessions. Do we really need to go to class for two hours every week for half a year to learn how do what married couples have been doing without books, videos, and the internet for thousands of years?

Part of the answer to these questions is for Christian parents to reflect more carefully on the few principles God has given them and to ask, "Do we really understand and believe these few God-given principles?" and "Are we making these God-given commands the priority in our parenting over the proliferation of man-made solutions that are so frequently touted?" These questions really boil down to a single issue: "Biblical Sufficiency." As a Christian parent, do you think the simple principles offered in the Bible are adequate for parenting, or do we need other "missing" or even complementary principles found elsewhere, such as in modern medicine, secular education, secular psychology and psychiatry, and other vehicles? Sadly, it seems that many Christian parents are looking for answers, or the "secrets" of parenting, or the new latest thing, outside of the Bible and outside of the Church. Ironically, by doing so, parents are actually making the job of parenting more complicated than it needs to be. (See chapter 1 for a thorough exploration of the sufficiency of the Bible for parenting.)

At the same time, this parenting book is several hundred pages long. And there is a place for that, mainly because we as finite, sinful parents need much guidance on how to apply the few simple guidelines God has given, especially in light of all the complexities and vicissitudes of life, many unexpected. And that usually takes many pages to explain it all. The key is not to forget God's few, clear priorities.

Timeless Principles

A second general principle about parenting gleaned from a macro-observation of Ephesians 6 is to note that Paul roots his command to children in 6:1 in the Old Testament. Paul was telling Christian parents of his day that the priorities in parenting children have not changed with time. The command he articulated in Ephesians 6:1 which he penned around AD 61 is consistent with and complementary to the main command given to children in the Old Testament as stated in the Ten Commandments. Ephesians 6:2-3 is simply a quote from Exodus 20:12 (the Fifth Commandment) which God gave to Moses and Israel around 1446 BC.[1]

The practical takeaway for Christian parenting is that we don't always have to be looking for something "fresh" or "novel" to "keep up" with modern-day parenting. Parents often feel they are "missing out" because they don't know the latest parenting fad on Instagram. The foundation of parenting that God revealed long ago always remains the same and it transcends time, cultures, and technological developments. That is true because people don't change; children don't change; God's expectations don't change; the fundamental duties of parents do not change; sinners don't change; and God's solution to sin does not change. God made families in the beginning, and He knows best what families need, who the players are, and how they should function. Once again, we come back to "Biblical Sufficiency." Everything we needed to know about parenting has always been in the Bible. Christians have been successfully parenting since the time of the early church, even without the help of modern-day Christian (and non-Christian) parenting gurus that seem to be replete in today's church.

A Solid Foundation

A third general principle to note about the commands Paul gives to children and parents in Ephesians 6 is that they follow on the heels of commands he gave to husbands and wives in chapter 5. That order was intentional. Christians cannot be good parents unless they are first good husbands and wives. A solid marriage is the foundation for solid parenting. (See chapter 3 for an in-depth examination of Ephesians 5:22-23 and God's expectations of husbands and wives.)

God is the one who invented the human family. It did not evolve out of nothing or over time from lower life forms. Nor is the family a

[1] Note that Ephesians 6:2-3 are in italics, which is to notify the reader that those words are a quotation from the Old Testament. Some English translations put Old Testament quotes in the New Testament in all capital letters.

human construct. The first human family began when God created it 6,000 years ago on day six of the creation week (Gen 1:1-31). God began the first family with Adam and Eve, the first two humans whom God brought together through marriage (Gen 2). Since God is the one who created the family, He knows what is best for the family.

When God created Adam and Eve, He immediately performed the first wedding resulting in the first marriage. He then immediately charged them to expand their family by adding children. God commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply." The addition of children did not create a family. Adam and Eve by themselves, without children, already constituted a family. Adding children just expanded the human family. Children were to be welcomed, temporary additions to the family.

The end goal of procreating and having more children was "to fill the earth" with more people. God's desire was to replicate, perpetuate and fill the earth with "families" to the furthest corners of the earth. As such, the traditional family became the basic building block of human society. Families, or marriages, were intended to be like cells to the human body. God designed families and they are essential to a healthy society and all its corporate institutions.

The ideal family from God's perspective starts with a believing husband committed to a believing wife. Today, that means the husband is born-again through the gospel of Jesus Christ and he is committed to the Bible as God's Word. And the wife is the same: she knows and loves Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And the Christian husband and the Christian wife are "one" before God in all ways: spiritually, emotionally, legally, physically. They live the Christian life in unity, walking each day as partners and friends in a united front. They share the same biblical faith. They have the same worldview and are pressing on toward the same immediate goals (glorifying God in all things) and are persevering to the same end goal: being in the immediate presence of the glorified Christ, to serve Him for all eternity.

With this solid spiritual foundation of a believing husband and a believing wife intact, it is now possible to fulfill the ideal potential that God has laid out in the Scriptures with respect to all the family roles. Having a saved dad and mom is the best scenario for the children who will grow up in that home. Christian parents, who have the Holy Spirit living in them, have the divine enablement that is necessary to obey and fulfill God's requirements with respect to the roles He established for the family. The Apostle Paul assumes he is addressing a believing

husband and a believing wife as he gives instruction about family life in Ephesians 5-6, Colossians 3, and Titus 2.

God's Ordained Roles

The Role of the Children

Now that the general observations of parenting have been given, it's time to flesh out the specifics at the micro-level as we look at the biblical roles of parents and children. We start with the role of the children because that is what Paul does in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3. In both passages he gives the command first to children and then to the parents. Addressing the subordinate party first and then the ruling party is in keeping with how Paul addressed wives and husbands (Eph 5:22-33) and also how he addressed slaves and masters (Eph 6:5-9). Paul repeats this pattern in Colossians 3:18-4:1 when he addresses the same categories of relationships.

The Command

Paul writes, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph 6:1). There are many implications for parenting in this short divine statement. We will consider eight of them. First is the command or the imperative in the sentence, which is the word "obey." The Greek word here for "obey" is a compound word, *hupo* + *akouō*. *Hupo*, a preposition, means "under." *Akouō*, a verb, means "to hear" or "to listen." This is where our English word "acoustics" comes from. Taken together, then, this word means "to listen under" or to get under the authority of another; to comply with their orders; to be a good listener; to do what one is told. The word "obey" occurs twenty-one times in the New Testament and it emphasizes outward compliance; it is first and foremost an action. Simple lip service will not suffice.[2]

In addition, the imperative verb "obey" in this verse is in the present tense, which stresses that this is to be an ongoing, continual action. In other words, obedience to parents should be the expected characteristic of children toward their Christian parents. To do otherwise is disobedience, or sin. Parents should expect obedience from their children and not make excuses for their rebellious behavior or justify their child's insubordination. Parents who tolerate patterns of

[2] It is used five times in the Gospels showing how the sea and even demons obey and submit to the word of Christ (cf. Matt 8:27; Mark 1:27). In Romans 6:17, Paul explains that true obedience flows from the heart. The right action (obedience) is a byproduct of the right attitude (a submissive heart).

disobedience from their children are undermining God's most basic command for children and are setting their children up for future problems in life. Understanding this expectation of children is pretty easy. The hard part is implementing it. Passive parents, especially passive fathers, will be particularly challenged at holding up God's standard. Children best learn what it means to obey by the modeling of their Christian parents who are typified by obeying God, the Bible, and all legitimate human laws.

To avoid mere outward, legalistic compliance, the Apostle Paul roots the imperative to obey in the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue which says to "honor" your father and mother (Eph 6:2). "Honor" is synonymous with "obey" and yet has an additional nuance. Honor emphasizes the heart attitude that goes with the action. It is possible to comply with your parents' demands while harboring the wrong attitude in the heart. Children can obey out of fear of consequences, wanting approval, or even while holding on to bitterness. God requires that the right heart attitude accompany the right actions. Godly attitudes and actions should always go together. This requires that Christian parents not just tell their children "what" to do but also explain "why" they should or should not do a certain thing. Early in the child's life, parents should help their child learn obedience by giving verbal recognition to the parents when a command is given. When mom tells four-year-old Sally Sue, "Go brush your teeth now," Sally Sue should respond with, "Yes, mommy." And mommy should expect Sally Sue to say, "Yes, mommy."

The Authority

The second implication of this verse has to do with authority. All human authority is delegated from God the Creator and Judge. No human has innate or inherent authority (Rom 13:1). With respect to family relations, God has delegated His authority to parents to exercise over their children. Children are told to obey "your parents." Paul further defines "parents" in 6:2 as being "your father and mother." Dad and mom have equal, shared authority as parents. Parents have God-ordained authority over their children before any other person or institution. As such, children must first learn to obey their parents. Obeying parents is where children first learn the universal principle in society of authority and submission. Obeying parents is where children first learn the life-long principle of respecting authority. Christian parents need to recognize this God-given authority, embrace it, and protect it.

There are many threats to parental authority in our culture. Public schools often try to bypass, undermine, overrule, or even usurp parental authority. Government institutions, social services, Planned Parenthood, and many other organizations impinge on parental authority. Autonomous parental authority over children is a distinctive of a biblical worldview. Competing worldviews have for millennia argued that children belong to the State first and foremost. God says otherwise: "Children are gift from the Lord" to the parents (Ps 127:3). As such, children are expected to first obey and honor their parents before other authorities in their life. A child with Christian parents should habitually ask themselves, "What would my parents think about this?" In a real sense, for children to obey their Christian parents is to obey God.

The Subjects

A third implication of Ephesians 6:1 is related to the word "children." There's a long-standing debate in Christian circles about what constitutes a "child" in terms of obeying parents. American culture for generations has wrongly propagated the notion that once a teenager turns 18, they are no longer a child…even if they still live at home with their parents and are completely dependent upon their parents for everything. I have seen that firsthand in my church as a pastor with church members and it has been very destructive to family life. Sadly, many Christians have bought into that pseudo-standard of when a person reaches adulthood. Others have gone the other direction, suggesting that children should obey their parents when they are adults, even after leaving home, becoming independent, getting married, or even all their lives. That is another illegitimate extreme. Adult children should always respect their parents, but they are not required to obey their parents. Many times, they can respectfully disagree with them. (See chapter 15 for a deeper look at how married couples can honor their parents and in-laws without needing to obey them.)

The word for "children" in Ephesians 6:1 is *tekna*, which is used approximately 100 times in the New Testament. Its usual, face-value meaning refers to a younger person who is dependent upon the parents. It also denotes a closer relationship to the parents than does the word for "son" (*huios*), which is another common word in the New Testament.

Context makes it clear that Paul had a specific demographic in mind regarding this imperative. He was not talking about infants. Nor was he referring to independent adults. The way the word is used, the emphasis

is on children who are young dependents who are under the immediate care of their parents; in other words, children living at home. It refers to young people who need to be managed and cared for by their parents because they cannot yet fully fend for themselves. This is how Paul uses the same word in 1 Timothy when delineating elder qualifications: "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity" (3:4).

When Paul wrote the Ephesians letter to the church at Ephesus, he expected it to be read to the whole congregation. And he knew there would be children in the crowd who were old enough to hear this command, to understand it, and to comply with it. Ephesians 6:1 is a direct address to children with understanding in the church. Children living in a Christian home are expected by God to obey their parents…even if the children are not saved yet. One of the greatest needs of a child is to learn to submit to authority from the time they are young. Parents should be teaching this passage to their children from the time they are babies, with the expectation that as toddlers their understanding of its truth will increase more and more. A three-year-old can easily memorize this passage verbatim and understand its implications. Christian parents should teach their children accordingly.

The Boundaries

Implication number four has to do with boundaries. Parents are not perfect; they make mistakes and sin. Parents even sin against their children in different ways. God knows this and that is why He had Paul give the parameters of a child's obedience with respect to the parents, which is "in the Lord." When Paul uses the word "Lord" he almost always is referring specifically to Jesus in distinction from the Father, whom he typically refers to as "God." So then, children are required to obey their parents in ways that please Jesus Christ. Children are to obey their parents in every area and in every way that is in keeping with God's will. God gives great flexibility and freedom to parents as the leaders of their children. Any rule or demand that parents make, children are required to comply with, so long as that rule does not violate a biblical principle. Every demand from Christian parents must be "in the Lord."

In addition to using the limiting phrase, "in the Lord" in Ephesians 6:1, Paul complements that with the comprehensive modifier "in all things" in Colossians 3:20. These are not contradictory phrases, but rather they go together in perfect harmony. Children are to obey their parents in all things means in every area of life. Parents have full authority over their children. Parents are to be holistic parents, being

hands-on in all areas of their children's life. They can't abdicate certain areas. They can't leave the primary education of their children to the teachers at school, or all the spiritual discipleship to the youth pastor or the church. Parents also have full responsibility for their children and full accountability too. As such, children need to obey their parents in every area—in all things—even social media if they are teenagers.

There are countless biblical principles that inform and restrain the demands parents make on their children. Parents are not allowed to violate or contradict any explicit command or prohibition in Scripture when ruling over their children. Parents may not violate any implications of any biblical principles as they parent. All parental rules must be in keeping with the many "one another" commands of the New Testament. Parents' demands may not violate any of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:18-23) or the principles of biblical love (cf. 1 Cor 13:4-8).

The Reason

The fifth implication has to do with the justification for obedience. Paul says that children should obey their parents because "this is right." He means this is right according to God's perspective. Obeying parents is morally, spiritually, socially, and personally the right thing to do. God wants children to obey their parents. To obey your parents is to obey the will of God. God instituted parental authority and it is not to be undermined. To defy parental authority is to defy God's authority. "Right" is the opposite of "wrong." Paul notes in Romans 1:30 that disobedience to parents is a characteristic mark of paganism. To do the right thing is to do the holy, wholesome, righteous thing. To do the right thing pleases God. In the parallel passage in Colossians, Paul said that obeying parents "is well-pleasing to the Lord" (3:20). It is an amazing concept to think that fallen sinners can do something that "pleases" the infinite and holy Creator of the universe. Parents should routinely remind their children that when they obey mommy and daddy, they are pleasing God. And the converse is true: to not obey is rebellion, sin, and displeasing to God.

When prophesying about the future godless days of the culture, Paul says that "disobedience to parents" will be one of the tell-tale signs of those difficult times:

> But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, **disobedient to parents**,

> ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim 3:1-4; emphasis added).

It is sobering to know that one of the worst sins that defines an apostate society is when children are characterized as defying their parents. This shows how fundamental God's command for children to obey their parents is to the health and civility of any given society. A breakdown in God's ordained hierarchy in the family leads to a breakdown in all other human institutions. This also accentuates the importance of the parents' responsibility to teach their children the "why" of obedience and not just the "what." From the womb, Christian parents need to be telling their children clearly what pleases God, what does not, and why.

The Severity

A sixth implication of this command has to do with its severity when compromised. Paul is clear that the command for children to obey parents was established in the Decalogue (cf. Ex 20). The Fifth Commandment is the first of the last six commandments that deal with humans relating to other humans. The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with man's relationship to God. Being the first of the six commandments that deal with human relationships shows how important it is for children to obey their parents. God takes this command very seriously and to resist it can bring severe spiritual consequences, both natural and spiritual.

In 1446 BC, on Mount Sinai, immediately after God gave the Fifth Commandment to Moses, He followed it up with two sobering, corollary commands, which are an affront to modern sensibilities. God warned, "He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Ex 21:15) and "He who curses his father or mother shall surely be put to death" (Ex 21:17). These are alarming warnings, but God is holy and He does not tolerate rebellion. In 1406, on the Plains of Moab next to the Jordan River, Moses reiterated God's severity regarding the Fifth Commandment to Israel as He said, "'Cursed is he who dishonors his father and mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen'" (Deut 27:16). In contrast to those in Old Testament times, Christian parents are not supposed to put their children to death today for various sins because Jesus died in the place of sinners who deserve the death penalty. So, the temporal consequences have changed in the New Covenant dispensation. But God's severe hatred for a child's

disobedience and defiance toward parents has not changed. Christian parents need to teach their children about God's severe displeasure in this regard. Parents also need to teach their children about how to have a healthy, holy fear of their Creator and Judge (1 Pet 2:17; Heb 12:29) who can also become their Savior.

The Benefit

A seventh implication of Ephesians 6:1 is related to the benefit of the command. As mentioned earlier, teaching children from an early age how to obey inculcates the practice and discipline of learning how to be a submissive person in general. And this will be a life-long benefit to that child as they engage the world, at every age of their development. If obeying the authority of parents becomes routine, natural, and expected for a child, then they will be well-suited to obey other authorities in their life such as their piano teacher, the referee in a sporting competition, the principal at school, the police officer on the highway, the IRS when it is time to pay their taxes, their future employers, and more. Being a submissive, compliant, and deferential person is characteristic of a person who is filled with the Spirit. A person who is filled with the Spirit is a person who is "submissive" to the Holy Spirit. Submission is the way of the obedient Christian life (Eph 5:21). And children should learn the concept of obedience and submission first in the home from their parents.

The Safeguard

An eighth and final implication of the command to obey parents is that it serves as a safeguard for children. As a safeguard, this one command shows the gracious wisdom of God for children. In the whole New Testament, and even the whole Bible, God gave only one command specifically for children that they are expected to remember and keep, and that is to obey their parents. This keeps things simple for children, as they are immature, fragile, vulnerable, naïve, and in the process of growth.[3] Until they reach maturity or independence, they only have to focus on one main human relational priority: obeying their parents. This is for their good. Children are in a special category: they are not adults. Expectations are different. They are not ripe yet. Paul

[3] Even Jesus, in His humanity, went through the normal process of maturation as a child, as He grew in four ways: intellectually, physically, socially, and spiritually; cf. Luke 2:52.

commented on this when he said the following about himself, comparing his adult self to when he was a child:

> When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things (1 Cor 13:11).

Children are not meant to be taking all the responsibilities of the world upon their shoulders. They don't have the constitution for that. An eleven-year-old daughter is not supposed to be a second mommy or parent to her three younger siblings just because it is convenient for the parents or because the parents are neglecting basic parental duties. Children need to be allowed to be children. Childhood is a unique and fleeting time to be carefree and enjoy life. God knows that and so He has not overburdened them. Neither should we.

The Role of the Parents

Having first looked at the role of the children within the family, we now turn to the role of the parents. As with his guidelines for the children's role, Paul's guidelines for the parents' role are stated succinctly but potently:

> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

And his parallel injunction in Colossians 3:21 says the following:

> Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

Paul makes clear that the role of the parents is to take the lead, be in charge, and manage the children appropriately. Children have their role to play, but it is the responsibility of the parents to make sure the children stay in their role. It is also the role of the parents to make sure they stay in their own God-ordained role as obedient parents.

The Point Person

Paul begins the command with the word "Fathers." One might expect that he would have said "Parents" or "Fathers and mothers," especially in light of the fact that he just said to the children they are to obey and honor their "parents" and "father and mother." Why does Paul use only the masculine noun "Fathers"? Are only fathers responsible for

managing the kids? These two verses have confused some since the time Paul wrote it.

There are two main views as to why Paul says only "fathers." The first view says that the word "father" entails both father and mother, for in Paul's day, and in many biblical writings, the male gender of a word could be used to include both genders. In this same epistle, Paul greets all Christians, male and female, with the masculine noun "brethren" which he uses in an inclusive manner: "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 6:23). In Romans 8:14 Paul refers to all believers, male and female, as "sons" of God.[4] Jesus said "man" shall not live on bread alone, and He used the male noun "man" to refer to all people, men and women alike (Matt 4:4).

The second view argues that Paul's command is directed to the fathers only and not the mothers, for in Paul's day men were the *de facto* leaders of the family, and wives were to follow the lead of their husbands in all things, including the rearing of children.

The truth may be a combination of both. It is clear that the Greek terminology used by the biblical writers employed masculine words to include both genders. And at the same time, God ordained men, the husbands and fathers, to be the head of the marriage and the home. God created Adam first and then Eve second (Gen 2). Paul said God did this on purpose to show that the husband was designed to be the leader of the family; the first among equals (1 Cor 11:8-9; 1 Tim 2:13). Ephesians 5:23 says, "the husband is the head of the wife" and 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, "the man is the head of the woman."

In making these distinctions, Paul was not talking about worth, value or dignity. He was simply talking about functional roles. When it comes to parenting and managing children, the husband needs to step up and take the lead. This is a rebuke to the modern-day passive dads that seem to be ubiquitous. Mom has a say in parenting. In fact, mom and dad are "one" flesh (Gen 2:24) and should always parent with a united front. But someone must be the spokesperson, the family CEO—one person who is ultimately responsible and with whom the buck stops. And in the Christian family, the buck stops with dad. Mom and dad are like the two copilots who fly the plane. They are peers; they are equals; they are partners and share information. But one is the lead pilot and one is the

[4] The Apostle John did something similar in his epistle, using the phrase "young men" and the word "fathers" to refer to two different groups of Christians that included males and females; cf. 1 John 2:13.

second-in-command. Dad is the lead pilot of the family by God's design.

The Directives

Taking the commands to parents in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 together, God gives parents two simple directives that define their role as parents: one negative and one positive.

Interestingly, Paul mentions the negative directive first, namely, "do not provoke your children to anger" (Eph 6:4) and "do not exasperate your children" (Col 3:21). The two phrases are virtually synonymous, with a slight nuance to each, but both directives highlight the fact that parents can be prone to illegitimately overwhelming their children emotionally and psychologically.

It is likely that Paul leads with the negative prohibition first to counteract the behavioral norm of fathers in the Greco-Roman culture of the day. While some ancient cultures were maternal, the Greek and Roman cultures in which the New Testament was written were paternal. And in Rome, particularly, fathers had unilateral authority and rights over their children for life — even when the children became independent adults. Greek and Roman fathers were known for using excessive force with their children. Physical abuse was protected by a formal law called *patria potestas*.[5] When a Greek or Roman became a Christian, as a new creature in Christ, he had to make a radical shift away from the oppressive, totalitarian style of parenting that was probably modelled in his home. He then had to learn to put on Spirit-guided gentleness when parenting his own children. Such a shift would not come naturally or quickly. Old habits are hard to break. So, Paul confronts this dangerous, spirit-crushing parenting practice with the negative directive. There is no place for verbal oppression or physical abuse in a Christian home.

The verb "provoke" in Ephesians 6:4 is a compound Greek word made up of the normal word for "anger" (*orge*), with the preposition, *para-,* added on the front to intensify its meaning. *Para* means "alongside," indicating someone who is close in proximity. Parents, who live in close proximity with their kids, have the unique potential to significantly anger their children. The *King James Bible* renders the word "wrath" instead of the more modern "anger." Sometimes children get sinfully angry or wrathful because of their own sin; but sometimes they are provoked to wrath by the sin of the parents. Some anger manifested

[5] John Crook, "Patria Potestas" in *Classical Quarterly* 17 (1):113-122 (1967).

by a child might be a sign pointing back to bad parenting. Not all anger is equal.

The verb "exasperate" in Colossians 3:21 means "to embitter," "arouse," or "irritate" which emphasizes words or actions that come from a parent that overwhelms the emotional stability of a child. The opposite of "embitter" is to be kind, a basic biblical virtue (cf. Gal 5:22). One noted Greek scholar translates this phrase as, "don't be nagging your children, lest they get demoralized."[6] Children are emotionally vulnerable, underdeveloped, and frail. Parents can easily crush their children in this area. Paul recognized this and that is why he warned parents not to allow their children "to lose heart." As Lenski explains, parents are to avoid stirring up their children:

> by inconsiderate or even unjust or wrong treatment. No parent who wants his child to obey him 'in the Lord' will treat his child so that he becomes downhearted, gives up, loses cheerful willingness. Paul demands Christian parental consideration for children.[7]

Back in the day, when I was a youth pastor, I was teaching teens about the roles of children and parents from this passage. After telling the kids their obligation to obey, I then went on to Ephesians 6:4 and opened it up for discussion to get feedback from them. I asked them, "What are things your parents do that make you angry or exasperate you?" A couple of my own teenage kids were in the audience. The discussion was enlightening and memorable. I got both barrels from the horses' mouths. The youth were not hesitant to share—they were thankful to have a forum to verbalize their thoughts on this matter. They gave a lot of answers, but a few stood out: (1) they did not like their parents talking about them, especially their faults and weaknesses, with their adult friends or in any public setting; (2) they got frustrated by favoritism—comparing one child in the family with another; (3) they did not like it when their parents were too controlling or smothering; (4) they did not like that their parents always criticized them, nitpicking everything they did, and no matter what they did they could not please their parents; (5) they didn't like it when their parents argued in front of them or in public; (6) and they got frustrated when their parents were

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[6] Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 808.

[7] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Paul's Epistles: Colossians-Philemon* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 183.

not available when they should be. This final bad trait is more a sin of omission than of commission like the first five.

Having been a child once, a parent of four, and now a grandparent, I think these criticisms shared by the teens were legitimate and practically significant. All six of these typical parental behaviors violate biblical principles. Matthew 18:15 and 1 Corinthians 13:5-7 address the first one: parents are to "protect"[8] their children by not airing their faults in public. James 2:1 addresses the second parental bad habit as it condemns showing "personal favoritism." Matthew 12:20 addresses the third hurtful tendency of parents, as Jesus modelled the opposite of being controlling and smothering. The fourth issue, overly critical parents, is countered by the sage wisdom of Proverbs 15:1: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." The fifth issue, parents arguing in front of their children, is addressed by walking in the Spirit which refuses to argue and wrangle with others (Gal 5:20-23). The sixth issue is addressed by the first word of Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers." Dads need to be proactive, deliberate, and involved in the parenting. They can't just leave it all to mom.

Parents need to routinely evaluate themselves in light of this divine prohibition and ask, "Have I been too harsh? Do I show favoritism to one child over the other? Am I too critical? Am I available for my kids? Do I go to their games and recitals?" It is also helpful for mom and dad to keep each other in check in these areas. Even Christian dads can be overly aggressive and harsh with their children. It is easy to lose patience with children when they do childish things. Moms can be just as guilty exasperating their children by being hyper-critical, nagging and yelling all the time. Sin comes naturally for us. This is why Paul commands young women to get under the mentorship of older, godly women to be taught how "to love their children" (Titus 2:4). This verse implies that loving children in a thoroughly biblical way does not come naturally for humans. Moms and dads need to be taught how to love their children. And when, as a parent, you cross the line and sin against your child, you need to humble yourself, apologize to your child, and ask for forgiveness. That is a great time to teach on what it means to have forgiveness in Christ's death and resurrection. That is gospel-centered parenting.

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[8] 1 Corinthians 13:7 says, "love bears all things." "Bear" is from the Greek word *stegō* which means "roof"; so, love puts a roof over; love protects and shields. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8). Hey parents, stop talking to your friends about your child's weaknesses in an unedifying manner.

After giving the negative directive to parents, Paul then gives them the positive one: "but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). The little conjunction "but" is significant here. It draws a sharp contrast with the negative prohibition that just preceded it. It is used to emphatically highlight that Christian parenting is categorically different from worldly, unbiblical parenting which is characterized by provoking children to anger and rendering them exasperated due to domineering, authoritarian, or negligent parenting. Godly Christian parents are proactive, positive, edifying, encouraging, hands-on parents. Their proactive parenting is fulfilled by the verb "bring them up,"[9] which is just one Greek word: *ektrephete*. It is another loaded, compound word made up of *trepho,* which means "feed" and the preposition on front, *ek-*. *Trepho* means "feed" and the preposition, which means "among," makes the meaning emphatic. In English it can be rendered, "to bring up from childhood," "bring up," "to feed," or "rear up to maturity." It implies hands-on nurturing (i.e., "feeding") that happens over an extended period of time that is working toward a specific goal. The nurturing is primarily spiritual nurturing, but includes emotional, social, and physical nurturing as well. The loving Christian parent needs to nurture every aspect of the child.

Paul goes on to say that Christian nurturing of children is informed by "the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The word "discipline" is the familiar Greek word *paideia*, from which we get the word "pedagogy," which means education and instruction. *Paideia* occurs six times in the New Testament and dozens of times in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) and can be used in two primary ways: in reference to verbal instruction as well as physical training. In the Old Testament it most often refers to instruction, whether it be a body of knowledge or specific content. This usage is replete in Proverbs. God gave Proverbs to believing parents to impart godly "instruction" to their children: "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction (*paideian*)" (Prov 1:1-2). Christian parents are to daily utilize the content of Proverbs as they raise and train their children.

Paideia can also refer to physical training, especially negative, corrective training that constitutes deserved punishment. This is how the author of Hebrews repeatedly uses the word:

[9] Most English translations render the Greek word with the phrase, "bring them up." The NET Bible has "raise them up"; Gundry prefers, "be nourishing them"; *Commentary on the NT*, 777.

> "My son, do not regard lightly the **discipline** of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He **disciplines**, and He scourges every son whom He receives." It is for **discipline** that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without **discipline**, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to **discipline** us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they **disciplined** us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He **disciplines us** for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All **discipline** for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb 12:5-11; emphasis added).

In this passage the author uses the word *paideia* in the sense of "to chastise" or "to punish." The punishment can be verbal,[10] a spoken rebuke, or physical,[11] as in a spanking on the backside. For the latter, the author of Hebrews was alluding to passages in the Book of Proverbs that commend spanking as an occasional necessary and appropriate means of chastisement which is part of parental training (cf. Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15). One of the most significant cases of *paideia* referring to physical, painful chastisement by way of scourging is in reference to the death of Christ by crucifixion. This is rendered in the Book of Isaiah in the Greek Old Testament:

> He bears our sins and is pained for us; yet we accounted Him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction. But He was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities; the **chastisement** (*paideia*) of our peace was upon Him; and by His bruises we were healed (Isa 53:4-5; emphasis added).

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[10] In Hebrews 12:5 the author equates *paideia* (discipline) with *elegcho*, which is a verbal rebuke and is translated by the NASB as "reproved."

[11] In Hebrews 12:6 the author of Hebrews equates *paideia* (discipline) with *mastigoo*, which means "to flog" and the NASB translates as "scourges."

In addition to bringing children up in the discipline of the Lord, parents are to bring children up in the "instruction" of the Lord. The word "instruction" is a complement to "discipline." Together they entail full physical and verbal training of children, both positive and negative. The word "instruction" here is *nouthesia* and is another compound Greek word made up of *nous-* (mind) + *tithemi* (to place into). Taken together it means "to place into the mind." As a verbal or oral word, it specifically refers to "placing truth into the mind by way of verbal instruction." This is what we call teaching, which includes counseling, preaching, and all manner of speaking. *Nouthesia* is where we get the word "nouthetic," as in "nouthetic counseling," also known as "biblical counseling." Because this word is primarily verbal, it could be that Paul was using the word *paideia* in reference to physical discipline and training.

The Book of Proverbs joins these two methodologies together in perfect harmony with respect to training children in godly wisdom. Children must be physically disciplined and trained in parallel with ongoing verbal instruction. "The rod and reproof give wisdom" (Prov 29:15). Speaking alone without any physical chastisement may deviate into an undue leniency and permissiveness. Conversely, resorting to the rod too quickly when maybe a word of rebuke is sufficient can result in abusive parental behavior. Godly parents need to maintain the proper balance. (See chapters 7 and 8 for a more detailed treatment of the concept of biblical discipline.)

Paul concludes the parental injunction by telling parents that all their training, both verbal and physical, needs to be "in the Lord." Again, this phrase provides the parameters, boundaries, domain, and even the curriculum for all that parents need to teach their children. The ultimate goal of Christian parenting is to raise up children in the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures and fulfilled in the gospel.

When my wife and I teach parenting classes, we like to summarize the main three elements in Ephesians 6:4 with the three words, Refrain→ Train → Explain. "Refrain" refers to the first imperative: do not provoke your children to anger. "Train" refers to the physical side of parenting, which also includes modeling and chastisement. And "Explain" refers to the verbal instruction that parents give from the Bible to help the children interpret everything in life from God's perspective.

Paul's exhortation to parents to teach and instruct their children was not a new concept but rather a perpetuation of what God has always

required of believing parents. In the Old Testament, when God was formalizing Israel as His special nation, He commanded Moses and the people to make religious and spiritual instruction a priority. Spiritual instruction that changes lives begins in the home, with parents teaching their children God's objective truth. Deuteronomy chapter 6 is the most famous chapter in the Old Testament regarding instructing children. A key passage of it reads as follows:

> Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut 6:4-9).

The essence of this command to parents is that they are to teach their children about the true God all the time, in every area of life, always taking the opportunity to interpret life for their children through the lens of special revelation. Special revelation for us parents today is the Bible. Children are born sinners and as a result are spiritually separated from God. They remain estranged from God until they are born again. They can only be born again through the agency of Scripture as they take it in, understand it, and believe it. The Holy Spirit uses the truth of Scripture to prepare them for salvation. It is therefore imperative that Christian parents make a priority of teaching their children biblical truth from the time they are born. There is a requisite amount of information and knowledge they must achieve before they acquire a faith that leads to salvation (2 Tim 3:14-15; Rom 10:17; 1 Pet 1:23; James 1:18).

Although our goal as parents is to teach our children the whole Bible, certain truths are priorities in terms of chronology and should be the focus of their instruction when they are young and first learning. Some of these priority truths include the following:

1. God is the infinite, all powerful, Creator who made all things.
2. God created them and all people in His image.
3. All humans are commanded to love and honor God the Creator.

4. All humans are commanded to love their fellow man.
5. God is perfect, good, holy, and sinless and cannot tolerate sin.
6. God punishes sin through death.
7. Sin is a result of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve.
8. God cursed this world because of sin and so the world is full of evil.
9. God reveals Himself to us through the Bible, which is His perfect Word.
10. Sin separates us from God and must be punished.
11. Anyone who dies with unforgiven sin is sent to hell by God.
12. Sinners can be rescued from hell and sin by Jesus.
13. God sent Jesus the God-Man to earth to rescue sinners from God's wrath.
14. Jesus willingly died on the cross and rose to be the substitute for sinners.
15. Sinners can only be rescued from sin and death through God's work of grace.
16. God gave parents to children to help them get to know God.
17. Children must obey their parents in all things because this pleases God.
18. When a person dies, they either go to heaven or hell, which are real places.

Each of the above truths need to be explained thoroughly and these truths will lead to further questions, which in turn will lead to opportunities to teach other biblical truths. The idea is to teach children early on about a true cosmology and ontology: the truth about the world and the God who made it. The greatest enemies our children will face early on in the world will be pagan worldviews that propagate evolution, naturalism, the innate goodness of humanity, and that humans can earn favor with the Creator through human achievement. That needs to be countered by children who are pre-programmed in God's truth. Jesus said, "know the truth and the truth will set you free."

Summary

This chapter set out to delineate the basic roles that God has laid down for family life, giving emphasis to how parents and children relate to

each other in a God-honoring way. The key to good parenting flows from having a godly marriage. The Apostle Paul gives the specific divine requirements for Christian parents and their children in two key passages: Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20-21. Children must obey and honor their parents in keeping with God's will as outlined in Scripture. Parents are not to provoke their children with excessive demands and expectations, but should exercise proactive, positive, and loving shepherding informed by Scripture. When any party sins, the sin needs to be exposed and repented of, and forgiveness in the name of Christ must be granted. Kids and parents need to stay in their designated lanes, being good teammates with the goal of preserving unity and harmony with the truth for the whole team. A family that does that pleases God and receives His blessing.

Chapter 5

A THEOLOGY OF CHILDREN

By Cliff McManis

Thinking Comes Before Doing

"As a man thinks within himself, so he is" (Prov 23:7). This timeless proverb teaches that everything a person does, feels, and desires flows from and follows his thought life. We act in a certain way because we first thought a certain way. That's how humans operate. God knows this and that's why this is the teaching of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

If you want to get your life right, or change your behavior, or get control of your emotions, then you must first get your thoughts in order. This is why Jesus commanded that we "must" love God with all our "mind" (Matt 22:37). Jesus called this the "great and foremost commandment." Thinking right, especially about God and spiritual truth, is priority number one. Jesus was just echoing what God declared earlier in 1400 BC (Deut 6:5). The people of Yahweh [YHWH] have always been commanded to make a priority of right thinking, because behaviors, emotions, and desires flow from thinking. This is a fundamental biblical and Christian principle.

The Apostle Paul commanded Christians to this end when he wrote:

> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do

> not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:1-2).

In verse 1, Paul commands Christians to "present their bodies" in a holy manner. That means believers are expected to live godly, moral, obedient lives in keeping with God's demands. To do otherwise is sinful. But Christians cannot fulfill this demand in their own power, by human strength, by man-made religion and rituals, by sheer willpower, visualization, mystical incantations, nor by the latest spiritual or psychological gimmicks. Paul says there is only one way to control your body and your actions the way God expects, and that is by "renewing your mind." That is the key that he reveals in verse 2. Thinking comes before living. Actions flow from thoughts. And what Paul means by "renewing your mind" is the idea of constantly inputting objective biblical truth from Scripture into your mind. Scripture contains God's thoughts. What the Bible says, God says. When we take in the truth of Scripture, we are literally taking in God's thoughts. And God's thoughts are always perfect, unchanging, authoritative, and transformative. And Paul says in Romans 12:1 that when we live right because we think right, this is an act of "worship" to God; and He is pleased with it!

This basic biblical principle needs to be practically applied to how we conduct family life, and specifically this chapter will apply it to how we parent. If you are a parent, stop, pause, take a step back, and evaluate. How are you doing? Are you parenting the way God wants you to in all areas? In every area? Do you have a specific strategy, practice, pattern, philosophy, and approach for dealing with all your children's routines and needs? Do you know everything God has said about children and how to treat them? Or, are you flying by the seat of your pants in some areas as a parent? That's not good. And as a Christian that approach is not only unnecessary, it may even be dangerous. Because God's Word does have something to say about children that we should know…in every area of life. At least in every area where God expects us to comply with His mandates. In other words, the Bible contains a complete "theology" of children. Or, another way to say it is the Bible contains a complete "philosophy" of children and child-rearing, or Scripture contains a complete "worldview" of how we should think about children from God's perspective.

False Views of Children Abound

The world, or unbelievers, have their philosophies, worldviews, and even theologies about children. And they are at odds with Scripture. Sadly, many Christians try to parent according to worldly convictions, teachings, philosophies, and principles that are in conflict with the Bible they profess to believe. Often, well-meaning Christian parents have an eclectic theology of parenting and children, as they try to mix secular ideas with biblical principles. That's like mixing cyanide with coffee. God has warned us that, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9) and "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor 15:33). The Book of James adds, "whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (4:4). As Christian parents we need to vet out and banish all secular elements from our entrée of parenting.

All cultures and religions throughout history have had, and still have, a distorted, deficient, and even dangerous view of children. All of them put children at risk. All of them devalue children to some degree. Remember the ancient Egyptians and their Pharaoh who legalized abortion as he gave the decree for all citizens to slaughter newborn infants? Moses recounts the horrific time:

> Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive" (Ex 1:22).

And there were the many tribes of the Canaanites in the Old Testament who had no regard for the sanctity of life for children as they routinely sacrificed their babies alive in the fire to the false gods, Baal and Molech (Lev 20:2-5; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer 7:31). Their religion was bound up with murdering innocent infants and children. The pagan Greeks were equally culpable, codifying the justification of demeaning and mistreating certain children.[1] The Romans, who ruled in Jesus' day, had a deplorable view of children. They had a law called *patria potestas* which allowed Roman fathers to discard their "unwanted" newborn infants at will.[2] Around 45 AD, Seneca, the prominent advisor to the notorious Roman Emperor Nero, infamously declared, "We slaughter a fierce ox;

[1] Aristotle, the so-called "genius" pagan, advocated for the slavery of non-Greek offspring, for he said they were not much more than beasts, plants, and as such, "natural slaves"; *Politics*, Book I, 4-6.

[2] John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 316.

we strangle a mad dog; we plunge a knife into a sick cow. Children born weak or deformed we drown."[3]

Fast forward to the modern age, the so-called "advanced," "developed," and "civilized" era, and humanity at large has fared no better on their views and treatment of children. They are just as barbaric with babies as the ancient pagan Egyptians, Canaanites, and Romans were. Twentieth-century communism is guilty of slaughtering countless innocent children. China's one-child policy, enforced from 1979–2015, was responsible for murdering more than 335 million babies through mandated abortions.[4] That is roughly the size of the current population of the United States. In the same period, the United States has murdered over 65 million innocent babies since 1973 due to legalized abortion.[5] So much for modern "civilized" society.

On the flip side, modern secular psychology and countless humanistic institutions, which, ironically, at the same time recognize no innate value of the unborn or even newly born babies, push for undue autonomy for children as they get older, promoting overt rebellion and premature independence from their parents. Countless "progressive" groups today are advocating for the "liberation" of children away from their parents and all traditional authority. Their mantras include the following: "Let the child decide," "The State knows best," "Parents are dangerous," and "The traditional family needs to go!"[6] This movement is the epitome of the dangerous "child-centered" craze.

Every culture, philosophy, ideology, and religion in history that was not informed by the special revelation of God's Word had or has a defective view of children. Thank God that He has graciously given His people the full revelation about children (whom He created) that parents and society need to know about to care for them appropriately. The following are eleven biblical principles gleaned from Scripture that constitute a complete and working "theology of children" to help guide Christian parents in how to think about, rear, and enjoy their children in a way that pleases God.

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[3] Seneca, "On Anger," Book 1:15.

[4] Tom Strode, "China: 336 million abortions in barely 4 decades," Baptist Press, March 19, 2013; www.baptistpress.com.

[5] National Right to Life, "Abortion Statistics," www.nrlc.org.

[6] MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 308-310. Interestingly, long before modern-day humanists began fighting for "children's rights," Plato the pagan (428-348 BC) argued for State control of all children, as he saw parents as inherently inept; cf. Plato, *The Republic*, Books 5-10.

Children Are Made in God's Image

The first biblical principle about children revealed in Scripture is actually the most foundational one, with countless implications, and that is that all children are made in the image of God. This is how the Bible begins. In the very first chapter of the Genesis, Moses recounts the significance of how God created the first two humans:

> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them …. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (Gen 1:26-27, 31).

Three times in this short passage it says that humans were created in God's "image." In verse 26 it says humans were made in God's "likeness," which is a synonym for "image."[7] To be made in God's image means to be made "like" God in some manner. God said He would make humans similar to Himself in some fashion, but as creatures, humans would be like God in limited ways on a finite scale. Humans will never be equal to God but will forevermore be dependent creatures.[8] The triune God of the Bible is Spirit and does not have a physical body (Luke 24:39; John 4:24). What defines God's being and nature are His attributes; characteristics about Himself which He has revealed through special revelation. These multiple attributes taken together constitute the essence of who God is in His personhood (or

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[7] "Image" is the Hebrew word *selem*, and "likeness" is the word *demut*, both of which refer to an outward manifestation of something else, a tangible reflection of an original, yet each with a specific nuance. In this verse they complement one another and emphatically highlight man's comparability to the Creator in some innate and inherent manner; cf. George J Zemek, *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrines of Grace*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 2002), 4; R. Laird Harris, ed. *Theological Wordbook of the OT*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 191-192.

[8] False religion often teaches that humans are "divine" in some manner, but they aren't and never will be. Mormonism, New Age philosophy, Hinduism and many brands of the Protestant prosperity gospel movement all claim forms of "godhood" for humans. But the fact is that humans who are perfected and glorified in heaven will for eternity be dependent upon God the Creator and Jesus the Savior, and will worship God as finite creatures in lowly humility forever; cf. Rev 5:8-14.

actually three Persons who make up the one God). So, to say that humans are made in God's "image," first and foremost means that humans are "persons."

To be a person is to have the qualities of rationality, volition, emotion, and immortality. God has all of these attributes and shares them with humanity. As "image-bearers," humans possess and reflect these attributes. Animals, plants, and inanimate objects have none of these. Personhood is what makes humans distinct, the highest creation of God. Being made in God's image also means that humans are inherently sacred and valuable, for they represent God in their constitution. This is what James meant when he wrote the following:

> But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way (James 3:8-10).

And that is true of every person who is ever conceived. Every human is sacred from the womb. Every person has God-given dignity, worth, and value from infancy. This is where the idea of "the sanctity of life" comes from, the image of God. God owns every soul, and He is tenaciously jealous for every soul that He brought into being (Ezek 18:4; James 4:5). Humans are the most sacred beings among God's created order. Even angels don't reach the level of being made in the image of God (1 Cor 6:3; Heb 1:14).[9]

It is important to note that Adam and Eve's original sin did not eradicate the image of God within them. They were still persons in their very being. Fallen sinners still bear the image of God, His creative imprint. Sin did sever the personal relationship Adam and Eve had with God. And sin also distorted their image, and only salvation could recoup God-intended functionality to their image. Today when a sinner is born again, they are renewed after the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). This means God divinely enables the redeemed to function as He originally designed when He made them in His image.

Additionally, it needs to be clarified that just because all people are made in God's image, conceived, and born after His likeness, it does not mean that every person is born a "child of God." The doctrine that

[9] John Calvin mistakenly said angels were made in the image of God in *Institutes*, Bk I: Chap 15: 3.

says, "All people are the children of God" is classic heretical, liberal theology.[10] Actually, every person is made in God's image but is born a sinful rebel from the womb in need of salvation (Ps 51:5-7; Rom 5:12). Every person is actually born as a child of Satan, not of God (John 8:44; Eph 2:1-2; 1 John 3:8, 10). That is why Jesus told the most religious man of his day, Nicodemus, "You must be born again!" (John 3:3). Jesus informed this leader of the Jews that his religion would not save him and only repenting from sin and submitting to Christ would. And that is true of every person born today (Rom 10:9-10). We are all the spiritual offspring of the Devil when we are born due to indwelling sin and we need to be adopted into God's family by believing in His gospel (Rom 1:16).

The doctrine of the image of God in every person is a unique teaching of the Bible. No other culture or religion believes it, and as a result every worldview today that is not informed by Scripture has a compromised view of children. All non-biblical ideologies ascribe no innate value to babies or to humans in general. Most unbelievers allege humans are the byproduct of random, purposeless evolution. Ironically, many radical humanists and environmentalists today, who are typically Darwinian evolutionists, say animals are inherently sacred and have more value than humans. That's why they tenaciously seek to protect the egg of the unborn spotted owl while at the same time tenaciously support the right of Planned Parenthood to abort unborn humans. Some say that the earth itself is sacred. The secular world has turned the truth about the sanctity of life on its head.

The truth that all babies are born with the image of God has countless practical parenting implications. Because all children are born being made in the image of God, being equally sacred, parents should treat all of their children accordingly. There should be no favoritism in the Christian home (James 2:1) …even if one child is better at math than another; or if one child excels at the piano while another doesn't; or when one child is an A student and the other is a C student. Further, children born with autism, down syndrome, a physical deformity, or with any other congenital abnormality, are just as precious to God as

[10] "Liberal theology" is a technical phrase for pseudo-Christianity that became prominent in America at the beginning of the 20th century and was characterized by those who professed to believe in the Bible while at the same time they denied its supernatural character and rejected sin, eternal hell, and a real, personal Devil. Sadly, liberal theology is alive and well in the Church today.

"normal" children. We need to love and nurture them all the same (Phil 2:2).

Parents Are Commanded to Have Children

The second basic truth to a biblical theology of children is that God commanded parents to have children. In the beginning, God the Creator mandated procreation. This was the first command God gave humans when He made them. Moses recounts what God said to Adam and Eve on day six when He created them:

> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:27-28).

God first gave this command about 4000 BC in the beginning of history. But He repeated it around 2500 BC in the days of Noah after the year-long Flood. When Noah and his seven family members got off the ark, God repeated the procreation command to Noah and his wife and to his sons and their wives:

> And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen 9:1).

God has never rescinded this command and He still intends married couples to have children. Children, babies, and the ability to conceive are always portrayed in Scripture as a gift from God. When Eve gave birth to Cain she gave the credit to God saying, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man" (Gen 4:1; NIV). The Psalmist says that children are a gift from God and "blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (127:5). This verse teaches that having many children is a blessing. The unbelieving world says otherwise, often alleging that children are a "ball and chain," a burden to the world's economic balance, or a threat to the balance of the Earth's ecosystem. Christian married couples who are physically able to have children who choose not to have children out of convenience, fear, or any other self-serving reasons proffered by the world are out of step with God's revealed will.

Children Are a Gift from God

The third truth about babies and children is that they are a blessing from God. Children are a heavenly gift, because life is a gift. Psalm 127:3 says,

> Behold, children are a gift of the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward.

The Hebrew word for "Behold!" (*hinneh*) is an emphatic interjection and always highlights something out of the ordinary, miraculous, or breathtaking. When God is the one doing the action, it highlights His work as memorable and incomparable, emphasizing that all onlookers should take notice, respect, and admire what He has done. In this case, this little interjection is a clarion call for all humanity to give children their proper due: they are a special gift from God the Creator and they better be treated accordingly.

The *New American Standard Bible (NASB)* says children are a "gift," whereas other translations say they are a "heritage" or an "inheritance."[11] All three renderings are legitimate renderings of the Hebrew word used here to describe children, which is *nachalah*. But none of the suggested three English renderings do full justice to the Hebrew term used (something is almost always lost in translation from one language to another).

Nachalah is a noun that occurs about 220 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and its related verb occurs 59 times. The verb and the noun are closely related.

> The verb means that a joint heir has received his portion by succession, while the noun denotes the portion received. In other words, the action denoted by the verb consists in transforming the right to a total estate into an exclusive right to a portion, called in Hebrew, *nachala.*[12]

Nachalah is almost always used as a legal term in the Old Testament, so the word "gift" is not the ideal translation. Children are even more than the typical gift. The words "heritage" and "inheritance" include the

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[11] The *King James*, the *New King James*, the CSB, the ESV and the NIV all say children are a "heritage"; the Legacy translation says children are an "inheritance." The NET Bible and the NLT follow the NASB; interestingly, the NASB translates *nachala* as "inheritance" in 198 other instances of the 220 possible occurrences.

[12] G. Johannes Botterweck, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. IX* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 320.

legal nuance, but the Hebrew term is actually more narrow than these English words. Most often, *nachalah* refers to the land that YHWH promised to give to the tribes of Jacob to possess as their own (cf. Deut 4:21). God originally owned the land and He gave it to Israel to possess, enjoy, manage, and steward. In a similar fashion, every soul belongs to God the Creator (Ezek 18:4) and He entrusts these souls as children to parents, that they might enjoy them truly as their own, to possess, care for, and steward. And in the end, as stewards, all parents must give a full accounting to God of how they parented the children God entrusted to their care (2 Cor 5:10).

This truth that children are a blessed stewardship from heaven goes hand in hand with the previous truth that says God commands parents to procreate. One of the reasons God wants parents to have babies is because He knows babies and young children are a blessed addition to the family, and for many reasons. Having children teaches the parents how to be servant-oriented and selfless. Having babies teaches parents how to love in a new way. Having children gives parents a glimpse of what it means when Scripture teaches that God is our "Father," provider, as well as the One who nurtures and disciplines us for our good. Also, a married couple who is infertile, unable to bear their own children, can experience the biblical truth of "adoption," the legal process of expanding the family. This process was created by God and modeled by Him each time He saves a human soul and adds them to His spiritual family. Every believer joins God's eternal family through spiritual adoption. (See Appendix 3 for a further exploration of Christian parenting and adoption.)

Children Are Born Sinful

The fourth truth about children revealed in Scripture is that children are born sinful. Our first two parents were created without sin, but when they disobeyed God their natures became corrupt and the Bible teaches that they passed this corrupt nature on to all their offspring (Rom 5:12). As a result, all people since Adam and Eve have inherited a sin nature from the point of conception and are born with a sin nature. King David, who was also a prophet of God, testified of this truth regarding the origin of his sinful nature which he inherited at conception:

> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me (Ps 51:5).

Being born with a sin nature means all people are born sinners (Rom 3:23). Being born sinful means every person is spiritually separated from God and needs to be "born again." Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can remedy this spiritual separation from God caused by innate sin (Acts 4:12). In light of this truth, a major priority of Christian parents is to be praying for the salvation of their children from the time they are in the womb, in addition to teaching their children the gospel as they grow, all in the context of a Christ-exalting, God-honoring home.

The fact that every child is conceived and born in sin does not contradict the truth that every child is made in God's image. Their image speaks to their divine origin; their sin nature speaks to the evil, external influence of sin that polluted that God-given divine image. These are parallel realities about the nature of children: they are made in God's image and are therefore sacred and, at the same time, they are born spiritually dead in trespasses and sins and are in need of God's salvation.

Just as those who reject or are ignorant of the Bible completely ignore the inherent sacred value of children, they also completely reject the fact that babies are born wicked, totally depraved, sinners to the core, albeit cute and lovable sinners. The Bible teaches that all people sin because they are sinners. Bad theology says people are sinners because they sin. Humanists say children are born morally good or neutral and become bad with time because of negative external influences. Secular humanists formally allege that children become bad because of exposure to bad parenting or from compromised, non-egalitarian authority figures in their lives.

In like manner, modern psychology typically argues that a disruptive fifth grader or an overly aggressive and violent teenager disregard social norms and decorum, not because they are inherently sinners, but because they are victims who have been corrupted by external forces, whether people, institutions, or the environment. But the Bible is clear about the divine diagnosis regarding the true nature of children with respect to their innate evil natures. By God's grace, that same Bible gives parents the remedy to manage and override that innate sin with love, discipline, and spiritual truth.

God Loves Babies and Children

The fifth truth about children revealed in Scripture is that God loves them. Since God loves babies and children, we should too. God's special love for children is first made evident in the Old Testament.

When giving the Law to Moses and Israel, God mandated and codified a perpetual decree requiring all people to note and protect the vulnerability of children, especially orphans. God commanded people to "love" the orphan because He loves the orphan. God said,

> For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Deut 10:17-19).

Notice this passage highlights that concern for orphans is part of God's nature. The Hebrew word for "love" here is *ahab* and refers to the most intimate and committed kind of personal love. The God of the Old Testament is portrayed as a God of love, especially of the lowly, helpless, and vulnerable. This flies in the face of the popular adage that says, "God helps those who help themselves."[13] The Bible says just the opposite: God helps those who can't help themselves (Ps 72:12; Rom 5:6).

God's special love for children is also showcased in the days of Jonah the prophet (8th century BC). After God threatened to wipe out the evil Ninevites, He decided to relent as a result of His patience and grace for sinners as well as their repentance. Jonah got angry at God because he wanted God to destroy the Ninevites. Jonah was prejudiced, unforgiving, and unmerciful. God rebuked Jonah as result. And in His rebuke, God told Jonah that part of the reason He mercifully spared the whole city of Nineveh was because of the many young children who lived there. God asked Jonah,

> Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand (Jonah 4:11).

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[13] This self-righteous, unbiblical adage was popularized by Benjamin Franklin (who was a Deist) in his *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1757) but was published in English earlier by Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government* in 1698. Sidney's humanist sentiment was in keeping with the age in which he lived, namely the Enlightenment, which emphasized human autonomy over special revelation. Sadly, it is also in keeping with the American sentiment of "rugged individualism" which is still in vogue today.

The phrase "persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand" is a reference to young children.[14] So, Nineveh had at least 120,000 babies and young children in the city. Because of God's special care for children, He spared everyone living there!

The New Testament also affirms God's special love for children, especially in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus loved babies and children. This is most clearly illustrated in the Gospels when at the end of His public ministry, some parents brought their babies to Jesus while He was teaching to the multitudes and they asked Jesus to "touch" and bless their children. Mark describes the incident:

> And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them (Mark 10:13-16).

Luke notes that the "children" were actually "babies" (Luke 18:15). These parents no doubt had to fight through the crowds to access Jesus and they had to push past the front line of the overly protective and jealous disciples who apparently didn't love children like Jesus did. Babies can't give you anything in return and they are totally demanding. So, giving babies the time of day and special attention would throw Jesus off His planned itinerary of interacting with worthwhile people, the adults. That's why the disciples "rebuked" the parents, in effect saying, "Get those babies out of here! Jesus has more important matters to attend to." But they were wrong. Jesus the God-Man stopped everything, heeded the parents' requests and grabbed the babies one by one, held them lovingly, and blessed them.

Children Are Impressionable

The sixth truth from Scripture that parents need to know about children is that they are impressionable and vulnerable. As young ones in the development phase (Luke 2:52), they lack both inherent wisdom and the wisdom that comes from experience. The Book of Proverbs, written for children and young people, highlights the vulnerability and

[14] John D. Hannah, "Jonah" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord (SP Publications, 1988), 1472.

naïveté of children (1:4). They are easily swayed by other people around them and the immediate circumstances at hand. Children are vulnerable and prone to being easily deceived and misled (Eph 4:14). They are gullible and can be overly trusting if the wrong person comes across their path (Ps 1:1). Parents can't expect children to act like adults (cf. 1 Cor 13:11).

Children Need Protection

The seventh truth about children flows from the previous one: because children are impressionable, parents need to protect them. Inherent in loving children is protecting them (1 Cor 13:7). Just as a hen protects her young ones, parents need to protect their young ones. God is the model as He protects His children jealously and vigorously (Ps 91:4; Zech 8:1-2). The main thing children need to be protected from is evil, beginning with the evil that resides in them. They need to be taught not to trust self, but to trust God (Ps 20:7; Prov 3:5-6; John 14:1; James 1:6) and God-given authority (Ex 20; Eph 6:1; Rom 13:1-4). We saw earlier that children are born sinners. Parents need to protect children from themselves. Sin is the greatest enemy. Several verses speak to this innate vulnerability of children:

> Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen 6:5).
>
> The wicked are estranged from the womb;
> These who speak lies go astray from birth (Ps 58:3).
>
> The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

Parents also need to protect their children from external influences of sin and temptation. This could be protecting them from certain people (even some relatives and other kids), various forms of godless "entertainment," anti-God school curriculum, and much more. The challenge here is to do so without being a legalistic or overly controlling parent.[15] The rule of thumb is, "Insulate, don't isolate." Hence, Paul

[15] There are countless parenting books out there, almost too many to choose from; but one reliable one that strikes the balance between legalism and liberalism is John MacArthur's, *What the Bible Says about Parenting* (Thomas Nelson, 2000). See Appendix 2 for a full list of recommending parenting and marriage books.

reminds parents of the beautiful balance: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart" (Col 3:21).

Another way to protect children is to be aware of "stumbling blocks" that are set before children. Jesus sternly warned about this:

> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matt 18:1-6).

According to Jesus, the hottest hell is reserved for those who impede children from getting to know who Jesus is and what He has done for sinners.

Parents Indelibly Influence Their Children

Truth number eight: children are indelibly influenced by their parents. Whether they realize it or not, parents make the biggest impact on children during the formative years. This is true of parents who are missing in action, as well as those who are constantly on duty. By God's design, children are to be raised by their parents, ideally a mom and a dad who are married, living together, and love each other. God has sovereignly assigned each one of us to our specific parents and family, and He had a purpose in doing so (Acts 17:26). Parents can be the greatest help (Ps 128) or the biggest hindrance to a child's development in every area, be it physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, or emotional (Prov 22:6). Countless grown adults have vivid dreams about the interactions they had growing up with their parents. Some of those dreams are sweet. For others, they are nightmares.

Parents influence their kids by formal instruction and modeling as well as by informal and unintended words, actions, attitudes, and habits. What known habits are you passing on to your children? What unintended bad habits are you passing on? Are you aware of the unintended bad habits being passed on by osmosis? This is a good area

to stop, pause, and do some self-reflection and parental inventory before it's too late.

In His grace, God can override bad parenting or in many cases a lack of parenting. He can heal abusive parenting. He can spiritually rescue children born and raised by unbelieving parents. The good news in the end is that God loves our children more than we do and He has the power to counteract inattentive, bad, or abusive parenting (Rom 8:28; cf. Gen 50:20-21).

Parents Are to Evangelize and Disciple Their Children

Truth number nine: parents have the command, privilege, and authority to evangelize their children. This comes through ongoing verbal instruction, non-stop prayers on their behalf, godly modeling in and outside the home, and the careful selection of who their friends and teachers will be over prolonged periods of time. While salvation happens in a moment of time, evangelism is a process and most often happens over an extended duration.

Scripture is clear that spiritual instruction begins and ends with parental authority. God told Moses:

> Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged …. You shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might …. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up (Deut 6:1-7).

The New Testament also commands parents to evangelize their children in biblical truth:

> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

The Apostle Paul's greatest disciple, Timothy, came to faith in Jesus due to faithful, ongoing, parental influence from his mom and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5), despite having an unbelieving dad. (See chapter 7 for an in-depth examination on the biblical foundation for a parent's role in discipling their children and chapter 9 for practical ways of applying biblical discipleship in family life.)

Parents Are to Provide for Their Children

Truth number ten: parents need to provide physically for their children. Parents are not to prioritize only spiritual guidance and instruction to their children. Children, and all humans, are physical beings as well as spiritual. And the physical aspect needs due attention, nurture, and care. Children cannot provide and care for themselves. If they could, they would just eat Twinkies and drink Kool-Aid. Basic to being a father is being a provider for the family. God has called men to work hard, continually, by the sweat of the brow to fulfill this basic mandate. A godly mother also provides for the children. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is commended for being a diligent and a tireless hard worker, most of which was for the benefit of her children. She did not skimp either. She did not dress them in gunny sacks or hand-me-downs, but instead:

> She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple (Prov 31:21-22).

The New Testament affirms this basic truth as well: parents need to meet the needs of their children. Christian women are instructed to show "love" to their children by being "workers at home" (Titus 2:4-5). Being a worker at home entails being a good homemaker, a bulk of which means caring physically for the children and providing their basic needs in a well-ordered home. (See chapter 3 for a deeper discussion on God's roles for husbands and wives.)

In 1 Timothy, Paul is categorical on this topic: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8).

Children Are Intended to Leave Their Parents One Day

Truth number eleven from the Bible is that children need to leave home someday. They were not intended to be permanent household fixtures. A family is made up of a man and a wife. A child is a temporary,

welcomed addition. From the beginning, God said that when a child grows and matures, he is "to leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife" in marriage (Gen 2:24). This is one of the basic goals of parenting. They are arrows in the quiver intended to be shot (Ps 127).

From the time your baby is born, as a responsible, biblical parent, you need to be thinking long-term and seeing the big picture. From the time the child is in the womb, parents should be praying, asking God to someday provide them with the perfect spouse, the companion God intended. After all, God said, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (Prov 18:22).

Parents need to always be about training their children to launch, so they can someday be fully functioning, independent citizens, managing their own families in a way that pleases God. Today, God's intended plan of launching children is impeded by control-freak parents, helicopter moms, and worldly ideas of wanting to delay and put off marriage until the young ones first excel in their careers and build a stash of cash to the sky. Christians need to resist the false wisdom of the world (Col 2:8) and instead trust God with His perfect plans. The Father knows best!

Summary

In this chapter we noted that all people operate and live their lives according to their worldview, whether they are aware of it or not. Christians should have a worldview informed by the Bible. Pursuing that goal needs to be a deliberate effort. Scripture contains a worldview about parenting and children in general, which amounts to "a theology of children."

This chapter highlighted eleven truths from Scripture that should be a part of every Christian parent's philosophy of childrearing. By way of reminder, the eleven guiding principles about children from Scripture are as follows:

1. Children are made in God's image and are therefore inherently sacred and valuable as persons from conception.
2. Parents are commanded to have children.
3. All children are a gift from God and a stewardship responsibility.
4. Children are conceived and born sinful in need of spiritual salvation.

5. God loves babies and children, so parents should love them too, without partiality.
6. Children are impressionable and vulnerable.
7. Parents need to protect their children from the sin within them and from temptations and dangers without.
8. Parents indelibly influence their children, by omission and commission, formally and informally.
9. Parents need to evangelize their children from the womb.
10. Parents need to provide well physically for their children.
11. Parents need to prepare children to someday leave home as responsible, independent adults.

Part II:

APPLYING BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN FAMILY LIFE

Chapter 6

PREPARING FOR CHILDREN: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BE READY?

By Jason Ng

A Personal Beginning

I still remember the moment we found out we were going to have a child. My wife and I had been married for only a year, and while we were filled with joy, I also knew in my heart that we weren't fully prepared. At the time, I thought preparation meant having enough money saved, a safe place to live, and a plan for how life would work with a baby. Those things mattered, of course, but as the years went on, I began to see that true readiness for parenting goes much deeper.

Looking back, there are many things I would have done differently if I had the chance to do it over. Yet God, in His wisdom, knew we were ready in ways I couldn't see. Parenting is one of those journeys where you discover quickly that your own strength will not be enough. God uses the challenges of raising children to show us our weakness and, more importantly, to teach us dependence on Him.

Now, more than a decade later, I look at the faces of our teen and tween and realize I'm still learning. The questions and struggles of parenting have not disappeared; they have simply changed shape. We still need God's wisdom and guidance every single day. And perhaps

that's the point: readiness for parenting is not about arriving at a place of control, but about learning to trust God and grow in Christ.

The Question of Readiness

If you ask people what it means to be "ready" to have kids, you'll often hear the same list of concerns:

- Do we have enough money?
- Is our living situation stable?
- Who will take care of the baby during the day?
- Will one parent stay home?
- Are we on the same page about how to raise the child?
- Will we still have time for each other as a couple?
- What about discipline, school, or church involvement?

These are honest and important questions. They should absolutely be discussed with your spouse. But if we treat these questions as the ultimate test of readiness, we may miss the bigger picture. Some couples put off having children for years; waiting until everything is perfectly in place, and they never feel ready. Others jump in with little thought and find themselves overwhelmed.

Here's the truth: no parent is ever completely ready. Parenting is bigger than us. It's not just about paying bills, juggling schedules, or keeping the house running smoothly. Parenting is a calling that presses us to rely on God and grow in Him.

A Different Kind of Readiness

So, what does it really mean to be ready to be a parent? The more I think about it, the more I see that readiness is less about circumstances and more about character. The heart of readiness is spiritual maturity.

The more we grow to resemble Christ and the closer we become to our spouse, the better equipped we are for parenting. A healthy marriage shaped by Christ is the foundation for raising children. If our hearts are cold toward God or if our relationship with Christ is shallow, then our strength will eventually run out. But if we are pursuing Him daily, He gives us the wisdom, patience, and grace we need to guide the little ones He entrusts to us. In light of that, we will spend most of this chapter discussing the spiritual disciplines that can help you prepare yourself spiritually to have children.

Why Spiritual Disciplines Matter

Recently, our pastor reminded us of the importance of being strong in our spiritual disciplines; things like Bible reading, prayer, worship, and service. These practices are not just religious habits. They're ways of training our hearts to stay close to God.

Think of the word "discipline." It implies training that produces a certain character or pattern of behavior. Nothing significant in life is accomplished without discipline. The same is true of the Christian life. Spiritual disciplines are those practices that help us grow in godliness. To be clear, they're not about earning favor with God, but about drawing near to Him, listening to His Word, and shaping our lives according to His will. Without discipline, we drift. With discipline, we find strength and direction. And this is especially important for parents. Parenting requires patience, endurance, humility, and wisdom. These qualities do not appear overnight; they're built through a steady walk with God.

Pursuing Holiness

The author of the Book of Hebrews tells us:

> Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

This verse highlights two things: pursuing peace with others and striving for holiness. Both are vital for parenting. Peace requires effort. It means practicing forgiveness, showing patience, and seeking reconciliation. Holiness means being set apart for God, growing in Christlikeness, and living with integrity. Together, these pursuits shape us into the kind of people who can shepherd children with love and wisdom.

Holiness is not optional. It's not something we can put off until later in life. It's central to walking with God. And it is central to parenting because our children will see whether our faith is genuine. They learn equally from watching us as from listening to our words.

Discipline Yourself for Godliness

Paul's words to Timothy are clear:

> Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim 4:7).

This is not passive. It requires training, just like an athlete who prepares for a race.

Godliness is not about following rules; it's about shaping our hearts and lives around the character of Christ. For parents, this means that readiness for children begins with personal devotion. If I am not walking with God daily, how will I have the strength to lead my children to Him? If I am not disciplined in prayer, how can I teach my children to pray? If I do not love God's Word, how can I expect them to treasure it? The best gift we can give our children is not a perfect home or financial security but a living example of faith in Christ.

Building on the Right Foundation

When I think about the times I've struggled most as a parent, the common thread has been my lack of focus on Christ. When my patience wears thin, when my words are sharper than they should be, or when I let the busyness of life drown out the needs of my kids, those are the moments when I see how badly I need a stronger foundation. That foundation comes through the quiet, ordinary rhythms of the Christian life. Reading the Bible. Talking to God in prayer. Worshiping with His people. Serving others. These are not glamorous or complicated. They're daily habits that shape the heart.

The Bible often compares life with God to walking a path. In Deuteronomy 6, parents are told to speak of God's commands when they sit at home, when they walk along the road, when they lie down, and when they get up. In other words, faith is not an occasional activity; it is the rhythm of everyday life. The same is true for us today. If we want to be ready for parenting, we must first be ready to walk with Christ in the ordinary and daily parts of life.

The Word of God

The most basic spiritual discipline is time in the Word of God. Scripture is not just another book; it is the very voice of God, breathed out by Him and full of His power. Without it, we cannot hope to stand firm against sin or to grow in faith.

Paul told Timothy that the Word of God is:

> profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).

That means Scripture shows us the truth, confronts us when we are wrong, guides us back to the right path, and trains us to live in holiness.

For parents, the Bible is our anchor. It speaks to our own hearts and equips us to teach our children. If we neglect the Word, our parenting will drift toward what the culture says or toward what feels easiest in

the moment. But if we are rooted in the Word, we can stand firm in God's wisdom.

Practical Application:

- Set a regular time each day for Bible reading. Mornings work well for some and evenings for others.
- Use a reading plan so you are covering all of Scripture, not just favorite passages.
- Read Scripture aloud together as a couple.
- Pray before and after reading the Bible, asking God to give understanding and to help you live out what you read.

The goal is not to check off a box, but to build a life that is saturated with God's truth.

Scripture Memorization

Another key discipline is memorizing God's Word. At first, Scripture memorization may seem unnecessary when we have so many Bibles and apps around us. However, Scripture memorized becomes Scripture stored in the heart. Scripture stored in the heart is always with us, ready to guide our thoughts and actions.

In the Book of Joshua, God told Joshua:

> Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful (Joshua 1:8).

Success here is not about money or status; it is about walking faithfully with God.

For parents, memorization is both personal and practical. Personally, it strengthens our faith. Practically, it equips us to share the Word with our children even during unexpected times; like when driving in the car, when fears arise at bedtime, when discipline is called for, or when encouragement is needed.

Practical Application:

- Start with short, meaningful verses.
- Write verses on cards or use a digital app to review them daily.
- Repeat the verses during daily routines, at meals, in the car, or before bed.

When God's Word fills our hearts, it shapes the way we speak, parent, and live.

Prayer

If Scripture is God speaking to us, prayer is us speaking to Him. Prayer is not just about asking for things; it is about living in communion with God. It involves praise, thanksgiving, confession, and requests. It's where we pour out our hearts and listen for His guidance. Prayer is powerful because it changes us. As we pray, God shapes our desires and strengthens our faith.

For parents, prayer is a lifeline. There are countless moments when we simply do not know what to do, when a child is sick, when conflict arises, when decisions about schooling or discipline weigh heavily. Prayer reminds us that we are not alone. One of the sweetest parts of parenting is involving our children in prayer. Even young children can learn to thank God for simple things or to pray for family members. As they grow, prayer becomes a natural part of life together.

Practical Application:

- Establish daily times of prayer as a family.
- Model honesty in prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and requests.
- Keep a family prayer journal to record requests and answers.

Prayer brings the family into the presence of God. It reminds us that He is the One who carries us through every stage of parenting.

Worship

Worship is more than merely singing songs on Sunday. It is focusing on who God is and responding to Him with love, gratitude, and obedience. Worship happens privately in the quiet of our homes and publicly when we gather with the church. Both are essential. Private worship keeps our hearts close to God. Public worship binds us to the body of Christ. Hebrews 10:25 reminds us not to neglect meeting together, but to encourage one another as the day of Christ's return draws near.

For parents, worship is contagious. Children notice whether God is central in our lives or not. When they see us rejoicing in God, thanking Him, and honoring Him with our lives, it shapes their view of what matters most. The hope is that this, one day, becomes their life-anchoring woldview.

Practical Application:

- Set aside time for personal worship through song, prayer, and reflection.
- Make corporate worship a family priority.
- Talk about the sermons or songs together afterward.

Serving

Another spiritual discipline that prepares us for parenting is serving. Jesus said that He came "not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). Parenting is, at its core, an act of service. It's a daily laying down of our time, our comfort, and often our preferences for the sake of our children.

But serving is not just about doing chores or meeting physical needs. It is an attitude of the heart. When we serve others—whether in the church, in our neighborhoods, or in our homes, we learn humility. We learn to put others first. We learn to find joy in sacrifice. Parenting requires this spirit. There are countless unseen acts of service that come with raising children: changing diapers, staying up late when a child is sick, helping with homework, driving to practices, or listening to endless stories. These moments may not feel glamorous, but they can be holy when done in love.

Practical Application:

- Look for small ways to serve your spouse and children each day.
- Serve together as a family in your church or community.
- Teach children that service is part of following Christ, not just a duty.

As we practice service in daily life, our hearts become more ready for the constant giving that parenting requires.

Stewardship

Closely tied to service is stewardship. God calls us to manage what He has entrusted to us: our time, talents, finances, and relationships. Parenting is perhaps the greatest stewardship of all because God entrusts us with His children to guide and shape. In Psalm 127, we see that:

> Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him (Ps 127:3).

Children do not belong to us; they belong to God. We are caretakers or stewards of a gift far more precious than anything else. This perspective changes the way we approach parenting. Instead of asking, "What do I want for my child?" we begin asking, "What does God want for His child?" Instead of clinging tightly to control, we learn to entrust our children to Him while faithfully guiding them.

Practical Application:

- View your finances, time, and home as resources to be used for God's glory.
- Teach children early about generosity and gratitude.
- Make family decisions with stewardship in mind—how will this choice honor God and serve others?

Stewardship reminds us that readiness for parenting is not about having everything under control but about faithfully managing what God has given us.

Holiness in Daily Parenting

Holiness may sound like a lofty concept, but in the life of a parent, it shows up in small, ordinary ways. Holiness is choosing patience when anger feels easier. It is speaking truth when it would be simpler to brush something aside. It is confessing our own mistakes to our children and modeling repentance.

Holiness is not perfection. We will fail. But holiness means being set apart for God and allowing His Spirit to shape us into the likeness of Christ. Our children need to see this process in us. They need to know that their parents are not flawless but are daily walking with God, seeking forgiveness, and growing in grace. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

> It is God's will that you should be sanctified (1 Thess 4:3).

This process of sanctification, of becoming more holy, is lifelong. Parenting is one of the main tools God uses to sanctify us. It reveals our selfishness, our impatience, and our weaknesses. But in those

moments, God is at work, shaping us into people who reflect His character.

Practical Application:

- Be honest with your children about your need for God's grace.
- Model repentance by apologizing when you are wrong.
- Pray regularly for holiness in your parenting.

Holiness is not only for us; it is for the sake of our children, who are watching closely and learning what it looks like to walk with God.

Marriage as Preparation

Before we are parents, we are husbands and wives. The health of a marriage is one of the strongest indicators of how well we will handle the challenges of parenting. A fractured, distant marriage makes parenting harder. A marriage rooted in Christ makes it easier to face challenges as a team.

In Ephesians 5:22-23, Paul teaches that marriage itself is a picture of Christ and the church. This means that the way we love our spouse is meant to reflect the love of Christ. (See chapter 3 for a fuller exploration of Eph 5:22-33). When we grow in patience, kindness, and forgiveness toward our spouse, we are learning the very qualities we will need as parents.

Too often, couples pour all their energy into their children and neglect their marriage. But children thrive most when they see their parents united in love. Preparing for children, then, is not only about setting up a nursery or planning schedules. It is about investing in the core relationship that forms the foundation of the family.

Practical Application:

- Prioritize time with your spouse, even after children arrive.
- Pray together regularly.
- Discuss parenting decisions as a team, not as individuals.
- Remember that your spouse is your partner, not your rival.

A strong marriage does not guarantee perfect parenting, but it provides the unity and support needed to face the ups and downs of family life.

Common Questions Couples Ask

When couples talk about being "ready" for children, certain practical questions often dominate the conversation. Let's look at a few:

- **Finances: "Can we afford it?"**
  The truth is children are expensive. But no one ever feels completely ready financially. If you're a husband and father, you should be diligently working to provide for your family. However, the key is not wealth but stewardship—managing what you have wisely and trusting God to provide.

- **Living Situation: "Do we have enough space?"**
  Families around the world raise children in every kind of home. What matters most is love, not square footage.

- **Responsibilities: "How will chores and care be divided?"**
  These are important conversations, but they should be marked by humility and teamwork.

- **Discipleship: "Do we agree on how to raise the child spiritually?"**
  This is perhaps the most important question. Parents must be united in the conviction that raising children in the Lord is central.

- **Marriage Time: "How will we keep our relationship strong?"**
  Intentionally carving out time for one another is essential after children arrive.

- **Childcare: "Will the mother stay home? Will we use daycare?"**
  These decisions depend on circumstances, but they must be made prayerfully, with God's wisdom guiding.

These questions are real and should not be ignored. But they should not paralyze us. If we wait until every question is perfectly answered, we may never feel ready. Readiness does not come from having every detail figured out. It comes from walking with God and trusting Him to guide us through the unknown.

Living It Out as a Family

Spiritual disciplines are not meant to stay hidden in the private corners of our lives. They shape the way we lead our homes. Parents who grow in Christ naturally bring their children along in that journey. Think of the theme passage of this book:

> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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 (Deut 6:6-7).

Faith is not just taught in Sunday school; it is passed down in the ordinary flow of family life. The disciplines you begin as a couple before you have children can become part and parcel to family life as your children get older.

Bible Reading as a Family

Read the Bible together around the table or at bedtime. It does not need to be long or complicated. A few verses with a short discussion can spark meaningful conversations. When children see the Bible as part of daily life, it becomes natural to them.

Prayer as a Family

Pray before meals, before school, and before bed. Pray when someone is sick, when decisions are heavy, and when blessings come. Encourage your children to join in. Nothing teaches them to pray like hearing their parents talk with God.

Worship as a Family

Sing songs together. Thank God out loud for His blessings. Attend church together and talk afterward about what you learned. When children see worship as a family activity, they learn that it is not just for Sundays but for life.

Service as a Family

Look for ways to serve together, help a neighbor, visit someone in need, or support a church project. Service becomes a habit when it is practiced as a family.

These practices do not guarantee that children will follow Christ, but they do create an environment where faith is lived, not just spoken

about abstractly. Children who see their parents genuinely following Jesus are far more likely to take their faith seriously themselves.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

All of this (discipline, holiness, parenting) is impossible without the work of the Holy Spirit. Left to ourselves, we will fall short. We can't discipline ourselves into godliness without God's Spirit at work in us.

The Spirit gives us new desires. He produces in us the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). Every one of those qualities is essential for parenting. The Spirit convicts us when we fail and comforts us when we feel weak. He reminds us of God's promises and guides us in wisdom. He enables us to endure when the days are long and gives us hope when the future feels uncertain.

As parents, we must rely daily on the Spirit. This means beginning our day in prayer, confessing our needs, and asking for His strength. It means listening when He convicts us of sin and turning quickly back to God. It means trusting Him to do in our children's hearts what we can't do ourselves. We can teach, discipline, and guide, but only the Spirit can give life. Only the Spirit can open their eyes to see Christ and their hearts to believe. That truth frees us from the crushing burden of thinking that everything depends on us. We are called to be faithful, but God is the one who brings spiritual growth.

Final Reflection: Readiness Is Found in Christ

So, what does it mean to be ready to have children? The world will point to finances, housing, careers, and timing. Those things matter, but they are not the heart of readiness. True readiness is found in Christ. The more we grow to resemble Christ, the closer we will be to our spouse, and the more prepared we will be to shepherd the children God entrusts to us. Readiness is about character, not control. It is about holiness, not perfection. It is about dependence on God, not self-reliance.

Looking back, I see that I was not fully prepared when we had our first child. My spiritual disciplines were weak, and my focus on Christ and my wife could have been stronger. Yet, God, in His mercy, carried us through. He used the challenges of parenting to shape me into someone more dependent on Him.

Now, as I walk through the teenage years, I still feel unprepared at times. But I have learned that God is faithful. He gives wisdom to those

who ask (James 1:5). He strengthens those who seek Him. He provides grace for every season.

For young couples preparing to have children, or those already holding a newborn in their arms—my encouragement is this: do not wait until you feel perfectly ready. Instead, pursue Christ. Grow in your spiritual disciplines. Love your spouse well. Rely on the Spirit. And trust that God will meet you in your weakness and make you strong. Parenting is not about perfection. It is about faithfulness. And faithfulness begins with a heart that is anchored in Christ.

Chapter 7

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR DISCIPLINE AND DISCIPLESHIP

By Stephen Salinas

Discipline, Parenting Trends, and the Bible

A few years ago, I was having a Zoom meeting at work with a coworker. I asked her how her day was going and she replied that it was not good. She had taken her five-year-old son to the dentist. I thought I understood the problem, because obviously no kid likes going to the dentist. However, as she explained the situation, it wasn't quite what I was expecting.

She said that her son needed to have multiple cavities filled. He doesn't like to brush his teeth, so they don't make him brush often. She told me that they had to trick him to get him to go to the dentist, because he would refuse to go if he knew where they were really going. Once they got to the dentist, they couldn't even get the cavities filled. He refused to let them access his mouth and would bite them whenever they would try. And to top it all off, she had to fake a call with the dentist when they got home to chew him out to save face with her son. She pretended to dial the dentist in front of her son and said something to the effect of, "I am so mad at you for what you did to my son. Don't you ever do that to him again."

Now, if it's not clear from this example, she and her husband don't believe in doing things that might upset their kids. I had previously

spoken with her husband at a team family picnic, and he explicitly told me that he didn't believe in telling kids "no." He said the word "no" creates boundaries and he wants his kids to live life without boundaries.

As evidenced by this example, some modern parents believe that discipline as a fundamental concept is bad. This is a key tenet of a popular new parenting method called "gentle parenting." What exactly is gentle parenting? According to the New Yorker, "'Gentle parenting' is a catchall for variations that include 'respectful parenting,' 'mindful parenting,' and 'intentional parenting.'"[1] That sounds good so far. As followers of Christ, we obviously don't want our style of parenting to be described as "rough parenting," "disrespectful parenting," "thoughtless parenting," or "accidental parenting." The article from the New Yorker goes on to describe gentle parenting this way:

> In its broadest outlines, gentle parenting centers on acknowledging a child's feelings and the motivations behind challenging behavior, as opposed to correcting the behavior itself. The gentle parent holds firm boundaries, gives a child choices instead of orders, and eschews rewards, punishments, and threats … One of the major themes … is that children don't defy for the sake of defiance, but that their challenging behavior is a physiological response to stress and should be seen as essentially adaptive.

So, a key belief of this parenting method is that the defiance of a child is not something that comes from within, but rather is something they are responding to in their environment. As the article continues to explain, "Under the gentle-parenting schema, a child's every act must be seen through a lens of anxiety and threat-detection—which heightens the parent's dual role of child psychologist and emotional-security guard."

How does this play out practically? An article from the Today Show's website about gentle parenting gives examples of how you might parent a child who is doing something you don't want:

> With a toddler who hits her sister, you might say something like, "I see that you're crying and you seem frustrated and disappointed. My job is to keep everyone safe. So even when

[1] Jessica Winter, "The Harsh Realm of 'Gentle Parenting'," *The New Yorker*, March 23, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/the-harsh-realm-of-gentle-parenting

> you're frustrated, keep your hands to yourself. I'll set a timer, and your sister will give you the doll when the timer dings.[2]

Here's another example from that article:

> For preschool children, you might need to hold your boundary while redirecting the activity … "I know you're having fun and you want to stay at the party, but we still need to go. Leaving is hard, but we can do hard things. Do you want to walk like a dinosaur to your stroller, or should I carry you?"

Here's a final example from Dr. Becky Kennedy:

> When a kid lies about knocking down his brother's block tower: "Well, if someone, not you, but someone did push down a tower . . . I think I'd understand. Having a brother is hard. Sharing is hard."[3]

Dr. Becky (as she's branded herself) is perhaps the most famous proponent of gentle parenting. She's a clinical psychologist who has been called the "millennial parent whisperer." She's gained a wide following on Instagram and her reels giving parenting advice have garnered millions of views.

In 2022, Dr. Becky wrote a New York Times bestseller called, *Good Inside: A Practical Guide to Resilient Parenting Prioritizing Connection Over Correction*. Her opening chapter provides a clear statement about the foundational assumptions at the heart of gentle parenting or other parenting methods that don't believe in discipline:

> Let me share an assumption I have about you and your kids: you are all good inside … And when I say "good inside," I mean that we all, at our core, are compassionate, loving, and generous. The principle of internal goodness drives all of my work—I hold the belief that kids and parents are good inside, which allows me to be curious about the "why" of their bad behaviors. This curiosity enables me to develop frameworks

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[2] Rosie Colosi, "What is gentle parenting?," *Today.com*, Nov. 21, 2023, https://www.today.com/parents/family/what-is-gentle-parenting-rcna126171

[3] Jessica Winter, "The Harsh Realm of 'Gentle Parenting'," *The New Yorker*, March 23, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/the-harsh-realm-of-gentle-parenting

> and strategies that are effective in creating change. There is nothing in this book as important as this principle—it is the foundation for all that's to come, because as soon as we tell ourselves, "Okay, slow down ... I'm good inside ... my kid is good inside too" … we intervene differently than we would if we allowed our frustration and anger to dictate our decisions.[4]

From a biblical standpoint, what do you see as a core issue with this assumption? This approach completely rejects what the Bible says about sin, children, and discipline. All these examples of how to implement gentle parenting fly in the face of the Bible. Here's what the Bible says about the sin that resides inside all of us:

> there is none who does good, not even one (Ps 14:3).
>
> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it (Jer 17:9)?
>
> For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

If you start with a faulty assumption, you can't help but come up with wrong conclusions. It's like math; starting with the wrong formula will take you way off base with your answer to the problem. If we start with anti-biblical human wisdom, we won't end up with God's wisdom. To reorient ourselves to a proper perspective, we need to look at what the Bible says about discipline and discipleship.

The Biblical Foundation for Discipline

To begin, we should probably define what we mean by "discipline." Biblical discipline is providing physical and verbal correction as consequences for sinful or foolish behavior. We've already looked at several verses from the Bible showing that all of us, including our children, are sinners. Considering that, we all need correction. Discipline, both physical and verbal, is needed to correct words, actions, or attitudes that are not in line with what God has commanded for us. Scripture explicitly tells children that they are to obey their parents:

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[4] Becky Kennedy, *Good Inside: A Practical Guide to Resilient Parenting Prioritizing Connection Over Correction* (Harper Wave, 2022), 2.

> 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" (Eph 6:1-3).

When children disobey their parents, they have broken God's Law, which is sin. When children sin, they're rebelling against God. Discipline allows us to address sin in the heart of our children and point them to their need for forgiveness in Christ. At its heart, discipline is a gospel opportunity. (We'll explore that in greater depth later in this chapter.)

Discipline also teaches children that there are consequences to disobeying authority. Disobeying mom and dad, disobeying a teacher, disobeying a boss, or disobeying a police officer is disobeying God-given authority. (Of course, this is assuming that these authorities are not asking you to do something sinful, in which case, it would be honoring to God to not comply.) By teaching our children that there are consequences to disobedience, we're training them to obey God-given authorities as a way of obeying God Himself.

On that same note, discipline teaches children that the consequences of engaging in sinful behavior are always painful. Sin ultimately hurts us in the end. If we truly care about our children, we'll want to protect them from that self-imposed harm. Just as a loving parent warns their children about running into the street without looking, we should be teaching our children to avoid sin because it carries great harm to us.

First, let's look at several passages of Scripture that can inform us about what the Bible says about discipline.

Discipline Is Commanded

> Do not withhold discipline from a child (Prov 23:13).

I love the simplicity and clarity of the Book of Proverbs. This clearly says, "DO NOT WITHHOLD DISCIPLINE FROM A CHILD." God doesn't beat around the bush in what He expects from us. As Christians, withholding discipline from our children is ignoring this explicit command from God. Withholding discipline is sin. Not correcting sinful or foolish behavior is wrong.

God is the source of wisdom, so He knows what is best for us and our children. If we ignore His commands, we're not only sinning, we're also being foolish. We're trading what God says is best for our children

for what people say is best. We're disobeying God and harming our children if we don't discipline them.

Discipline Includes Corporal Punishment

> Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol (Prov 23:14).

The Bible commands parents to discipline their children physically. The Hebrew word that is used for "Rod" (*shebet*) can be translated "Staff", "Branch", or "Stick." This is often used in the Old Testament to refer to the tool used by shepherds to guard and lead their sheep.

What is this talking about in relation to parenting? Spankings. Scripture advocates for parents spanking their children to guard and protect them. Now to be clear, this is to be done in love and in a controlled manner on the bottom where God created extra padding. This is not an act of child abuse, such as when someone is beating their child in anger or hitting them all over their body. That's not biblical discipline informed by love; that's hateful abuse.

As Ted Tripp writes in *Shepherding a Child's Heart*:

> The rod is a parent, in faith toward God and faithfulness toward his or her children, undertaking the responsibility of careful, timely, measured, and controlled use of physical punishment to underscore the importance of obeying God, thus rescuing the child from continuing in his foolishness until death.[5]

Spankings are all but anathema in modern parenting books. Psychologists would cite studies that show that spanking doesn't work. However, we must trust God, the Creator of children and the source of all wisdom. If He commands parents to use physical correction as part of discipline, we must trust that He knows best. So, measured and controlled spanking should be part of discipline when children are young, because that shows them the consequences of disobedience in a way that they can understand. However, biblical discipline isn't merely spankings.

[5] Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Shepherd Press, 1995), 104.

Discipline Should Be Paired with Instruction

> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

Children are to be brought up with physical discipline, but also with instruction. This verbal communication includes teaching, training, rebuking, and warning.

Biblical discipline isn't just meting out punishments and moving on. Biblical discipline, including spankings, should always be accompanied by instruction. Communication is vital to discipline. This includes discussing why the child is being disciplined, what the Bible says about sin, talking to them about their hearts, listening to them explaining their side of the story, discussing their need for Jesus, restoring them, reconciling the relationship, and reaffirming the parent's love for the child.

Discipline and discipleship must go hand in hand. We'll see how discipline and discipleship are connected in the second half of this chapter.

Discipline Should Ultimately Focus on the Heart

> Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him (Prov 22:15).

This verse tells us that discipline will drive folly out of where? The heart. Worldly discipline or correction is merely focused on behavior modification. However, the Bible tells us that all our thoughts, words, and actions flow from our heart:

> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander (Matt 15:19).

> Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life (Prov 4:23).

While a child may be receiving discipline due to something they said or did, we should always be bringing the conversation back to their hearts. In *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Ted Tripp writes, "Remember, the heart directs behavior. Discipline addresses the heart. It does not focus on

behavior alone."[6] We need to instruct our children about the sin living in their heart and the fact that they need a regenerated heart that can only come from placing their faith in Jesus.

This is crucial because correction without focusing on the heart can lead to legalism. If our children learn to follow the rules, but don't learn to understand the sin in their heart and their need for Jesus to save them, we're missing the forest for the trees. Merely external behavior modification will produce little Pharisees and we all know what Jesus had to say to the Pharisees. (See chapter 11 for the harsh language Jesus used in condemning the Pharisees.)

Discipline Should Be Driven by Love

> Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him (Prov 13:24).

This verse clearly connects biblical discipline with love. It actually says something shocking: parents who don't discipline their children hate their children. That's extremely countercultural.

Those who subscribe to the gentle parenting method would say that they don't discipline their children *because* they love them. However, Scripture says the opposite. They may feel bad disciplining their children, but prioritizing their own feelings over what is best for their children is selfish.

Personally, I really hate disciplining my children. However, I know it's best for them. I do it because I love them and want what God says is best for them. Disciplining your children shows that you love them.

Did you notice that Proverbs 13:24 talks about being "diligent" to discipline? It's easy to get lazy and let things slide regarding discipline. You may feel too tired to discipline them again for the fourth time that day for the same issue. However, this verse says that those who love their kids *diligently* discipline them. Both diligence and consistency are key to obedient parenting.

I know that when I'm not consistent in disciplining my children, it's usually due to tiredness or laziness. I may recognize that I need to address the issue, but I rationalize my inaction by reasoning that I'm tired and it's late and I've had a long day. However, I'm not loving my kids when I do that; I'm loving myself.

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[6] Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Shepherd Press, 1995), 150.

Discipline Is Intended to Yield the Fruit of Righteousness, Not Retribution

> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb 12:11).

The point of discipline is not to get revenge or to punish our children out of retribution. It's not to satisfy the parent's anger. The point of discipline is to correct sin and produce the fruit of righteousness. It's for the child's best interest. The goal is to draw the child to repentance and to point them towards walking with the Lord in obedience.

Discipline Should Not Be Done to Provoke Children to Anger

> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

Now, to be clear, no kid likes discipline. They may respond in anger to being disciplined, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't ever discipline them. Having said that, parents should not add fuel to the fire by needlessly provoking them.

Maybe you have a temper, and you don't find disciplining your kids hard at all. Maybe your problem is that you're sinfully driven by anger in disciplining your children. You need to check your own heart and make sure you aren't disciplining in a way that is excessive or is unnecessarily provoking your children. Discipline should be driven by love. This is the Bible's way of preventing abusive punishment. As John MacArthur explains in his book, *What the Bible Says About Parenting*:

> There are times, of course, when children become sinfully angry with their parents apart from any provocation. The child's own selfishness, immaturity, or wrong attitudes might be the cause of the anger. In such cases, it is the child who is sinning.
>
> But there are other times when the parents are guilty of provoking their children's anger by thoughtlessly aggravating them, by deliberately goading them, by callously neglecting them, or by any number of other intentional or careless means

> that exasperate them. When that happens, it is the parents who are sinning—and provoking the child to sin as well.[7]

Discipline Leads to Knowledge and Wisdom

Discipline drives out foolishness by associating foolish actions with consequences. Additionally, it also incentivizes the development of wisdom.

> On the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense (Prov 10:13).
>
> Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid (Prov 12:1).
>
> The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother (Prov 29:15).

If we don't discipline our children, we're implicitly showing them that there aren't consequences for sin. God's Word tells us definititvely that that's not the case, so we're setting them up for failure. Sin always has consequences.

We've already discussed what the rod is, but we need to define "reproof." The Hebrew word for "Reproof" (*tokechah*) means "correction," "rebuke," "argument," or "refutation." It is often used for verbal exhortation or admonishment.

What we see in Scripture is that physical discipline accompanied by verbal correction brings wisdom. What are the consequences if you don't do this? Your children will be foolish. An undisciplined child grows in their sin. They will be unwise and bring shame to you as they grow up.

Again, instructing our children in God's Word in times of discipline teaches them wisdom. We are teaching them about the holy God they've offended with their sin. Proverbs tells us that:

> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Prov 9:10).

[7] John MacArthur, *What the Bible Says About Parenting: Biblical Principles for Raising Godly Children* (Thomas Nelson, 2000), 135.

God Disciplines Us as His Children

> Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him (Deut 8:5-6).
>
> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb 12:5-11).

God is the perfect Father and we must look to His example in how we parent. Scripture clearly teaches that He disciplines us as His own children. In love, God disciplines us for our sin. He seeks to train us through discipline to produce the "peaceful fruit of righteousness." There are many examples all throughout Scripture of God disciplining people whom He loves, such as Adam and Eve, Moses, David, and the nation of Israel.

God disciplines those of us who belong to Him as children. He seeks our good by not letting us continue in sin. He seeks our good by training us in the peaceful fruit of righteousness. We must, therefore, follow His example with our children.

We've already alluded to the fact that discipline and discipleship go together, but let's now look at the biblical basis for discipling our children.

The Biblical Foundation for Discipleship

Let's start by defining what I mean by "discipleship." A disciple is a learner who follows teacher. In the New Testament, a disciple is

somone learning to follow Jesus. Regarding parenting, I would say, discipleship is teaching our children to follow Jesus through relational training and modeling.

As we discussed in our first point, discipline and discipleship go together. Biblical discipline is not just physical, but it involves proactive training and instruction. It involves teaching. What we're talking about is pointing our children to Christ.

The Goal of True Discipleship Is Following Christ

True biblical discipleship was exemplified by the Apostle Paul when he told the Corinthians:

> Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

As parents, we must constantly be pointing our children to Christ. That includes correction that points to their sin, but also proactive teaching of the gospel and who Jesus is. We are to be living examples of what it means to follow Jesus as sinners who have been saved by grace.

As we go through day-to-day life with our children, they're reading us like an open book. One thing you learn early on in your journey as a parent is that your children are always watching you. You need to be careful with how you speak and act, because your kids will start imitating you at a young age. It's natural for children to imitate their parents.

Is the example of your life pointing your children towards Christ or away from Him? Like the Apostle Paul, we should be able to say, "follow me as I follow Christ." Of course, no one is going to be perfect, but is the general direction of your life teaching your children to follow Jesus?

God's Word Must Be Taught Diligently

As the central text of this book teaches, we must always be teaching our children God's word diligently:

> Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 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. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **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 (Deut 6:1-8, emphasis added).

The Israelites were commanded to teach their children diligently. Being diligent means putting in the hard work of being consistent. It's the opposite of being lazy.

We must work hard to seize the opportunities to talk to our children about God, the Bible, Jesus, and the gospel. From this passage we see those opportunities are available all the time: when you're sitting in your house, when you're walking, when you're lying down to go to bed at night, and when you're rising in the morning. From early in the morning to late at night, we should be pointing our children to Christ and teaching them the fear of the Lord.

Paul tells us how the truth of God's word teaches us, rebukes us, corrects us, and trains us:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:14-17).

Teaching the Fear of the Lord Leads to Wisdom

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom from a father to a son. We see this at the beginning of the book:

> The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:
> To know wisdom and instruction,
> to understand words of insight,

to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,
to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and forsake not your mother's teaching,
for they are a graceful garland for your head
and pendants for your neck (Prov 1:1-9).

The whole point of the Book of Proverbs is to give wisdom and instruction, to receive instruction in wise dealing, to give prudence to the simple, and so on and so forth. This all starts with fearing the Lord. To have humble, reverent respect for God is the beginning of true knowledge and wisdom. In our discipleship, we must teach our children the fear of the Lord.

Jesus Is Our Ultimate Example

All throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus exemplify what true biblical discipleship looks like. He had many followers, but He poured Himself most intently into the twelve disciples. He lived with them daily and taught them, served them, and modeled what it means to love God and love others. From Jesus, we can see the perfect example of what discipleship looks like. He can be our example as we lead our children in love and train them in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Let's briefly talk about a few specific challenges to biblical discipline and discipleship.

Challenges to Disciplining and Discipling Our Children

What makes diligent and consistent discipline and discipleship hard?

Tiredness

I don't know about you, but I feel bone-tired a lot of the time. Raising children is very, very tiring. It requires physical, mental, and spiritual energy. My oldest son is 16 years old and I feel like I've been tired for 16 years straight. When I'm tired and I know disciplining or discipling in the moment is going to take energy, that's a challenge.

Laziness
Related to being tired, I sometimes choose to take the easy way out and not engage my kids in the moment when they need discipline or discipleship. When I'm selfishly prioritizing how I feel over what I know I should be doing to obey God and love my kids, that's being lazy.

Fear
Perhaps you're afraid to discipline your kids because you've heard stories about discipline harming your children's development. Maybe you're afraid of making them upset. Maybe you're afraid about saying or doing the wrong thing.

Ignorance
Maybe you didn't grow up in a Christian household, so you're not sure what biblical discipline and discipleship even look like. Where do you start? How do you learn how to do this?

Inconsistency
Maybe you know what biblical discipline and discipleship look like but implementing them has been an inconsistent, start-and-stop process for you. You struggle with staying on top of it because it's hard.

Exposure to Unbalanced Discipline
Perhaps hearing that the Bible talks about spanking puts a pit in your stomach because you've only ever encountered unbalanced or extreme discipline. Maybe you haven't seen what biblical discipline looks like, because you've seen unbiblical discipline disguised as biblical discipline. To reiterate, true biblical discipline is not abuse, but perhaps you've only ever experienced unbiblical discipline.

Influenced by Worldly Wisdom
Maybe biblical discipline and discipleship is a challenge for you because it runs counter to what you've learned in your parenting journey. Maybe you have read books of articles from psychologists or influencers that run counter to what the Bible says. Maybe the latest and greatest parenting method, like gentle parenting, sounds more appealing to you than biblical parenting.

Influenced by Feelings

Maybe you're influenced by your feelings and it feels too hard to implement biblical discipline and discipleship. It's hard to get over how disciplining your children makes you feel.

If you're a parent, the odds are high that you have experienced or are currently experiencing one or more of these challenges. Despite these challenges we all face as parents, how should we practically approach biblical discipline and discipleship?

How Should We Approach Disciplining and Discipling Our Children?

If our goal is honoring God in our parenting, we must have the right approach to discipline and discipleship.

Obediently

At the end of the day, we should strive to be obedient to the Lord. If God has called us to discipline and disciple our children, we need to obey what He has commanded us to do in the manner He's commanded us to do it. Failing to do so is sinful disobedience.

Diligently

We must be diligent in our obedience as well. Begrudging or half-hearted obedience isn't true obedience. We must wholeheartedly seek to discipline and disciple our children.

Consistently

We must be consistent in our approach or else we will be sending mixed messages to our children. This takes persistence on our part.

Prayerfully

We would be fools to think we could accomplish such a huge task on our own. We must prayerfully ask God to empower us to discipline and disciple our children through the power of the Holy Spirit. We must pray without ceasing that God will save our children and that He will work in their hearts. Only God can change the hearts of our children and give them the ability to follow Him.

Faithfully

By this I mean disciplining and discipling in faith. We must trust that God's ways are best and that being obedient to Him will result in blessing. Even if you're not seeing immediate results, trust that God

knows what is best. When we fail as parents, as we all do every day, we can have faith that Christ has paid for our sins and God is sovereign over our children. We can have rest as parents in the grace of the gospel that comes to us through faith.

Conclusion

It seems fitting to close with this quote by Paul David Tripp from his book, *Parenting*, to remind ourselves of the God-given opportunities we have as parents:

> Parents, we all need to have an "everything I do, I do to point my children to the presence and promises of God's grace" way of parenting our children. Every conversation is an opportunity. Pointing them to the beauty of nature is an opportunity, every moment of correction and discipline is an opportunity, every sibling battle is an opportunity, success or failure at school is an opportunity, family worship is an opportunity, birthdays and holidays provide an opportunity, teenage identity angst is an opportunity, bedtime conversations provide an opportunity, discussions after watching something on Netflix provide an opportunity.
>
> There will be no lack of opportunity to talk to your children about their inescapable need for God's grace. There will be no lack of opportunity for telling the story of how Jesus meets those needs. Because, by God's plan, every good thing, every beautiful thing, every hard thing, every sad thing, and everything to celebrate gives us an opportunity to point to the God who, in grace, rules it all. The question is: will you see those opportunities in the mundane moments of parenting and capture them again and again and again?[8]

[8] Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* (Crossway, 2016), 54-55.

Chapter 8

AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE: BUILDING AN ORDERED LIFE, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY

By Bob Douglas

Introduction

Today, Western culture influenced parenting promotes independence without accountability, passion without restraint, and identity without truth. Scripture, by contrast, calls Christian parents to self-control, obedience, and steadfastness—an orderly life aligned with divine wisdom. That may sound like rigid constraints and legalism is the recipe for raising children—far from it. Christian parenting is more than simply attempting to understand biblical parenting principles; it begins by having a relationship with God. We see this in the life of Moses.

Moses experienced truly awesome wonders of God's mighty hand: the burning bush, the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the elimination of Pharaoh's army, a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, bread from heaven, water from a rock, and many more. After experiencing these wonders in Exodus 33:13, Moses requested for God to "please show me your ways." Rather than desiring God to address personal needs or display more miracles for the people of Israel, Moses wanted to understand His ways—why He chooses what He chooses, why He uses the methods He does, and to know the manner of His

faithfulness and judgement. Moses desired to know God relationally and to understand the wisdom that flows from God's character.

What Moses longed for has become fully available to followers of Christ. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, God gave the Holy Spirit to all believers so they could have a direct relationship with the Creator. Through the Spirit, believers may ask God for wisdom (James 1:5), for help understanding the Scriptures (1 Cor 2:10–14), and to be taught and reminded of Christ's words (John 14:26). Scripture teaches that the Spirit searches the deep things of God and enables spiritual understanding for those who belong to Him.

Today, we have God's all-sufficient Word, given that we may know Him and walk faithfully with Him. Anyone who desires a relationship with God and seeks to understand His Word and wisdom may freely come to Him (Rev 3:20).

We must desire God's way for the family unit— "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps 127:1). The foundation of parenting does not begin when a child is born. Rather, it begins with a with a biblically ordered personal life (Col 3:1-17) followed by a biblically ordered marriage (Eph 5:22-33). From that foundation, parents are best suited to understand and instruct their children in the faith (Deut 6:6–7) and raise them in a disciplined and obedient life (1 Tim 4:7–8).

So, it should not surprise us that dysfunction can flow into the home when disharmony and frustration are in our hearts. For example, we see this when vocational stress becomes overwhelming and spills over into interactions at home. Children respond to this in a number of ways in attempts to either avoid parental contact or naïvely engage the parent, only to receive the brunt of the parent's frustration and maybe even wrath. And of course, any number of life's stress—financial, extended family, health, to name a few big ones—can bring these overwhelming situations. This creates parenting issues directly stemming from the parents' words and actions. Likewise, marital disharmony can bring a host of complications to parenting. Conflict between spouses shakes the very foundation that the Christian family is built on. Therefore, when serious parenting issues occur, it is good for spouses to engage in honest self-examination as a first step.

Scripture gives believers principles for raising children, yet those principles require godly wisdom to understand and apply them. James 1:5-6 tells us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." We cannot expect divine wisdom if our hearts are out of alignment with God or in sinful conflict with our spouse. Before we look at principles

of parenting, we must begin by taking inventory of our own lives and marriages.

This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of parenting. Entire books have been written on each subject addressed here. Rather, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a high-level overview of the biblical structure that should shape how Christian parents think about raising children. Scripture provides the framework, priorities, and principles. As we consider the following passages, the goal is to help parents evaluate their own lives and homes in light of God's design.

The Call for an Ordered Life

God is a God of order. From creation to redemption, His work reflects purpose, structure, and elegance. The heavens move with precision, moral law flows from His character, and the church functions under His authority. Nothing about His design is chaotic or arbitrary.

To live under His lordship is to live within His divine order. Paul wrote, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40). For believers, this means aligning every area of life—personal habits, relationships, time, money, and priorities—all under the will of God revealed in His Word.

The Christian life is not meant to be lived in disorder or spiritual passivity. Scripture consistently calls believers to a life that is intentionally shaped by Christ and ordered according to His Word. This ordered life begins with a right foundation in Christ, grows through submission to His authority, is strengthened through spiritual discipline, and ultimately produces godly character. The following passages help illustrate these four aspects of a life rightly ordered before the Lord.

Foundation: Life Rooted in Christ

An ordered life begins with a right foundation: being rooted in Christ. This is achieved by building an ongoing dependence upon Him for identity, direction, and strength. When parents are firmly grounded in Christ, their lives are stabilized by truth, and they are armed to build their homes on something unshakable, rather than the shifting values of the world.

> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him (Col 2:6–7).

> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Col 3:1–10).

Submission: Christ as Lord

An ordered life requires calling Jesus "Lord" but it means more than just belief; it also means obedience. Parents who consistently submit their thoughts, decisions, and actions to Christ actually model for their children what it means to live under rightful authority, demonstrating that God's commands are not burdensome but life-giving.

> Why do you call Me "Lord, Lord," and not do the things which I say (Luke 6:46)?
>
> If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15).
>
> If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me (Luke 9:23).
>
> Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1:22).

Discipline: Training for Godliness

An ordered life is not accidental; it is cultivated through discipline. Scripture calls believers to train themselves for godliness by developing habits and patterns that align with God's Word. For parents, this means intentionally pursuing spiritual growth and modeling consistency, as well as showing their children that maturity in Christ requires effort, commitment, and perseverance.

> Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way (1 Tim 4:7–8).
>
> The grace of God … trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives (Titus 2:11–12).
>
> Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness (2 Pet 1:5–6).

Character: The Fruit of an Ordered Life

An ordered life is rooted in submission to Christ's authority and shaped through discipline. It produces godly character. The fruit of the Spirit becomes evident, not as something forced, but as the natural result of a life rightly ordered before God. This visible character becomes one of the most powerful influences parents have, as children witness the reality of faith lived out daily.

> The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22–23).
>
> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all people. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you (Phil 4:4–9).

A godly ordered life begins with salvation through faith in Christ. This salvation inevitably results in a desire to follow Christ and His precepts. It then extends to the roles of husbands and wives in marriage, followed by the roles we have as parents, all done faithfully in service and commitment to one's local church. (See chapter 3 for the roles of husbands and wives and chapter 4 regarding the roles of parents and

children.) Parents bear the weighty calling of shaping their homes around the framework of God's Word. This shaping begins with their own personal walk, followed by faith and obedience to follow their godly roles as spouses and parents.

The Call for an Ordered Life in Marriage

Marriage was the first institution God established. In the Book of Genesis, we read:

> A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:24).

That union is sacred, beautiful, but profoundly challenging, and it requires daily humility and continual spiritual alignment through the word of God.

When the marriage relationship is in disorder, disordered parenting inevitably follows. In Exodus 4:24–26, Moses faced divine correction because marital disunity kept him from circumcising his sons. Unity is critical, parents need to work together both in conviction and practice, on the structure of the home in all areas especially those commanded from Scripture. Ephesians 5:22-25 explains how marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and His church. This relationship is one of love, sacrifice, and willing submission. (See chapter 3 for a deeper examination of this passage.) When spouses walk in mutual obedience to God, they create an atmosphere of peace and stability that becomes the spiritual soil for healthy parenting.

In 1 Peter 3:1–8, Peter calls husbands and wives to live ordered lives that reflect Christ's character within the home. Wives are urged to walk in a spirit of submission and purity, adorning themselves not with outward beauty but with the gentle and quiet heart that is precious in God's sight. Husbands, likewise, are commanded to live sacrificially and with understanding, showing honor to their wives as fellow heirs of the grace of life and recognizing their unity as husband and wife before God. Together, they are to cultivate mutual respect, compassion, humility, and love, maintaining an ordered relationship grounded in godly conduct. Such order in marriage not only brings harmony between husband and wife but also testifies to the transforming power of obedience to Christ. This order is good spiritual soil for healthy parenting.

The Call for an Ordered Life as Parents

Biblical parenting begins with the parent's heart. First, it involves our disposition—the attitudes and beliefs that reside within our hearts and minds. These must be shaped and informed by Scripture, for we know from Jeremiah 17:9 that the human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Second, it involves our actions, which flow from the condition of our heart, as Proverbs 4:23 reminds us. Below are several passages that help guide both our disposition and our actions as parents according to God's Word.

Disposition

> Children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps 127:3).

Children are a gift entrusted to parents by God. They should never be viewed as a burden or inconvenience, but as a divine blessing and responsibility. Scripture even says the man who has many children is blessed, emphasizing the value God places on them (Ps 127:5).

> As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).

Joshua demonstrates the responsibility of a father to lead his household spiritually. As the leader of his home, he declares that all under his authority will follow and serve the Lord.

> Fathers … bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

Parents, especially fathers, are called to actively shepherd their children spiritually—guiding, teaching, correcting, and encouraging them according to God's Word.

> The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him (Prov 20:7).

A parent's personal integrity and godly example profoundly influence their children. When a father walks faithfully before the Lord, his life becomes a blessing and model for his children to follow.

> Listen, my sons, to the instruction of a father, and pay attention so that you may gain understanding, For I give you

> good teaching; Do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart take hold of my words; Keep my commandments and live" (Prov 4:1-4).

A parent's disposition is not casual but purposeful—marked by a commitment to pass on truth as something valuable and worth guarding. The father speaks with intentionality, offering "good doctrine," showing that parenting is rooted in a heart devoted to God's wisdom and a desire to faithfully instruct the next generation. This passage calls parents to approach their role with seriousness, clarity, and a deep sense of responsibility before the Lord.

Actions

> Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut 6:4-9).

Parents are commanded to teach God's Word diligently and consistently in everyday life. Spiritual instruction is not limited to formal teaching moments but is woven throughout daily conversations and routines.

> And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually (Job 1:5)

Job regularly offered sacrifices on behalf of his children, showing a parent's responsibility to pray and intercede for their children's spiritual well-being.

> Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6).

Parents are called to intentionally guide their children toward wisdom and godliness, shaping their character and direction in life according to biblical truth.

> Discipline your son, and he will give you rest (Prov 29:17).

Loving discipline provides guidance and correction, ultimately producing peace and joy within the family.

> Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (Col 3:21).

While discipline is necessary, it must be exercised with patience, fairness, and love so that children are strengthened rather than discouraged.

> Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him (Prov 13:24).

Biblical discipline is an expression of love. Parents who truly love their children will correct them when needed, guiding them away from harmful behavior and toward righteousness.

> Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may turn out well for you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4).

These verses are commonly focused on the child's responses to parenting. They not only call children to obedience, but they also establish the father's responsibility to lead in a way that reflects God's character. The second part of verse 4 focuses on fathers having a disposition toward teaching and training the wisdom of God. A further look at the full passage also reveals that fathers are commanded to actively bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This means shaping both behavior and understanding, while also guarding against harshness that provokes anger. This passage shows that godly parenting requires both authority and tenderness. This is

because children need firm guidance rooted in love and intentional spiritual formation.

These verses remind us that the family is the first and most vital classroom where godly order is learned. Parenting is not reactive, but intentional. It must always be anchored in Scripture and consistent in application. It requires foresight, endurance, and steadfastness modeled after the faithfulness of Christ.

When parents live biblically ordered lives, they give their children a living picture of what it means to follow God. When they do not, their words lose weight and authority. Children are quick to detect hypocrisy; they learn best when the message of Scripture is reinforced by the example of their parents.

The Order of a Christian Home

The world often sees order as restriction, but in God's design, order is protection. Divine order brings peace, stability, and blessing. A godly home rests on three foundations:

1. **God's Word**—the unchanging authority for all of life (2 Tim 3:16–17).
2. **A Godly Marriage**—the divine framework for love, leadership, and partnership (Eph 5:22–33).
3. **The Local Church**—the community of worship, accountability, and service (Heb 10:24–25).

When these foundations are strong, children grow up secure in the knowledge that authority is not arbitrary. They see that it flows from God. When these foundations are weak or missing, confusion follows, and rebellion soon grows. Joshua's timeless declaration captures the spirit of godly leadership:

> But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh 24:15).

Joshua's words reflect personal resolve and a commitment to family leadership. Faith begins with "as for me" and extends to "my house." As the leader of his home, Joshua set the tone for his marriage and family. Parents set the spiritual tone; children rarely rise higher than what they consistently see modeled.

The order that exists in the hearts of parents and in their marriage must eventually express itself in the daily structure of the home. Spiritual convictions that remain only theoretical will never shape

children. An ordered life produces ordered homes. This includes the rhythms of family life: how time is used, how priorities are established, and how the household functions on a daily basis. When parents live under the authority of Christ and walk in unity with one another, that order naturally begins to shape the environment of the home: times of prayer, consistent routines, expectations for behavior, patterns of discipline, and shared family worship. These rhythms teach children that life itself is lived under God's authority.

Children thrive in environments where order, consistency, and purpose are present. Just as God established order in creation, parents establish order within the home so that children learn that life is not random but guided by God's wisdom. Structure does not restrict children—it provides security, clarity, and stability.

The Warning of Forgetfulness

When parents neglect this order, the next generation drifts. The Book of Judges records the tragic results:

> Another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord … Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord (Judges 2:10-12).

Somewhere along the way, the Jewish parents stopped teaching their children about God. The stories of God's faithfulness went untold, His commands unpracticed. The result was spiritual decay.

Faith cannot be assumed; it must be taught, modeled, and reinforced daily. Forgetting God's works leads to abandoning His ways. The antidote to this dangerous drift is found again in Deuteronomy 6:6–7. Parents are to teach God's Word diligently in every setting and time of day—at home, on the road, in the morning, and in the evening. The Christian home is to be a continual school of faith, infusing God, Christ and the Bible into family life and teaching.

Order in Raising Sons and Daughters

There must be order even in how our children think of themselves as boys and girls. Today, our culture is not merely blurring gender distinctions—it seeks to erase them altogether. What began a couple of decades ago as "open mindedness" about a child's gender has become open rebellion against God's created order.

Genesis teaches that God created humanity "male and female" (Gen 1:27), each with distinct purpose and design. The differences between

men and women are not distinctions of evolution that are now in need of some imagined next evolutionary step of being blended tougher. On the contrary, distinctions between men and women are by divine design. These are complementary strengths and weaknesses that are blessed when brought together "to become one" in marriage as purposed by God (Gen 2:24).

Parents must therefore raise sons and daughters with clarity about their God-given identities and roles, celebrating the beauty of that distinction rather than surrendering it to cultural trends.

Raising Sons: Strength with Responsibility

> The glory of young men is their strength (Prov 20:29).

Strength is a gift, but without submission to the gospel it can become destructive. Boys must learn that true strength is used in service, not domination. Men were designed to be leaders in their marriages and home (Eph 5:23-25). Harnessing that strength in true gentleness guided by the Holy Spirit is how a godly man shows strength. Jesus modeled this perfectly:

> The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45).

We need to teach our sons that leadership is responsibility under God, not power over others. Raising boys to be godly men starts with modeling from dad. Then comes dad discipling his sons by teaching godly character and calling them to integrity. Below are a few other verses to consider.

> The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him (Prov 20:7)

Scripture repeatedly calls young men to wisdom, discipline, and integrity. The Book of Proverbs emphasizes the importance of instruction and correction in shaping a boy into a godly man.

> Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching (Prov 1:8–9).

This passage calls sons to receive and value the instruction of both father and mother, recognizing that wisdom is not self-discovered but passed down. It teaches boys humility and attentiveness, shaping them

to honor authority and embrace godly guidance as a lifelong foundation.

> My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline (Prov 3:11–12).

Here, discipline is reframed as an expression of love, not rejection. Sons must learn to receive correction without resentment, understanding that God uses discipline—and parents as His instruments—to shape character and maturity.

> Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (Prov 27:17).

This verse highlights the importance of relationships in forming a young man's character. Boys should be taught that godly friendships and accountability sharpen them, helping them grow in strength, wisdom, and conviction.

Fathers in particular play a crucial role in shaping the character of their sons. Through instruction, correction, and example, they model what it means to live as a man under God's authority.

Raising Daughters: Wisdom with Grace

The Bible's portrait of womanhood is one of strength, dignity, and grace. The Book of Proverbs describes a godly woman:

> Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue (Prov 31:25–26).

We need to teach daughters that their worth is found in godly character, not appearance or popularity. As Peter wrote:

> Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. (1 Pet 3:3-4).

Titus 2 calls older women to mentor the younger women. That is, they are to teach the young women to love, serve, and walk in purity.

> Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is

> good, 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 (Titus 2:3-5).

Mothers and mentors alike should help young women understand that purity is devotion to God first and foremost.

From Esther's courage to Ruth's loyalty to Hannah's faith, Scripture abounds with examples of faithful women whose strength flowed from their reverence for God.

Discipline and Discipleship

Discipline and discipleship are crucial aspects of ordered godly living, but discipline is often thought to be merely corrective action to wrongful behavior. Yes, discipline is corrective, but it is more than just that. It includes proactively creating structured environments where our children can thrive, based on their age and capacity. Discipleship is age appropriate training bringing the things of God and His Word alive. Our goal as parents is outlined in Psalm 127:1: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." We follow God's precepts to craft, aim, and release our children with purpose to follow God. That shaping process requires discipline and discipleship. (For a full treatment of the biblical foundation of discipline and discipleship, please refer to chapter 7.)

Discipline

I have seen many first-time parents struggle with corporal punishment for a variety of reasons. Many feel it is not truly necessary, and others were raised with it wrongly modeled. In their experience, discipline was often conducted in anger. Still others wait too long to start, not convinced that a one or two-year-old should be corrected. Others believe it is not biblical at all, which means they have not done the necessary study. The Bible is clear that corporal punishment is necessary for all children.

The amount of corporal punishment that will be necessary will vary from child to child. The type of corporal punishment utilized must be age appropriate. These are wisdom issues that parents need to pray about, agree on, and be consistent in applying. However, the reason for corporal punishment is clear in Proverbs 22:15:

> Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

What is foolishness? It is defiance; the asserting of self over the instructions of parents. The primary command in Scripture for children is Ephesians 6:1 "children obey your parents." Defiance against parental instruction is at the intersection of Proverbs 22 and Ephesians 6. How defiance manifests itself will change over time from the toddler to teen years, but the root is the same: the child asserting self over parental instruction.

How corporal punishment should be implemented, how often it should be utilized, and when mercy is to be shown are topics that are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp is a great resource that delves into each of those topics.

The next element of discipline is the physical environments and routines we establish at home. Age appropriate physical environments teach our children purpose. For example, there are certain rooms for playing, sleeping, eating, cooking, etc. We don't park the car in the living room, nor do we cook dinner in the bathroom. However, the horrible waves of man-based, liberal child-rearing systems that have plagued our culture for decades put the child in charge. These systems teach that complete freedom is needed for building self-esteem and confidence. However, nothing in the Bible tells us to build self-esteem and confidence. In fact, Jesus tells us we naturally love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31), so we don't need to feed the pride beast. What are we to build into our children? Godly character.

We see that God is a God of order from creation. We see this truth in His purpose in creating man, woman, and marriage. We see this in the way He calls us to order our Christian lives through prayer, study, and worship. God expects order in our homes. Unfortunately, many buy into secular psychology and allow children to set the pace for the home. Every room of the house is a playroom filled with toys. The time and location for sleep are child-centred. This does not build self-esteem, and confidence—it feeds self-centeredness and self-assertion, which are all centered on pride. Discipline without affection breeds rebellion, but affection without disciplined environments or routines breeds entitlement. Grace and truth must walk hand in hand.

Structured environments and routines are true character-builders that teach children that there is a time and place for the things we do. As parents we build age appropriate environments and routines where they can thrive and grow.

The following is a simple overview:

- **Early Years**—Tight boundaries; simple obedience; immediate correction.
- **Toddler Years**—Limited choices; consistent consequences.
- **School Years**—Explanation with discipline; understanding cause and effect.
- **Adolescence**—Guidance shifts toward conviction, grace, and accountability.

Why do we parents need to do this? It's simple: we as parents are under the authority of God and His Word. And we know God disciplines those He loves. Discipline is a lifelong process of training our children. They start under a house of discipline and that will follow them into adulthood under Christ. Proverbs 29:17 promises:

> Correct your son, and he will give you rest.

Godly discipline brings peace because it teaches boundaries and self-control.

Discipleship: Teaching and Encouraging

Discipleship begins with intentional teaching. (For a deeper exploration of discipling children, see chapter 9.) Christian parents are not merely caretakers of their children's physical needs: they are primary teachers of God's truth. As we saw earlier, Deuteronomy 6 instructs parents to speak of God's Word throughout the ordinary rhythms of life: when sitting at home, when walking along the road, when lying down, and when rising up. This means that teaching Scripture should not be confined to formal devotions but woven naturally into everyday conversations.

Parents teach their children by explaining Scripture, discussing decisions in light of biblical wisdom, answering spiritual questions, and pointing out God's work in everyday life. These conversations help children develop a biblical worldview and learn how God's truth applies to real situations.

God Himself rewards faithfulness:

> Well done, good and faithful servant (Matt 25:21).

Parents should do the same. Proverbs 3:27 reminds us not to withhold good from those who deserve it. Philippians 4:8 calls us to dwell on what is true and praiseworthy. Correction trains the conscience, but encouragement shapes the heart. A home filled with encouragement becomes fertile ground for joy and maturity. When parents affirm honesty, kindness, or courage, they reinforce virtue. Proverbs 12:25 observes, "A good word makes the heart glad." A word of encouragement at the right moment can change a child's outlook and strengthen their faith.

Colossians 3:16 paints a beautiful picture of the Christ-centered home:

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly … singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

A joyful, grateful home where faithfulness is affirmed and encouraged becomes a sanctuary where children learn that obedience brings blessing and faith brings peace.

Conclusion: The Generational Vision

Parenting is one of God's greatest callings and blessings. None of us is a perfect parent, and none of us has a perfect marriage. That said, when Christian parents live ordered lives that are aligned with Scripture, in harmony with one another, and faithful in example, they pass on a legacy of faith and stability that man's wisdom cannot offer. When parents stand firm amid cultural confusion and declare, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15) we are following the standard set by God and we will be blessed.

A life ordered under Christ's lordship is not bondage—it is blessing. It produces peace, wisdom, and joy. The caveat to parents, however, is that there is no guarantee our children will follow our footsteps. When our adult children choose the world, we are to hold to promises of scripture, believing and praying that our prodigals will return to God as they were raised (Luke 15:11-32). And the children raised in such homes who do embrace their parents' faith become the next generation of disciples, leaders, and servants of God—those who, in turn, will teach their own children to walk in His ways.

Scripture consistently calls parents to an active role in shaping the spiritual lives of their children. In summary, parents are called to:

- Live under God's Word personally.
- Teach Scripture diligently.
- Train character intentionally.
- Discipline consistently.
- Model integrity visibly.
- Lead spiritually.
- Correct without provoking.
- Encourage faithfully.
- Pray and intercede.
- Love sacrificially.

Parenting in Scripture is never passive; it is always active, structured, and deliberate.

Chapter 9

DISCIPLING THE NEXT GENERATION: GOD'S DESIGN FOR THE CHURCH AND THE HOME

By Jason Ng

The Church and the Home: God's Design for Discipleship

When we think about the spiritual growth of our children, we often look to the church as the primary place where faith is formed. Sunday school, youth group, and Bible lessons are all good and necessary. The church is God's design for building up believers and equipping His people for every good work. Yet, the Bible also shows us that discipleship begins at home. The church is a key place where discipleship should occur, but parents should be the primary disciplers of their own children. The two are not competing; they are partners in the same mission.

Every Christian parent should remember that discipleship is a long-term journey. It is not about a few emotional moments or one great Bible camp experience. It is a lifelong process of shaping hearts, habits, and faith. When we disciple our children, we must look far beyond their childhood years. We're training future adults who will one day stand on their own before God, make choices, build families, and take their place in the church.

Our goal is not just well-behaved kids, but faithful followers of Jesus Christ who love His Word and walk in His ways. We want our children to see the local church as their spiritual home. Church is not just a place to attend, but a spiritual family to belong to. When children grow up viewing the church as the place where their faith is nurtured, they will carry that love for God's people into adulthood. The rhythms of worship, the preaching of Scripture, and the fellowship of believers shape them far more deeply than we often realize. Parents and the church must work hand in hand by each fulfilling their role. Parents should be modeling faith daily. The church should be reinforcing, supporting, and equipping both children and parents for a lifetime of discipleship.

Discipleship Defined

So, what exactly is discipleship? At its heart, biblical discipleship is the intentional, relational process of learning from, following, and becoming like Jesus Christ, while helping others do the same.

It means following Jesus as Savior and Lord (Matt 4:19), learning His teaching and obeying it (Matt 28:19–20; John 8:31), imitating His life and character (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1–2), and growing in maturity (Eph 4:13–15). It also means helping others grow in Christ (2 Tim 2:2).

True discipleship is not a cold system or a checklist; it's a relationship that shapes every part of who we are. Discipleship is the heartbeat of the Christian life, and it should begin within our homes.

The Models of Jesus and Paul: How True Discipleship Works

If we want to understand discipleship, we must look first at Jesus Himself. He did not simply preach from a distance or distribute study guides. He called people into relationship with Himself. He said:

> Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men (Matt 4:19).

That invitation was personal and direct. He chose specific men (Mark 3:13–14) and asked them to leave behind everything familiar to walk with Him.

Discipleship began with relationship, not with rules. Jesus did not separate His teaching from His life. He lived with His disciples, walking, eating, praying, working, and suffering alongside them. He showed them what obedience looked like in everyday life. His teaching came not just from words but from example. Mark writes that Jesus

appointed the twelve "so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). Being with Him came before being sent by Him. True discipleship always starts with presence.

Today many people treat discipleship as a program, a class, a workbook, or a schedule of lessons. While structure has value, discipleship cannot happen at a distance. You cannot disciple someone you never spend time with. You can teach from a platform, but hearts are changed up close. Jesus let His disciples see His compassion, His prayer life, His weariness, and even His pain. They saw how He handled rejection and temptation. They saw how He loved the Father and obeyed Him fully. That kind of discipleship transforms because it invites people into real life.

Jesus also taught truth clearly. He spoke the Word of God in every situation, teaching through parables, sermons, and conversations (Matt 5–7; John 13–17). He wanted His disciples to be grounded in Scripture, not just stirred by emotion. Experiences can encourage, but only God's Word can anchor the soul. Discipleship without Scripture will never produce endurance.

Discipleship involves correction and Jesus often corrected His followers. He rebuked Peter for opposing God's plan (Matt 16:23), taught Thomas through his doubt (John 20:27–29), and restored those who failed. His correction was never harsh or hopeless. It was filled with love and direction.

Then, after teaching and correcting, He sent them out (Matt 28:19–20). Discipleship was never meant to stop at information; it aims to move outward into mission.

Paul followed this same model as Jesus. He was not a distant theologian but a hands-on disciple-maker. He wrote to the Thessalonians:

> So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess 2:8).

Paul shared not only the message of the gospel, but his life. He worked with his own hands (Acts 18:3), suffered with believers, and wept over them (Acts 20:31). He invested deeply because discipleship is built on relationship.

Paul's discipleship was also anchored in truth. He declared the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and reminded Timothy that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16–17). Discipleship built on anything other than sound doctrine will eventually drift.

Paul modeled a life worth imitating. Paul could say, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). His life was open and observable. He endured suffering, worked humbly, and lived with integrity. That visible faith validated and authenticated his teaching to them.

Paul also adapted his approach to the needs of each person. He was gentle like a mother (1 Thess 2:7) and firm like a father (1 Thess 2:11). He encouraged, warned, and corrected with wisdom and patience.

Finally, he trained others to multiply:

> What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2).

The goal of discipleship is always reproduction. True disciples make more disciples.

Both Jesus and Paul show us that discipleship is relational, truthful, authentic, corrective, and multiplying. It is not about control or performance but transformation through relationship and truth.

Parents as the Most Effective Disciplers

When we think of influence, we might assume the loudest voices win. Children today are surrounded by constant messages from friends, teachers, social media, entertainment, and the wider culture. It can feel overwhelming to imagine how parents can compete with so many voices. Yet research and experience tell a very different story: parents remain the most powerful influence in a child's spiritual and moral life.

Sociologist Christian Smith's research in *Handing Down the Faith* found that, more than clergy, youth pastors, peers, or media, parents have the greatest effect on whether children continue in the faith. This should encourage every parent. The culture may shout loudly, but the steady voice of a parent speaks deeper and lasts longer.

In children's ministry, leaders often say, "What happens at church is supplemental to what happens at home." That is true. The church can support, teach, and encourage, but parents live beside their children every day. They are the ones who show what grace looks like at breakfast, what patience looks like at bedtime, and what repentance looks like after sin. Children rarely become what they are told to be; they become what they see.

So, if discipleship begins at home, where do we start? The answer is not complicated, but it does require consistency. Four ordinary rhythms make a powerful difference.

First, go to church. When families attend church regularly, they are teaching their children that worship is a priority, not an option. Church provides a rhythm of truth and a community of faith. It teaches children that they are part of something bigger than themselves. They learn to listen to God's Word, to pray with others, and to see adults living out faith together. Over time, these habits build spiritual stability. The consistency of Sunday worship becomes a pillar in their memory.

Second, practice faith at home. What happens between Sundays matters most. Children learn as much from what they see as what they hear. When parents read Scripture, pray, and talk about God naturally in daily life, they create a home atmosphere where faith is normal. Family devotions, even short ones, can become the heartbeat of a Christian home. Read a short passage, talk about what it means, and pray together. These small moments add up to lasting impact.

Third, have spiritual conversations. Faith grows through conversation. Ask your children questions about God. Talk about what they are learning at church. When something happens in life, good or hard, bring God into the discussion. When your child feels afraid, talk about how God promises to be with us. When they see injustice, talk about God's justice. When they succeed, remind them that every good gift is from Him. These simple talks teach children that faith connects to all aspects of life.

Fourth, model Christian character. Children watch their parents closely. They notice how we handle anger, disappointment, and stress. They hear how we talk about others and how we treat them.

Two types of homes often push children away from faith: those that are too permissive (lots of love but no structure) and those that are too harsh (lots of rules but no warmth). The healthiest home is both loving and structured, full of grace and truth. That combination reflects God's own character.

Parents should also be open about their own need for grace. When we fail, we should confess and ask forgiveness. When you lose your patience, it's powerful to say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. That wasn't honoring to God. I need His help to change. Please forgive me." Children learn humility not from lectures but from seeing it lived. They learn repentance when they see repentance. The goal of all this is not perfection but faithfulness.

The Holy Spirit is the one who changes hearts. Our job is to plant and water faithfully, trusting God for the growth. Simple habits, like going to church, praying, reading, and talking about faith, build a lasting foundation.

Discipling Sons and Daughters with Wisdom

The heart of discipleship is the same for everyone: following Jesus and growing in His likeness. Yet, Scripture shows that God designed men and women with distinct strengths and callings. Both are made in His image (Gen 1:27), but each reflects that image differently. As parents, we should recognize and honor those differences as we disciple our children.

When raising sons, Scripture often emphasizes leadership, responsibility, courage, and sacrificial service. Paul exhorted men to "act like men, be strong" (1 Cor 16:13–14) and to love as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25). Boys need to see that true strength is not dominance, but service. They are called to lead through humility, protect the weak, work diligently, and stand for truth even when it costs them. Helping our sons grow into Christlike men means giving them responsibility, challenging them to serve, and teaching them to use their strength for the good of others.

When raising daughters, Scripture highlights wisdom, strength joined with gentleness, and faithfulness. Proverbs describes a godly woman in this manner:

> Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue (Prov 31:25-26).

Similarly, Peter speaks of women whose "adorning … is the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Pet 3:3-4). Girls need to see that biblical womanhood is not weakness, but rather strength under control, courage in love, and wisdom that builds others up.

For sons, discipleship may involve challenge and initiative: giving them tasks that teach responsibility, talking about leadership and courage, and showing them what servant-hearted strength looks like. For daughters, discipleship often flourishes through relationship and conversation: helping them process emotions, guiding them toward discernment, and modeling a quiet confidence rooted in Christ. Both

need truth and grace, correction and encouragement, but the way we reach their hearts may differ.

Ultimately, our goal is the same for both—to raise Christlike men and women who love God's Word and reflect His character. In a world that blurs the lines between manhood and womanhood, Christian parents must show that God's design is good, beautiful, and worth embracing. Our children need to see that following Christ means living out their God-given identities with joy.

Growing Faith Through Every Stage of Childhood

Discipleship does not look the same at every age. As children grow physically, mentally, and emotionally, their understanding of truth deepens. Wise parents recognize these changes and adjust how they teach, model, and encourage faith. The message of the gospel never changes, but the way we communicate it should mature alongside the child.

Spiritual growth is much like tending a garden. In the early years, parents plant seeds of truth. As the child matures, those seeds begin to sprout and take root. Later, the roots deepen, and the fruit of obedience and faith begins to show. Every stage requires intentional care, patience, and prayer. The goal is not simply that our children would know *about* God, but that they would come to know and love *Him* and walk with Him personally.

Ages 0–5: Building Trust and Wonder

During these earliest years, children learn primarily through relationships and repetition. Their understanding of God is formed by how their parents care for them. When parents are consistent, gentle, and loving, children learn that God is good and trustworthy. When parents show joy in prayer and worship, children learn that God is someone to delight in, not fear.

At this stage, the goal is to build a sense of trust and wonder in the heart of the child. They will not understand deep theological truths yet, but they can understand that God made, loves, and watches over them. These truths, taught simply and joyfully, lay the foundation for faith to grow in the future.

Practical Ways to Disciple in This Stage

- Begin and end each day with prayer. Even short prayers teach a pattern of gratitude and dependence.

- Read short Bible stories aloud. Books with colorful illustrations and simple wording like *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or *Read-Aloud Bible Stories* can help children connect truth with joy.
- Sing together. Songs like "Jesus Loves Me" and "This Little Light of Mine" teach theology in a way children can grasp.
- Use nature to teach about God. Talk about how God made the trees, the clouds, and the animals. Use creation to build wonder about the Creator.
- Be gentle and consistent in discipline. When you correct your child calmly and lovingly, you are reflecting God's patient correction. (See chapter 7 for a detailed examination of biblical discipline.)

Children in this stage are not yet ready to reason abstractly, but they are quick to imitate. They learn faith through rhythm, affection, and repetition. When they see parents pray naturally and speak kindly, they begin to connect love and obedience with God's character.

Ages 6–11: Teaching Truth and Shaping the Heart

During these elementary years, children begin to think more logically. They ask "why" frequently. They can understand cause and effect, fairness, and consequences. This is a wonderful stage to begin teaching clear biblical truths consistently.

Children in this age group are curious and observant. They notice when parents are joyful in faith and when they are not. They can memorize Scripture quickly, so this is the ideal time to fill their hearts with the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Helping children memorize short passages now will equip them for later battles of the heart.

Practical Ways to Disciple in This Stage

- Read one short passage of Scripture together each day and discuss it briefly. Ask, "What does this tell us about God?" or "How can we obey this verse?"
- Encourage participation in church services. Help them listen for one truth that is preached during the sermon and then talk about it afterward.
- Begin family devotions. It can be as simple as reading a verse, explaining it in your own words, and praying together.

- Teach them how to pray for others. Have them pray for family members, teachers, or missionaries.
- Talk openly about sin, repentance, and forgiveness. When they disobey, connect correction to the heart by explaining how sin hurts relationships and dishonors God. Then show them what grace and forgiveness look like.
- Give them small opportunities to serve, such as setting the table, helping with siblings, or collecting items for a church-related charity drive.

At this stage, parents are building understanding. Children must begin to see that the heart of Christianity is not about rule-keeping, but about a relationship with God. Teach them that obedience comes from love, not from fear. Share your own experiences of trusting God when things in life were hard. Honest examples make faith tangible and relatable.

Ages 12–14: Engaging the Mind and Heart

As children enter adolescence, their worlds expand. They begin to think critically, question authority, and form their own identity. Their faith must now begin to move from dependence on their parents to personal conviction. This can be a challenging stage, but it is also a rich opportunity for deeper discipleship.

Adolescents can understand complex truths, but they need to see those truths lived out authentically. They notice inconsistencies quickly. If they see hypocrisy, they will question it. Parents must respond not with fear, but with honesty. It is better to admit, "I struggle in that area too, but God's Word helps me grow," than to pretend perfection. Transparency builds trust and keeps the heart open.

Practical Ways to Disciple in This Stage

- Invite open discussion about doubts and questions. Encourage them to think deeply rather than silencing their concerns.
- Read through a Gospel together and talk about what Jesus' actions reveal about God's character.
- Discuss moral and cultural issues from a biblical perspective. Use current events to teach discernment. Help them learn how to think biblically and not just parrot back learned answers.
- Begin to teach personal spiritual disciplines like journaling, Bible reading, and solitude. Help them set aside quiet time for prayer and reflection.

- Talk about friendship and peer influence. Use Proverbs to discuss wise and foolish company.
- Encourage them to participate in a youth group or service projects where they can put their faith into action.

This stage is about helping your child take ownership of his or her beliefs. They need to see that Christianity makes sense in real life. Show them that following Christ is not blind faith, but reasonable and joyful obedience to truth. As their independence grows, give them more freedom to make decisions and experience consequences, while still offering guidance and love.

Ages 15–18: Coaching and Leadership Development

The teenage years bring new levels of independence and responsibility. Teenagers are preparing for adulthood, which means they need guidance in applying faith to real-life choices. Parents must now move from directors to coaches, though still retaining authority. The goal is to help teenagers learn how to live out their faith when they are no longer under constant supervision.

At this age, teens wrestle with identity, purpose, and direction. They begin to ask questions such as "What does God want me to do with my life?" or "How can I be sure of my faith?" Parents should meet those questions with encouragement and a biblical perspective.

Practical Ways to Disciple in This Stage

- Encourage consistent personal time with God. Offer to study a book of the Bible together but give them space to develop their own patterns of study.
- Teach them about calling and vocation. Help them see that serving God is not limited to ministry but includes every career done for His glory (Col 3:23).
- Discuss purity, relationships, and integrity openly and biblically. Let them see that holiness is not restriction, but protection.
- Involve them in church ministry. Allow them to serve younger children, help with worship, or assist in outreach. Service helps faith mature.
- Talk about finances and stewardship. Teach generosity and wise management as acts of worship.
- Encourage them to take stands for truth at school and in friendships. Discuss how to respond with grace and conviction when their beliefs are challenged.

At this stage, parents should focus on providing mentorship. Ask good questions rather than always giving answers. Affirm their growth and responsibility. Help them see that mistakes can be redeemed and that God's grace covers failure. Equip them to think, serve, and lead as disciples who will one day disciple others.

Ages 18 and Beyond: Encouragement and Partnership
When children reach adulthood, the role of a parent changes. At this stage, influence replaces authority, and relationship replaces control. It can be difficult to step back, but this is the natural and healthy progression of discipleship. The goal of parenting is to prepare children to follow Christ on their own. Now the parent becomes more of a counselor and encourager. Continue to pray faithfully for your adult children. Keep communication open. Offer wisdom when asked but avoid trying to manage their choices. Be ready to listen, support, and remind them of God's faithfulness.

Practical Ways to Disciple in This Stage

- Send a verse of encouragement through a text message or card.
- Pray regularly for their specific needs and tell them you are praying for them.
- Invite them to talk about what they are learning in church or through their own devotions.
- Continue to model steadfast faith through your marriage, work, and relationships.
- Be available during seasons of difficulty. Sometimes presence speaks louder than advice.

As your children start families of their own, you have the privilege of becoming an example for the next generation. Your faithfulness as a parent can shape your grandchildren as well. Scripture often speaks of "generational faithfulness," where the love for God is passed from parents to children and grandchildren. Psalm 145:4 says: "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." That is the vision of parenting for eternity.

No matter the age or personality of your child, one truth remains constant: discipleship thrives in the soil of relationship. Your children must feel loved before they can absorb truth. They must see the gospel lived out before they will believe it deeply. You cannot force spiritual growth, but you can cultivate an environment where it naturally flourishes.

At every stage, discipleship involves two things: consistency and authenticity. Be consistent in teaching and example. Be authentic in joy, repentance, and dependence on God. The years may bring challenges, but the Holy Spirit uses faithful parents to shape hearts for eternity.

Raising children in the Lord is not about controlling outcomes, but trusting the God who transforms hearts. Your calling is to plant, water, and nurture. God alone gives the growth. And the same God who entrusted your children to you is faithful to finish His good work in them.

Closing Reflections

Parenting is one of the most sacred callings God gives. It is also one of the hardest. We will stumble and fail at times, but the grace of God meets us in those moments. Our children do not need perfect parents; they need repentant ones. They need to see us trust God's promises when life is uncertain. They need to see us love the church, treasure Scripture, and depend on the Spirit.

Discipleship is not about producing perfect kids but pointing them to a perfect Savior. As parents, we are sowing seeds that may not bear fruit for many years, but God is faithful.

The home and the church work together in His design. The church teaches and equips, but the home lives it out daily. When both are united under the lordship of Christ, children grow up surrounded by truth, grace, and godly example.

So, commit your family to this long obedience. Make worship central. Talk about God at home. Confess when you fail. Celebrate when your children take small steps of faith. Pray constantly that they will know and love Jesus. Trust that He is working even when you cannot see it.

Discipleship is a lifelong journey, but it begins today in your home, in your words, in your prayers, and in your example. The same Savior who called fishermen to follow Him calls parents today to do the same: to follow Him closely, to walk faithfully, and to bring their children along the path of grace and truth.

Chapter 10

PLAUSIBLE ARGUMENTS: PARENTING, PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE CALL FOR DISCERNMENT

By Derek Brown

There was trouble brewing in Colossae. The church, planted by Epaphras in the mid-fifties AD, had good beginnings, but now something was amiss. Rogue teachers, professing to be uniquely in touch with spiritual realities, had started to infiltrate this fledgling church and stir up confusion. While it is difficult to know precisely which heresies these teachers were promoting, it is clear that their ideas undermined the person, work, and sufficiency of Christ.

These teachers likely claimed to have exclusive insight into divine matters, telling the Colossians that they could supplement their spiritual deficiencies with superior wisdom. Paul countered this teaching by defending Christ's deity and exhorting the believers to be on guard against any teaching that challenged Christ's sufficiency for their lives. He also told believers that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ, to whom they had complete access through faith (Col 2:4). The so-called enlightened teachers, therefore, had nothing to offer the Colossian church.

But it wasn't as though these false teachers didn't *sound* good. They did. Their arguments appeared reasonable, informed, and educated. Indeed, what they were telling the Colossian believers was *plausible*. But

it was precisely the plausibility of their ideas that elicited Paul's warning. Paul reminded the Colossians that Christ is the only inexhaustible source of spiritual wisdom and knowledge so that they would not be led away by people who sounded good but whose teaching swerved from the truth.

> For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. *I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments* (Col 2:1-4; emphasis added).

The key to surviving the onslaught of plausible-sounding, yet heretical ideas, was for the Colossian Christians to fix their attention on Jesus Christ, walk obediently with him, remain well-grounded in apostolic truth, and continually express gratitude to their Savior. "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Col 2:6). Moreover, they needed to take an active stance against *any* kind of spiritual teaching that was not rooted in Christ.

> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority (Col 2:8-10).

The phrase "see to it," in the *English Standard Version* translates one word in Greek, *blepete*. This word is an imperative (a command), and it could also be translated, "Be careful," as in the *Christian Standard Bible*. Here, Paul is warning the Colossian Christians to be on guard against teaching that sounds plausible and is wrapped in philosophical sophistication but has its origins in human tradition and what Paul calls "the elemental spirits of the world." What kind of teaching is Paul telling the Colossians to guard themselves against? He is referring to *any* teaching that attempts to address spiritual issues *apart from apostolic revelation*.

The false teachers in Colossae were talking about spiritual matters—God, heaven, divine fullness, forgiveness of sins, baptism, and spiritual beings like angels and demons—but they did so without grounding their teachings in God's revelation that He had given through Christ to the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). The false teachers in Colossae derived their beliefs about religion from mere human cogitation, tradition, and self-reflection. Such teaching, Paul warned, would always be spiritually defective and dangerous because it was not rooted in Christ and His revelation.

These believers needed to be reminded that in Christ they had a Savior who was both infinite God and sinless man (Col 2:9-10). Through their union with Christ, they had experienced a radical heart change (Col 2:11), spiritual resurrection (Col 2:12-13a), and complete forgiveness of sin (Col 2:13b-14). Spiritually speaking, they needed nothing else. Everything necessary for salvation and Christian living was found in Christ.

These were vital truths that these first-century Colossian Christians needed to hear. But Paul's words do not only apply to the circumstances in ancient Colossae. *All* Christians of all ages must follow Paul's instructions in this passage and be on guard against any teaching that attempts to address spiritual realities apart from apostolic revelation—God's Word in the Bible.

A Modern-Day Example: Secular Psychology

Today, Paul's warning applies directly to modern psychology.[1] Why psychology? Put simply, secular psychologists, like the teachers in Colossae, are attempting to address spiritual matters apart from God's Word. Modern psychology aims to address nearly every aspect of Christian discipleship, yet from a naturalistic foundation that does not yield to Christ or His Word. This conceptual overlap between the concerns of modern psychology and the concerns of Christianity is evident in Table 1.

[1] Throughout this chapter, I will use the words "modern" and "secular" interchangeably with reference to psychology.

Table 1: A Comparison of Psychology and Christianity's Conceptual "Jurisdictions"[2]

Psychology	Christianity
Suffering/Trauma	Suffering *(Rom 8:18-25; 2 Cor 4:16-18)*
Romantic Relationships	Romantic Relationships *(Song of Solomon)*
Family Relationships	Family Relationships *(Eph 5:22-6:4)*
Friendship	Friendship *(Prov 18:24; 27:9)*
Conflict	Conflict *(Matt 5:23-24; Rom 15:5)*
Grief/Loss	Grief/Loss *(Rom 8:18-25; 1 Thess 4:12-16)*
Motivation	Motivation *(1 Cor 10:31)*
Work	Work *(Gen 1:26-31; Col 3:23)*
Satisfaction	Satisfaction *(Eccl 2:24; Ps 90:14)*
Parenting	Parenting *(Prov 13:24; 29:15; Eph 6:1-4)*
Personal Problems	Personal Problems *(Rom 7:14-25)*
Anxiety	Anxiety *(Matt 6:25-33)*
Thinking	Thinking *(Rom 12:1-2)*
Desires	Desires *(Prov 24:1; James 4:2)*
The Meaning of Life	The Meaning of Life *(Matt 23:37-39)*
Loneliness & Isolation	Loneliness & Isolation *(Prov 18:1; Heb 3:12-15)*
Food & the Body	Food & the Body *(Eccl 5:18; 1 Cor 6:12-14)*
Sexuality	Sexuality *(Gen 1:26; Prov 5:15-23)*
Time Management	Time Management *(Eph 5:15-17)*
Identity	Identity *(Rom 6:1-4; Col 2:11-14)*
Depression	Depression *(Ps 42:3; 56:8)*
Inner-Peace	Inner-Peace *(Phil 4:4-8)*
Anger	Anger *(James 1:19-20)*
Fear	Fear *(Prov 1:7; Is 41:10)*
Mental Health	Fruit of the Spirit *(Gal 5:22-23)* & Renewal of the Mind *(Rom 12:1-2)*

From this table we see that nearly every category of sanctification, spiritual maturity, and Christian discipleship addressed in Scripture is also addressed by modern psychology. The noun "disciple" means "learner," and "discipleship" simply refers to the process of learning. Used as a verb (i.e., to disciple), it denotes the act of instructing another person. Just like Christianity, modern psychology aims to instruct (disciple) the inner-life (mind, heart) and behavior (obedience) of a person. In this way, then, modern psychology should be classified as *naturalistic* discipleship in contrast to Christian or *spiritual* discipleship. Scripture, therefore, would categorize modern psychology as a rival

[2] There are many more Bible verses that could be used to demonstrate how the Bible addresses each category. I provided only a few in Table 1 for the sake of space.

religion/philosophy to Christianity—an alternative framework for addressing the deepest concerns of human existence.[3]

The word "psychology" (*psyche*=soul; *logos*=word) etymologically means "the study of the soul." By its very nomenclature, psychology, as an area of academic study and professional practice, seeks to understand and treat problems within the inner life of the human being. Today, psychology is viewed as a professional practice where specialists offer insight into our nature as humans to help us with our most serious problems.

In modern parlance, the word "psychology" has a distinctively non-theistic connotation. That is, *psychology is viewed as a naturalistic discipline comprising a research-level academic component and a popular-level self-help practice that is grounded in an alleged scientific foundation.* But at its core, it is an attempt to address spiritual issues—issues of the soul—independent of Christ and His Word.

To set this difference in stark relief, I've provided the following two tables. In Table 2, we observe the fundamental differences between secular psychology and Christianity in terms of key theological concepts. In Table 3, I draw out the respective differences in psychology and Christianity's view of the human person in greater detail.

[3] For an academic defense of this claim, please see my article, "Rival Religions: Why Common Grace Cannot Provide Theological Warrant or Obligation for the Use of Modern Psychology in Christian Counseling" in *The Cornerstone Journal of Pastoral Theology and Ministry*, vol. 3 (2025).

Table 2: Foundational Theological Assumptions

	Theological Assumptions (Psychology)	Theological Assumptions (Christianity)
God	If God exists, He is there to help you achieve your goals, feel good about yourself, and fulfill your potential (Moralistic Therapeutic Deism). However, God is not *necessary* for successful parenting.	God exists and is the source of all that exists. He has created all things, including humans, for His glory. Man's supreme good is to know and worship God for who He is.
Man	Humankind is intrinsically good. The human person is primarily (if not exclusively) biological/physical.	Man is made in God's image; comprised of a material body and an immaterial soul. Man is dead in sin and unable to remedy his spiritual situation.
Sin	Man's primary problem is not sin against his Creator, but a lack of emotional resilience, the need for education, and the need for greater self-esteem.	Man's greatest ailment and source of trouble is his own sin and rebellion against his Creator. Mankind is guilty before God and is corrupt on the inside.
Salvation/ Sanctification	The aim in life is personal growth, self-improvement, a sense of worth, personal happiness, comfort, fulfillment, emotional regulation, and mental health. These goods come through psychotherapy, human wisdom, medication, diet, routine lifestyle changes, and other techniques.	Man was made to glorify God in everything he thinks, feels, says, and does. God provides judicial removal of man's guilt through the righteous life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and gives His Holy Spirit to renew the sinner's inner life (soul). God uses the Scripture, His Spirit, and the church to enable the believer to successfully overcome sin and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.
Authority	Neurological science, medical professionals, psychologists, psychiatrists, *DSM-V*.	The Bible supremely, and derivatively, qualified pastors and teachers.

While psychologists do not refer to their beliefs as theological, their beliefs nevertheless replicate every major doctrinal category within Christianity. God is either non-existent or not necessary for successful parenting, for "success" in parenting is defined without relation to God and His purpose for our lives. Sin in psychology is redefined so that it

is no longer a violation of our Creator's law for which we are ultimately culpable, but a disorder rooted in biological abnormalities. The aim in life is not to grow in holiness and Christlikeness for the glory of God, but to improve oneself, cope with difficulties, and achieve self-actualization and personal fulfillment. The authority for how to live and what to believe is not Scripture, but the current scientific consensus, medical professionals, psychologists, psychiatrists, and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.*

Psychology and Christianity also have vastly divergent views of the human person, as we see below in Table 3. In this table, I've contrasted psychology and Christianity's respective anthropologies (i.e., views on humankind) in more detail. As we will see below, these diverse beliefs yield markedly different parental counsel.

Table 3: Anthropological Assumptions

Human Person (Psychology)	Human Person (Christianity)
Primarily a biological entity (monism).	A physical and spiritual entity (dualism).
Evolved from common ancestor.	Created *De Novo.*
"Mind" is a product of the brain's physical processes.	"Mind" is immaterial and exists apart from the brain.
Inherently good.	Inherently sinful and rebellious against his/her creator.
Needs greater self-esteem, changes in routine, physical intervention (medicine), and therapy.	Needs supernatural intervention, a renewed inner person, forgiveness of sins, and biblical discipleship.

It is crucial for Christians to see that psychology is working from an anthropology that is opposed to a Christian view of the human person at every point. Why is this crucial to note? Because it is the human person with whom we are dealing in both cases. What we think about the nature, constitution, and ultimate need of the human person will directly shape how we think about parenting.

Modern psychology's origins are rooted in neo-Darwinian evolution. Sigmund Freud and many of those who followed him worked from the assumption that biological evolution is true. But even for those psychologists who did not and do not follow a strict neo-Darwinian framework, or who claim that a theory of origins does not influence their study of the human person one way or the other, modern psychology on the whole does not have a category for

understanding the human person as a composite entity—a physical body *and* an immaterial soul. The human person is viewed from a monist perspective—that we are only a biological entity. Within this naturalistic framework, the concept of "mind," is a construct for understanding the brain's physical processes. According to modern psychology, the mind is not an immaterial substance that is distinct from the physical brain.

Christianity, however, teaches that God created human beings as unique creatures whose origins do not derive from pre-human ancestors. We exist as dual substances (a body and a soul) that are joined in a mysterious unity where the spiritual affects the physical and the physical interacts with the spiritual.

Regarding our status as sinners, modern psychology assumes that we are intrinsically good and that our greatest needs are for increased self-esteem, education, therapy, changes in our daily routines, physical interventions, and medication. Christianity sees our condition as profoundly worse and teaches that we are sinful to the core of who we are. Our greatest ailment is our slavery to sin, which can only be remedied through a supernatural intervention that relieves our guilt and provides divine power through which we can overcome our indwelling sin.

Most importantly, when it comes to raising our children, Christian parents must recognize that secular psychologists and modern family therapists are *not* offering their clients, readers, or listeners unbiased, purely evidence-based counsel, rooted in empirical fact. While popular portrayals of psychology imply that it is rooted in scientific objectivity, the truth is that the entire system is laden with philosophical assumptions about human nature, the nature and existence of God, the reality of sin, our deepest human needs, and authoritative sources of knowledge and wisdom.

Observations vs. Interpretations

One objection to what I've said up to this point may be to highlight the many true observations that secular psychologists *have* made. Doesn't the fact that psychologists have made true observations about children and parenting demonstrate that this concern over modern psychology is a bit overwrought?

It is certainly the case that psychologists often say true things about parenting. For example, one psychologist notes that, "Children love to be busy, and useful. They delight in seeing that there is a place for them

in the hum of doing, making, and fixing that [which] surrounds them."[4] This is a true observation. Having three children of my own who like to be busy and useful, I can vouch for the truth of this statement. I also see this characteristic in other children. Nothing controversial here.

But this reflection on the general desire of children to be busy and useful is merely an observation of behavior. Once we start asking *why* children like to be useful, or *what* we should do when they suddenly don't want to be helpful in the way we want them to, or *how* to teach our kids that the attitude of their heart matters more to God than the busyness of their hands, we are interpreting their behavior through the grid of our worldview (our assumptions about God, man, sin, salvation, and authority) and using our interpretations to inform how to we will instruct our children.

As we have already noted, the Christian will answer these interpretational and applicational questions much differently than the psychologist. Although secular psychologists may often make true observations about human thought patterns and behavior, the moment they start interpreting those observations (e.g., *why* a child is behaving a certain way) and applying an intervention (e.g., *how* to solve the child's problematic behavior), their naturalistic worldview takes them in a direction that is contrary to biblical teaching.

One of the most important skills that Christian parents can develop, therefore, is the ability to discern between observations and interpretations. When you hear or read some bit of psychological counsel, try to distinguish between what a speaker or author is seeing (observation), how they are construing what they see (interpretation), and how they are using those conclusions to instruct parents on how to manage their children (application). This is a vital skill to develop because most of the psychological parenting counsel you will receive is the *interpretation* of problematic behavior, not the mere observation of it. Thus, such counsel is far from objective—it is shaped by the psychologist's prior beliefs about who your child is and what constitutes his most serious problems.

Consider the following table (Table 4). Because modern psychology and Christianity begin with vastly different views on God, man, sin, salvation, and the sources of authority, each posits vastly different views of a child's problematic behavior and the cause of it. As a result,

[4] Kim John Payne, *Simplicity Parenting: Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids* (New York: Ballentine, 2009), 104.

each system offers opposing goals for the child and divergent views of discipline.

Table 4: Comparison of Parenting Philosophies

	Psychologically Rooted Parenting	Biblically Rooted Parenting
Source of Wisdom	Relies exclusively upon human wisdom and insight. Interprets behavior and thought patterns without the guidance of Scripture.	Relies upon God's wisdom in Scripture and not our own minds *(Prov 3:5-6; 28:26; Col 2:3; 2 Tim 3:16-17).*
Sin	Relabels sinful attitudes and behavior in naturalistic terms.	Calls sinful attitudes and behavior what they are: heart-level rebellion that requires supernatural heart-change *(Ps 25:11; Jer 6:14).*
Cause of Child's Behavior	Emphasizes the physical/biological factors of the child's behavior.	Recognizes how parenting must be correctly proportioned between the physical and the spiritual, with a growing asymmetrical emphasis on the spiritual (the heart and mind) as the child gets older *(Rom 12:1-2).*
Goals for the Child	Aims at self-centered goals: • Raising the child's self-esteem. • Promoting the child's physical, emotional, and relational well-being. • Developing coping skills. • Promoting emotional regulation.	Aims at God-centered goals: *(1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17)* • Directing children away from self-esteem to a right understanding of sin and God's glorious grace in Christ *(1 Tim 1:12-17).* • Training children to self-sacrificially love God and others for Christ's sake, not merely for the benefits it provides *(Matt 22:37-39).* • Teaching children to persevere through trials with faith, hope, and love *(Rom 5:1-5).* • Growing in self-control *(Gal 5:22-23; Titus 2:6).*
Discipline	Refrains from physical discipline and focuses on communication.	Implements both wise physical discipline and rich communication *(Prov 29:15; 4:1ff).*

It should be apparent that the parenting goals offered by modern psychology diverge profoundly from the parenting goals that God has laid out in His Word. The fundamental difference is in the object of worship.

God has created us to worship Him and value Him above all things (Is 43:7; Jer 2:13). When we reject God's supremacy in our hearts, we don't cease to worship—we just worship something else in God's place, and the default idol of every human heart is the self (Rom 1:18-32). Secular psychology, because it is rooted in a naturalistic view of the universe, *must* terminate on the self as the object of utmost worship, loyalty, and love.

In truth, love of self is the source from which *all* psychological counsel flows. Parents who uncritically drink in psychological counsel are imbibing deadly toxins into their spiritual bloodstream. Self-love characterizes the unregenerate person (see 2 Tim 3:2) and is diametrically opposed to Christian discipleship, where we learn to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23), aiming our whole lives at God's glory, even at the cost of our own earthly comfort (Luke 14:25-33).

Some parental counsel may sound plausible and even helpful, yet it is precisely here, at the point of plausibility, that Christian parents must carefully discern between that which *sounds* good and that which is *truly* good. If a secular psychologist offers advice on parenting, he is drawing from a worldview that places ultimate value on the well-being of the child. While a child's well-being is a valid concern in parenting, this concern can never be detached from Christ and His Word, for only Scripture can tell us what is best for our children. The above "goals" in Table 4 may initially sound good—self-esteem, well-being, coping skills, emotional regulation—yet each of these goals falls woefully short of a biblical vision for parenting.

Rather than raising our children's self-esteem, we should be helping them cultivate a healthy understanding of their sin, the necessity of repentance, godly grief, and wonder over God's amazing grace in Christ (Rom 3:10-12; 21-26; 2 Cor 7:10; Eph 2:1-10). Scripture calls us to develop a Christ-dependent confidence and a sober-minded assessment of our God-given abilities, not self-esteem (John 15:6; Rom 12:3).

Instead of focusing on our children's emotional, physical, and relational well-being, we should direct their gaze upon Christ and train them to, like Jesus, deny themselves for the glory of God and the good of others (Phil 2:1-11). Here and only here will they experience true "well-being," as Jesus said, "Whoever *loses* his life for my sake will *find*

it" (Matt 10:39, emphasis added). Far better than teaching our children to merely cope with difficulty is to help them learn how to persevere through trials in faith and joy (Rom 5:1-5; 2 Cor 4:14-16). Instead of making emotional regulation the focus of our child's daily life, we should teach them how to grow in self-control through faith in Christ and His promises (Gal 5:22-23; Titus 2:6), while helping them understand that emotions reveal the heart and what the heart values. (See chapter 19 for a thorough examination of what the Bible says about the heart.)

The table below (Table 5) contains more ways in which Christian parenting goals are dramatically different than what modern psychology offers.

Table 5: Parenting Goals

Psychology	Christianity
High Self-Esteem	Recognition that the child is a sinner in need of forgiveness; genuine shame and grief over sin; longing for justification and inward renewal by the Holy Spirit *(Rom 3:10-26; Titus 3:3-7).*
A Successful Career	A whole-life diligence in the child's walk with Christ, work, family, relationships, and ministry *(Prov 10:4; 12:24; 21:5; Col 3:23).*
Self-Actualization	A love for holiness (*Heb 12:14*) and selfless service to others (*Phil 2:1-11*); self-denial for the gospel's sake *(Luke 9:23).*
Growth in Empathy	Growth in Christ-centered compassion rooted in biblical truth; growing in love and discernment *(Phil 1:7).*
Self-Care	Reasonable physical care for the sake of long-term, effective ministry to others *(Matt 22:39);* a willingness to suffer with Christ *(Rom 8:17).*
Growth Mindset/ Self-Improvement	Growth in the fruit of the Spirit *(Gal 5:22-23*) for the glory of God and the good of others; Christ-centered humility that prioritizes the glory of God over temporal personal benefits *(James 4:6).*

Each of these parenting goals may appear good for our child. When contrasted with Scripture's vision for our children, however, we see that psychology offers a counterfeit that does not compare to what God offers to our children in the gospel. In salvation and sanctification, God provides our children true, lasting change and powerfully turns the

child from a love for and dependence upon self to a love for and dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psychology and Discipline

Discipline is also reframed by secular psychology. Take, for example, this quote from a book on parenting from Sarah Ockwell-Smith: "Gentle parenting is about creating a future …. where discipline does not involve inflicting physical harm and pain, exclusion, shame, and guilt on some of the most vulnerable members of society."[5] The author suggests in another book that praise can be an effective means of discipline.[6] Ockwell-Smith labels corporal discipline as a punishment, cites studies that show that corporal punishments create greater aggression and defiance in children, and then dismisses it as an outmoded way of discipline.[7] Even the American Psychological Association states plainly that physical discipline is harmful and ineffective. [8]

These views of discipline do not originate in a God-centered vision of the universe. Rather, they flow out of a worldview that sees children as inherently good and whose well-being consists primarily in feeling good about themselves. Scripture teaches, however, that children are intrinsically sinful, resistant to God and other legitimate authorities, self-willed, foolish, and self-centered (see Rom 1:30; 3:10-12; Prov 22:15). While discipline is not the sole task of parenting, parents who desire to guide their child away from foolishness and onto the path of wisdom must use unpleasant consequences in the training process (Prov 29:15).

The above quote from Ockwell-Smith also unhelpfully conflates physical harm and pain, which makes it sound like any time a child experiences physical pain, they also, by definition, experience harm. This is simply not true. Pain and harm are not necessarily correlated. For example, if I go on a long run, I will feel pain in my quads the next

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[5] Sarah Ockwell-Smith, *The Gentle Parenting Book: How to Raise Calmer, Happier Children from Birth to Seven* (Piatkus, 2016), 4.

[6] Ockwell-Smith, *Gentle Discipline: Using Emotional Connection—Not Punishment—to Raise Confident, Capable Kids* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2017), 62.

[7] Ockwell-Smith, *Gentle Discipline*, 55.

[8] American Psychological association, https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/physical-discipline; see "Who Will You Believe About Spanking?" for a biblical response. https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/who-will-you-believe-about-spanking/

day. The pain, however, is good for me, for it leads to growth in strength and endurance.

When we discipline our children, they will experience brief physical pain. Done rightly with self-control and without anger, however, discipline will *never* injure (harm) the child. The pain the child experiences on their backside is momentary—it lasts only a minute or two. Nor will such discipline harm a child mentally or emotionally, for the parent is implementing this unpleasant consequence for the child's ultimate good and communicating love for the child before, during, and after the discipline (see Eph 6:4; parents should never provoke their children to anger through unbridled discipline). The fruit of godly discipline will be the child's growth in self-control and their ability to choose right over wrong, obedience over disobedience.

Biblical discipline is not punishment, nor is it retribution. Viewing corporal discipline as punishment is one way that psychology has caricatured this aspect of training our children. Nor is discipline the venue where a parent gets to vent his or her anger. Discipline is an important aspect of training our children to walk in the fear of the Lord so that they will enjoy the pleasant fruit of wisdom (Prov 1:7; 2:6). Secular psychology has no such categories for understanding children and their relationship to God. For this reason, physical discipline is often caricatured and dismissed out of hand as an antiquated, ignorant form of parenting that hurts rather than blesses children.[9]

Conclusion: Which Way, Christian Parent?

We see, then, that modern psychological perspectives on parenting, despite their plausibility, are at odds with Scripture's teaching about who God is, who we are, and how to parent our children in light of these essential truths. Christian parents who desire to please God in their parenting and truly bless their children will not thoughtlessly blend mainstream pop-psychology into their parenting philosophy and practice. Rather, they will, in obedience to Paul's apostolic word in

[9] Consider this statement from a recent book on parenting. "Authoritarian parenting styles stem from the belief that, in order to develop properly, children need to be punished for bad behavior and be rewarded for good behavior" (Hunter Clarke-Fields, *Raising Good Humans: A Mindful Guide in Breaking the Cycle of Reactive Parenting and Raising Kind, Confident Kids* [Oakland: New Harbinger, 2019], 127). While some parenting models may advocate for discipline as punishment, this is not the biblical model. Unfortunately, psychological literature does not distinguish between unbiblical and biblical forms of corporal discipline, where the latter is used to train the child for their good, not punish them.

Colossians, be on guard against *any* teaching that attempts to address spiritual issues apart from divine revelation.

When it comes to raising our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, the Word of Christ in Scripture is our sufficient guide. Not only does Scripture speak specifically about training and disciplining our children, but it also provides us with the truth about all of reality so that we might truly know who our children are, how they relate to God, what their most serious ailments consist of, and the only solution to these problems. There is nowhere else we need to go, for in Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Chapter 11

HOW TO (NOT) PARENT LIKE A PHARISEE

By Stephen Salinas

Success or Tragedy?

If you have young kids, I'd like you to imagine a scenario about your children for a moment. Imagine they're grown adults and out of the house with families of their own. They go to church every week, they're involved in a bi-weekly Bible study, and they attend prayer meetings every month where they're known for their eloquent prayers. They fast twice a week and give tithes on every dollar they make. They're successful in business and well respected in their local community. They've never lived a lifestyle of outright sin. However, they don't have a true love for God. Is that scenario a success or a tragedy?

Up until that last point, that sounded pretty good, right? However, lacking a true love for God means they aren't regenerated. This scenario is a tragedy, because it means that they aren't saved and they're just playing at religion. Scripture is clear that good works or religious activity alone cannot save.

Parenting and Legalism

What I just described to you would describe the Pharisees (the religious elite in Jesus' day) to a T. They were hyper religious and obsessed with outwardly obeying the law but didn't possess true saving faith.

Surprisingly, Jesus reserved His harshest words for the Pharisees, not the prostitutes and tax collectors.

As Christians, I'm afraid it can be easy to fall into the trap of parenting like a Pharisee. In our desire to have our children honor God, we can stress moralism and self-righteousness, while neglecting the gospel. Of course, we want our children to obey God's commands, but teaching them moral behavior alone is not enough. We need to teach them about their sinful hearts and their need for Jesus to save them.

To be clear, we cannot save our children, because salvation is from God alone. However, we can take a big picture approach to how we faithfully parent them. We can choose to parent them with a focus on the gospel and their hearts. We can choose not to parent them in a legalistic, self-righteous way. We can choose not to parent them like Pharisees. Our primary focus should be on addressing sin in our children's hearts and their need for Jesus to save them, not merely their external behavior.

In this chapter, we're going to use one of Jesus' most contentious confrontations with the Pharisees in Luke 11:37-54 as a framing device to see how we can avoid parenting like Pharisees.

The Traditions of the Pharisees

Before we start breaking down the text, we need to set some context. The incident we're going to explore takes place late in Jesus' ministry. He has already become hugely popular with the people of Israel. Great masses of people are coming to Him daily for healing, to see Him perform miracles, and to hear Him teach.

While He was a sensation with the common people, the religious elite hated Him for several reasons. First, they were jealous of His popularity. Second, He was constantly criticizing their hypocrisy and their false religious system. At this point, many confrontations between Jesus and the religious elite had already taken place. We'll see one of the most heated interactions with the Pharisees in this passage. Let's start in Luke 11:37.

> While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table.

To set the stage, Jesus was in the midst of teaching, and He was invited to dinner by a Pharisee. Who were the Pharisees? The word "Pharisee" means "to separate." These were religious elitists who were known for their intense pursuit of being separate from sin, uncleanness, and others

who were not as religious as them. They were generally laymen and not priests. There were about 6,000 Pharisees at that time. They were extremely devoted to keeping the Mosaic Law. They prided themselves in their supposed obedience to God. They were self-righteous and thought they were better than everyone else. They were both respected and feared by the common people. As mentioned earlier, they hated Jesus for His attacks on their hypocritical self-righteousness.

Yet, we see a Pharisee inviting Jesus to His home for a meal. This isn't like inviting someone for a quick bite to eat at a fast casual restaurant today. This was an intimate experience bringing someone into your home. A meal was a tacit form of acceptance through hospitality. This is odd, because Pharisees usually wouldn't dine with non-Pharisees, especially someone like Jesus who was known to associate with sinners.

Yet, Jesus accepted the invitation and went to the Pharisees house to share a meal. However, there's a problem as they get ready to eat.

> The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. (Luke 11:38).

The Pharisee was shocked by Jesus' behavior. He didn't wash first before the meal. However, this wasn't a matter of hygiene. The Pharisee wasn't concerned that Jesus would get sick from germs because He didn't wash His hands before touching His food. He was shocked that Jesus was violating a man-made religious tradition.

The Greek word used here for "wash" is *baptizó* and it's where we get our word for "baptism." It means "dip," "sink," or "immerse." The The Pharisee is appalled that Jesus wasn't performing an elaborate ceremonial cleansing that the religious elite would perform before a meal. This unbiblical ceremonial cleansing had three steps:

1. Pouring water over your upward pointed hands so the water flowed down your wrists.
2. Pouring water over your downward pointed hands.
3. Scrubbing each hand with a clenched fist.

It was meant to symbolize the washing off of the uncleanness of the world. If you really wanted to be extra-holy, you could take a full bath.

Now keep in mind, there was no Scripture or Old Testament law commanding this. This was something that the Pharisees did on their own to be extra-spiritual. This was legalism and Jesus would have no part in it.

What is legalism? It can take several forms:

1. Elevating the traditions of men to be equal to the commandments of God.
2. Thinking that keeping the Law can save you.
3. Keeping the letter of the Law while ignoring the heart of the Law.

The Pharisees were guilty of all forms of legalism. They adhered to hundreds of traditions and man-made laws like they came down from God Himself. They judged others for not keeping them and felt like they were extra-pleasing to God for keeping them. They believed they were righteous in the eyes of God for keeping all of the Mosaic laws and these additional man-made traditions. They kept to the minutiae of the Law while ignoring the heart of what God had commanded. They were wrong on all accounts.

As parents, we want to avoid legalism like the plague. As we'll see shortly, Jesus condemns legalism and the different sins it can produce. Now, we're confronted with an important question: is it wrong to have rules in your house that are not in the Bible? No — definitely not. While there's no verse that says "Thou shalt not put thine shoes on the couch," that's a completely reasonable rule. As parents, you can and should set rules for your house.

You should obviously hold your children responsible for violating scriptural commands, but they also need to obey the rules that you give them as parents. It's perfectly OK to have rules like "Don't play baseball in the house" or "You need to brush your teeth before bedtime." The key is that you need to know the difference between your rules and the Bible's rules. Don't judge other families for not keeping your rules that are not found in Scripture. (e.g., "a good Christian would never do *xyz thing not found in Scripture*.") And don't teach your kids that keeping the rules is enough to be right with God. More on that later.

Let's move along in the story. What is Jesus' response to this Pharisee being offended that He didn't keep this tradition of ceremonially washing before a meal? Is He going to apologize for offending His host? Not exactly.

> And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? (Luke 11:39-40)

Jesus directly confronts the legalism of the Pharisees. He's at a meal, so He uses an analogy of cups and dishes. The Pharisees were like fools who only focused on cleaning the outside of the cup or the bottom side of the plate and left the part that was actually touching the drink and the food filthy. That makes absolutely no sense.

Imagine coming to my house for a nice dinner and I give you a crystal glass for your drink. The outside is sparkling and exquisite, but you look inside, and it's stained from some drink from a long time ago. There are dried bits of food on the bottom. Somehow, there are strands of fur from my dog, Molly, on the inside rim of the glass. You would be absolutely disgusted. It doesn't matter how clean the outside is if the inside is filthy.

Spiritually, that is how the Pharisees approached their own lives. They were purely focused on the external and paid no attention to their hearts. Jesus says their hearts were full of greed (literally, "robbery" in Greek) and wickedness. They were only concerned about what people could see on the outside and they had no true concern about what God saw inside of them.

In Mark, Jesus describes the Pharisees as being hypocrites:

> And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ""This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!" (Mark 7:5-9)

If your lips are saying the right things on the outside, but you have no love for God and your heart is full of sin on the inside, that's not honoring to God. God does care about your external behavior, but He also cares deeply about your heart. That's who you truly are as a person. That's where sin and evil come from, not from external behavior.

> And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride,

> foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (Mark 7:20-23)

Back to our story, Jesus responds by telling the Pharisees to focus on their hearts in Luke 11:41:

> But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

The word for "alms" in Greek (*eleémosunê*) can mean "charity," "mercy," and "compassion." The sacrifice that God cared about was a merciful and compassionate heart that can only come from a heart that is cleansed through true faith.

If they focused on their hearts, then all things would be clean for them through the regenerating power of God and they wouldn't need to perform made-up ceremonial cleansings to feel holy. Jesus is reorienting their focus from the external to the heart. As parents, we should never lose sight of the hearts of our children.

The Sins of the Pharisees

In response to the Pharisee's blatant form of legalism, Jesus is going to issue a series of six woes to all the Pharisees and the Lawyers (the Scribes) who were present. The word "Woe!" is an emphatic interjection that speaks of condemnation. Essentially, Jesus is going to condemn the Pharisees and Lawyers for six specific sinful ways that their legalism manifested itself. Each woe is a warning to us as to how we should not parent.

Focusing on Keeping the Rules and Ignoring the Heart

> "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others (Luke 11:42).

Jesus condemns the Pharisees for being fastidious in keeping the rules in minor issues of life, while neglecting the most important things that God commands. They were so obsessed with rules that they created additional policies to tithe individual pieces of mint and other herbs. They were literally parsing individual leaves when it wasn't commanded in Scripture, because they wanted to be holy. Yet, they were neglecting justice and love for God.

It's possible that the word "justice" is calling out the injustice and corruption that the Pharisees were partaking in. However, the Greek word for "justice" (*krisis*) also means "divine judgment or condemnation." So, the Pharisees were so concerned about their outward show for other people to see how holy they were that they were ignoring the fact that their souls were in danger of divine judgment.

Crucially, they were ignoring a true love for God. They weren't doing all of their religious activities to honor God. They couldn't care less about God. They were doing it for themselves and for the praise of other people. They were ignoring the greatest commandment of all.

> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt 22:36-40)

When we parent our children, we need to constantly bring them back to their relationship with God and how that can only exist by turning from their sins and placing their faith in Jesus. Right standing before God is only possible through faith in Jesus, not keeping the rules. It can be easy to get into a trap of sending our kids the message that, "you just need to obey to be good."

If we raise our children to follow all the rules and they are pleased as punch with themselves for being good kids, but they never love God, they'll go to hell. They need to have a right relationship with God that is only possible through the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be clear, we need to teach them that if we're saved, we're commanded to obey God. However, our obedience is not to earn God's favor (which can only be earned through faith in Christ), but to honor Him in love.

What Should Parents Do Instead?

- Require obedience but focus on the heart.

How Should We Do That?

- Explain the concept of the heart to your child and that their heart is who they really are on the inside.

- Explain how God can see their heart and that sin resides in their heart.
- Teach them the gospel—that we can't perfectly keep God's rules, but Jesus did and provided the only way for us to be right with God.
- Don't divorce rules from the greatest priorities: loving God and loving others.

Obsessing Over Image and the Praise of Man

> Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces (Luke 11:43).

Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their love of status and image. The *New American Standard Bible* translation says that they loved "the seat of honor in the synagogues." These were the seats at the front of the synagogue facing the congregation. They were highly visible and went to the most respected people attending the synagogue. The *New International Version* translation says that they loved "respectful greetings in the marketplaces." The Pharisees loved being revered by the people.

Everything that the Pharisees did was to elevate their status and how they were viewed in the eyes of the people. They didn't care what God thought about them. They thrived off of the praise of men.

As parents, we may be more concerned with how people view our kids than how God views them. "You need to do what's right so that you don't embarrass me." Or maybe our kids are becoming prideful because they think they're holier than other kids who aren't Christians. Or maybe our kids have a tendency towards people-pleasing and they think that serving is a way to get praise from people at church. We need to teach our children that their sin and obedience is first and foremost related to God. We need to teach them to be humble and not to strive for status:

> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you (James 4:10).

What Should Parents Do Instead?

- Focus on humility and honoring God.

How Should We Do That?

- Explain the dangers of the praise of man being a trap.

- Teach them to look for signs that the fear of man is taking root.
- Focus on what God thinks, not what others think.
- Be less concerned with how things look than how things are.
- Be honest about your failings and need for Jesus.
- Teach your children humility and authentic honesty.
- Teach your children to do all things to honor God.

Ignoring Internal Sin

> Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it (Luke 11:44).

Next, Jesus compares the Pharisees to unmarked graves. That may seem like a confusing metaphor to us, but the Jews would have understood exactly what He meant. In the Mosaic Law, coming in contact with a dead body or a grave would leave someone ceremonially unclean. That meant they had to be isolated from others and couldn't worship with the congregation for a period of time.

> Whoever in the open field touches someone who was killed with a sword or who died naturally, or touches a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean seven days (Num 19:16).

If a grave was unmarked, it was hidden, and people would walk right over it and contaminate themselves without knowing it. Jesus is calling out the Pharisees for the hidden sin in their hearts and saying that they are covertly corrupting everyone around them.

The Pharisees were so fastidious about following the minutiae of every rule, yet they were extremely wicked on the inside and did nothing about it. They never focused on addressing sin in their hearts. As parents, if we only address outward behavior when we're correcting our children, we're not teaching them where sin comes from. When disciplining them, we need to explain that their actions came from their hearts. That includes their thoughts, attitudes, and emotions.

If they're not saved, they need new hearts that come from placing their faith in Christ. If they are saved, they need to pray that the Holy Spirit would help them address sinful patterns coming from their hearts.

If they obey what you tell them, but still have a sinful attitude, that is still sin. You need to teach them that true obedience comes from the heart.

What Should Parents Do Instead?

- Teach that sin in the heart must be addressed.

How Should We Do That?

- Teach them to examine their hearts for sin (Ps 139:23-24).
- Explain that the gospel is the only cure for our sinful hearts (Rom 1:16).
- Teach them not to hide their sin, but to confess it (Prov 28:13).
- Help them understand that true obedience comes from the heart (1 Sam 15:22).

At this point in our passage, we see someone else at the dinner chime in. In Luke 11:45, we see that this man isn't a Pharisee, but a Lawyer.

> One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also."

This isn't a lawyer like we would think of today (e.g., a defense lawyer or a prosecutor). This was likely a Scribe. Scribes were experts in interpreting and applying the Law of Moses and the traditional teachings of rabbis. They were often Pharisees, but not always. A lawyer was essentially a "super-Scribe." In theory, they should be the most educated on the Law and what God commanded.

This Lawyer speaks up and essentially says, "Hey, just so you know, you're not just insulting the Pharisees. You're insulting us too."

What does Jesus say? "Oh, wow. I'm truly sorry about that. My mistake." No, He basically says, "I've got some woes coming your way as well."

The Sins of the Lawyers

Focusing on Law and Not Grace

> And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers."

Jesus condemns the Lawyers for being all Law and no grace. They missed the whole point of the Mosaic Law. Paul says this:

> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom 3:19-20).

The point of the Law is to show that we have all broken it and no person can be justified by keeping it. The Law doesn't show us how holy we are. Quite the opposite; it shows us how sinful we are.

> For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)

And the punishment for sin is physical and eternal spiritual death:

> For the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23a)

However, as the sinless God-Man, Jesus kept the Law perfectly. He never once sinned, so He didn't have to pay the penalty for His own lawbreaking. He could bear the punishment for the sin of others. On the cross, God punished Him for every sin committed by anyone who places their faith in Him. God was fully satisfied by His death on the cross and anyone who turns from their sins and places their faith in Christ is fully forgiven.

> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh (Rom 8:1-3).

We don't have to earn God's favor. We have it in Christ and we live under grace. We obey God because we love Him and want to honor Him, not for our salvation.

The Scribes didn't teach a life-giving message of grace. They taught the soul-crushing burden of the Law. They were teaching that salvation came through obedience to the Law, which is impossible. They also taught that their hundreds of man-made traditions needed to be kept to earn God's favor. They placed heavy burdens around the necks of

the people and asked them to swim for their lives. They had no true concern for them, because they wouldn't even lift a finger to help them.

As Christian parents, it can be easy to teach our kids moralism. We want to teach them to follow the commands of the Bible, but it can be easy to forget to teach them how that ties into the gospel. They can't earn God's favor by obeying the rules. Only Jesus perfectly kept the rules and we need Him to save us. We should want to obey God because we love Him, but our obedience *cannot* and *will not* save us. If we give our children the impression that they have to obey to be saved, they will be crushed by the burdens of the Law.

I have to constantly remind myself of this when discipling my kids. Just this week, one of our kids said to us: "I don't want to disobey, but I keep doing it. I don't know why I can't be perfect." I had to remind them (and myself) that they're right, they can't be perfect. They can't obey perfectly on their own. They need Jesus. They need to rest in His finished work on the cross. They need a message of grace and not legalism. Not moralism. Not obedience apart from Christ.

As parents, we're told in Ephesians 6:4 to not exasperate our children. There's nothing more exasperating than loading them up with the burdens of legalism. We need to teach obedience in light of the grace of the gospel. We need to teach our kids the rest from legalism that is found in Jesus.

> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt 11:28-30).

What Should Parents Do Instead?

- Teach obedience in light of the grace of the gospel.

How Should We Do That?

- Teach the gospel, not moralism.
- Require obedience but explain that only Jesus was perfectly obedient.
- When our kids sin, point them to the cross and their need for Jesus.
- Share your own need for a Savior.
- Explain that true peace comes from resting in Jesus.

Being Self-Righteous and Hypocritical

> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation (Luke 11:47-51).

Jesus condemns the Pharisees for honoring the prophets of old while having the same behavior and mindset as those that murdered them. Basically, he's saying that if they were alive at that time, they would have gladly participated in the murder of the prophets. In fact, they were about to do worse to the Messiah.

Jesus is calling out their self-righteousness and their hypocrisy. As Christian parents, we need to make sure that we are not teaching our kids to think more highly of ourselves than we ought or that we're better than anyone.

With my own kids, we've had to have conversations that our family is not better than non-Christian families from school because we go to church. We're not better than anyone, so we shouldn't be pridefully looking down on anyone for not following the Lord. We should pray for their salvation. We need to humbly recognize that we're sinners saved by grace. This was the attitude of Paul:

> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost (1 Tim 1:15).

Obeying the Bible is also a good thing, but it isn't the basis of our salvation. Our salvation is based on the finished work of Christ alone on the cross and that is a gift of grace. We did nothing to earn it.

We should also recognize sin in our own hearts and not be hypocritically blind to it. We need to be honest with ourselves about our sin and not see ourselves as perfect. We must teach our children to search their hearts and ask God for help in putting sin to death through the Holy Spirit.

> Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps 139:23-24)

What Should Parents Do Instead?

- Teach humility and honest self-assessment.

How Should We Do That?

- Don't let them feel superior to non-Christian friends or family members.
- Don't let them base their confidence on their works or their Bible knowledge.
- Teach them that salvation is a gift of God's grace.
- Show them how to honestly assess their hearts.

Focusing on Facts, but Not the Truth

> Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering (Luke 11:52).

Lastly, Jesus condemns the Lawyers for hiding the "key of knowledge" from the people. What does that mean? The Lawyers were the experts in the Law. They instructed the people on what the Law meant and how it should be applied. What Jesus is saying is that in all of their misguided teaching, they were actually taking away the keys to understanding the knowledge of God. They were elevating man-made traditions with the command of the Law and teaching that salvation was found in obeying the law. They weren't teaching the truth of salvation. They were damning people in the lies of legalism.

He says that they didn't enter themselves and they hindered those who were entering. He's talking about the knowledge of the kingdom of God. They weren't entering heaven and they were preventing the people from understanding how to enter as well. They were damning people with a false gospel of works-based righteousness.

As parents, this should be a warning to us. The Lawyers knew the Old Testament inside and out, but they missed the point. They understood facts, but they didn't understand the truth. It can be easy for us to fall into a similar trap.

Maybe our kids know all of the familiar Bible stories and a lot of Bible trivia. That's not bad, but if they don't understand the deeper

truth of how that fits into the gospel and God's plan of salvation, they're missing the forest for the trees. Understanding the Bible from an academic standpoint is a far cry from loving the truth of God's Word.

It doesn't matter if your kids can name the twelve tribes of Israel if they don't know the gospel. It doesn't matter if they've memorized a whole chapter of an epistle if they don't understand what it means. It doesn't matter if your child can recap the main plot points of every Bible story if they don't know Jesus. We need to teach our kids to understand the true meaning of the Bible and love God's word from the heart.

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col 3:16).
>
> Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night (Ps 1:1-2).
>
> I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes (Ps 119:48).

What Should Parents Do Instead?

- Don't let Bible knowledge be merely academic.

How Should We Do That?

- Don't just teach facts about the Bible; focus on the heart of the Bible.
- Teach the meaning of Bible stories, not moralism.

At this point, Jesus has ripped the Pharisees and the Lawyers to shreds. What is their response to this?

> As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say (Luke 11:53).

They are not happy at all. They began to verbally attack Jesus in their rage. The *New International Version* says they began to "oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions." The *New King James* says they began to "assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things."

They were hoping to catch him in something they could use to trap him. The *New American Standard Bible* says they were "plotting against Him." They wanted to destroy him. The true heart of the Pharisees is revealed. They hated Jesus and wanted to kill Him. They didn't care about true righteousness that only comes from Him. They cared about moralism. They cared about image. They cared about status. They loved their false system of works-based righteousness, not God. So, they sought to destroy Jesus. This is the true heart of an unredeemed legalist.

Conclusion

As Christian parents, we should pray that we don't fall into the trap of teaching our kids legalism. As we pray for their salvation, we should pray for God's help in teaching them the gospel. We should pray for help teaching them the grace of God. We should pray for help in teaching them to love God and love Jesus. By the saving power of God, He can give them a new heart and love for Christ. He alone can prevent them from becoming little legalistic Pharisees and make them true followers of Jesus from the heart.

Chapter 12

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

By Stephen Salinas

The Reality of Work

Work is a significant part of our lives. If you have a full-time job, you probably spend the majority of your waking hours during the week working. You may spend more time with your coworkers than your family or friends during this time. Work can be an incredible blessing or it can be a source of great frustration and heartache.

I've experienced the ups and downs of work first-hand having spent the last two decades working for large tech companies in Silicon Valley. I've had good jobs and bad jobs, great bosses and awful bosses, teammates I loved and cross-functional partners I could barely stand.

I've had a lot of time to think about work and, specifically, what the Bible says about work. I was married for 15 of those 20 years in tech and had kids for 14 of those years. In light of that, I've spent a lot of time thinking about how to balance work and family in a way that pleases God. Doing that in Silicon Valley is particularly hard.

Workism

I recently discovered the concept of "workism" and it perfectly describes Silicon Valley. This is a concept coined by the journalist Derek Thompson to describe what he's seeing in corporate America.

He's not a Christian, so the fact that he's come to these conclusions about work is particularly striking. This is how he defines workism: "The belief that work is not only necessary to economic production but also the centerpiece of one's identity and life's purpose."[1]

He sees this as a prevalent attitude in younger generations of American workers. Your job doesn't have to just provide for you; it needs to be your ultimate identity and the primary source of meaning for your life. Here's what he attributes this to:

> The decline of traditional faith in America has coincided with an explosion of new atheisms. Some people worship beauty, some worship political identities, and others worship their children. But everybody worships something. And workism is among the most potent of the new religions competing for congregants.[2]

From my perspective, workism is rampant in the workplace. This form of idolatry is something we all have to contend with as we seek to balance work and family.

Sometimes the pull of workism is explicit. My friend shared a story about how he was interviewing with a large tech company known for having an intense culture about ten years ago. They extended an offer to him, but before he accepted it, the hiring manager wanted to chat with him. The hiring manager wanted my friend to have a conversation with his wife to let her know that, if he worked for this company, work would always have to come first and she needed to be ok with that. Needless to say, he didn't accept the offer.

Most of the time the pull of workism is more subtle. It starts to impact your thinking, your desires, and emotions invisibly. It reminds me of playing with my kids in the ocean. The tide slowly starts pulling you down the beach without you realizing. All of a sudden, you look up and realize your blanket and all your stuff are way down the beach and you've drifted a long way away. If we're not careful, we can be slowly swept away by the tide of workism.

What's at Stake?

The stakes for us are incredibly high. Look at some of the most successful people in the world: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Sergey Brin, and

[1] Derek Thompson, *On Work: Money, Meaning, Identity* (Zando – Atlantic Editions, 2023), 35.
[2] Ibid.

Bill Gates. They've achieved great riches and worldly success, but at what cost? They've sacrificed their families at the altar of their careers. While they're some of the richest men in the world, they've left a trail of broken marriages and families in their wake. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but forfeit his family?

As Christians, it's imperative for us to have a correct biblical perspective about work. Right living starts with right thinking. When we understand what the Bible teaches, we can then start applying it to our lives and pursuing wisdom. The Bible teaches that work is a God-given blessing, but due to the corruption of sin, it must be approached with diligence, intentionality, and wisdom to protect our families.

Seeking wisdom and guarding our hearts from sin will keep us from either overworking or underworking. That's our only hope for both serving our families and working in a way that is honoring God. That's the North Star: honoring God at home and at work. If we do one well and not the other, we've failed. We must do both by the grace of God.

The good news is that God hasn't left us alone to navigate this. We can glean truth about God's perspective on work all throughout Scripture. These truths are timeless and give us everything we need to live a life that honors God.

> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3).

Whether you're a newlywed trying to figure out how to work now that you're married or a parent with multiple kids trying to balance work with parental duties; whether you're a software engineer or an electrician; whether you're a stay-at-home mom or manager in tech; the Bible has principles to guide you and your family to a healthy work-life balance.

God's Design for Work: "Work is Good"

To see God's initial design for work, we need to go back to the beginning. In Genesis 1, we see God at work in creation.

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And

> God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen 1:26-28, 31).

In this passage, we see several interesting things related to work.

God Made Man in His Image

Speaking within the Trinity, God decides to make man in the image of God. What does it mean that man is made in the image of God? Does that mean man is divine? No, it means we are made in the likeness of God in many areas. We share some of His attributes—called "communicable attributes." (There are many attributes of God that we don't share, called "incommunicable attributes," such as omniscience or omnipresence.) Some of the attributes that we share with God are the fact that we are rational beings who can create, organize, be productive, and have dominion.

God Created Man to Work

God placed man in paradise, but it's interesting that He didn't tell him to just enjoy the garden and relax. In addition to multiplying by having children, God commands man to work. He commands man to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. That speaks to ruling over the earth by cultivating the land and ruling over the animals. It involved organizing and bringing order to everything on the earth. The call to be productive by working extends to every part of our lives—from a formal job in the office to tasks done in service to the home.

Adam Worked Before the Fall

We have a tendency to view work as a necessary evil. Some Christians might even think that work is a by-product of the Fall of mankind into sin. However, if you look at the text, you see that God commanded Adam to work and placed him in the garden to subdue and have dominion over it *before* the Fall. The command to have dominion over the earth happens in Genesis 1, but Adam's fall into sin doesn't happen until Genesis 3. Genesis 1 ends by saying that everything that God had made was good, including work.

That tells us that God created work to provide for us, to allow us to use our gifts or skills, and to have dominion over nature. God created work to be a blessing.

You might be saying, "It's great that God created work to be a blessing, but it sure doesn't feel like one. It feels more like a curse to me." We have to go back to Genesis to find the reason why our work doesn't always feel like a blessing.

The Impact of the Fall on Work: "Thorns and Thistles"

In Genesis 3, we see Adam and Eve sin by listening to Satan, questioning God, and eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When sin entered the world, everything that God had created perfect and good was now corrupted, including work. Sin entered the heart of man, sentencing him to physical and spiritual death. All men will now physically die at some point, but even worse, they'll be punished in hell forever for their disobedience to God unless they are delivered from their sin by faith in Christ.

As punishment for their rebellion, God also pronounced specific curses on the serpent/Satan, Eve, and Adam. Listen to God describing His curse on Adam:

> And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:17-19).

Work was so integral to Adam's existence that God chose that aspect of his life to curse for his disobedience. The earth was cursed—there's now sickness, death, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, etc. Adam's job to cultivate and have dominion over the land and the animals just got infinitely harder. Thorns and thistles would rise up in the midst of his crops. To produce a harvest, it was going to now take intense, back-breaking, hard work. He was going to have to toil by the sweat of his brow until the day he died.

This explains why our work can be so hard, even though it is ultimately a good thing. While we may not be cultivating the land, metaphorical thorns and thistles still crop up in our work. For example:

Work Can Be Frustrating
It can be hard to get things done at work. Work can be simultaneously painful, stressful, boring, or a source of anxiety.

We Experience People Problems
We can have bad bosses, lazy coworkers, rude cross-functional partners, angry customers, or difficult direct reports.

Work Can Be Hard to Find
Layoffs are becoming more common again in certain industries. Many people would like to be working, but it can be difficult to land a new job in a tough market.

We Make Mistakes
Since we're not perfect, we might make errors in our work and get our hands slapped for them.

We Can Be Tempted to Sin
Our work can tempt us to pride, greed, laziness, and dishonesty.

Competition Can Be Cutthroat
Succeeding at work can become a zero-sum game of competition with other people for promotions, raises, or recognition.

Our Careers Can Become Idols
Our career can easily become our identity if we're not careful. It can become our primary source of meaning, worth, joy, and satisfaction. This is idolatry and the root cause of workism. In our fallen, sinful culture, workism reigns supreme. However, as Christians, we must realize that work is a false god that cannot satisfy if it becomes our idol. Solomon called this out thousands of years ago in Ecclesiastes:

> What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity (Eccl 2:22-23).

> He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner, but to see them with his eyes? (Eccl 5:10-11)

So, if work is a constant source of frustration, can lead to idolatry, and is not ultimately satisfying, why should we even bother with it? As Christians, should we just give up and try to work as little as possible? No—quite the opposite. As Christians, we're called to work diligently all throughout Scripture. Here are just a few of many examples:

> Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man (Prov 6:6-11).

> The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor (Prov 12:24).

> The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty (Prov 21:5).

The call to work is clear. We shouldn't just throw in the towel. However, we'll need to have the correct motivation for work if we want to honor God and protect our families.

The Motivation for Work: "As Unto the Lord"

If we're trying to balance work and family in a God-honoring way, we first need to make sure we have the right motivation to work. As Christians, our motivation to work should not be to make a name for ourselves. It shouldn't be to get rich. It shouldn't be to fill a need for significance. It shouldn't primarily even be to provide for ourselves or our family. Our ultimate motivation for working should be to honor Christ. Paul says this in Colossians:

> Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ** (Col 3:22-24; emphasis added).

Paul is telling us to obey our earthly bosses from a sincere heart. He is telling us to work hard and not just when people are watching. Why? Because we have such great bosses? No, because our ultimate boss is Jesus. We should be working hard at our jobs to honor Christ and to receive an eternal reward.

Working for Christ as your boss means being diligent to approach your work God's way. On the one hand, that means working in a way that isn't sinful. We shouldn't be dishonest. We shouldn't be rude or abusive in how we speak to our coworkers. We shouldn't be taking credit for other people's work. We shouldn't be lazy.

On the other hand, working with Jesus as your boss means working diligently and honestly. It means faithfully doing what we're supposed to do, they way we're expected to do it, when we're supposed to be doing it. It means working to be as productive as we can be. It means treating people as Jesus treated others—with love, kindness, and humility. It means having the right attitude and not complaining. Christians should be the best employees in the world.

Paul says that working to honor the Lord will result in spiritual blessings. One day, we will receive eternal rewards in the New Heaven and the New Earth. But God can also bless us now.

We see biblical examples like Joseph and Daniel working diligently and honestly in a pagan environment and being honored and rewarded with increased responsibilities. (See Gen 37-50 and Dan 1-4.)

Many Proverbs speak about God materially blessing diligence and hard work. For example:

> Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine (Prov 3:9-10).

So, taking a step back, it doesn't matter if you work for a tech company, a hospital, a government office, a construction company, or in the home, your work should be done with diligence and sincerity to serve Jesus.

With that correct motivation in place as our foundation, we can be in a position to skillfully and wisely balance work and family in a way that is honoring to God. When our motivation is honoring Christ, we'll be less prone to overwork or underwork. We'll be more likely to strike the right balance at work and at home.

Even though the frustrations of this fallen world will still exist in our work, if our hearts have the right motivation for work, our eyes can be

opened to the blessings of work. There are many things to be grateful for when we're working as unto the Lord.

Provision for Self and Family
God is sovereign over all things and he uses our jobs to provide for us and our families. Money for food, clothing, or housing may come from your job, but it's ultimately a gracious provision from God. (It's worth calling out that as the head of the home, the husband bears the ultimate responsibility to provide for his family. See 1 Timothy 5:8.)

Using God-Given Gifts
You are made in the image of God and He has graciously given you a unique blend of talents and skills. Your job can be an outlet for you to express creativity, organization, leadership, and exercise dominion.

Being a Witness for Christ
Unless you work at a church, the odds are pretty good that the vast majority of your coworkers are not believers. God has placed you where you are to be a witness for Christ. He can use relationships you build to bring the gospel to the lost. As they see your godly example, they can see the power of Jesus to transform lives. Some of the best gospel conversations I've had have been with my coworkers. We can be lights in a dark world:

> You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:14-16).

Giving to the Lord
As God provides income for you, that can be used to fund ministry through sacrificial giving to the church. This can be used as an opportunity to bless you with heavenly blessings and accomplish God's will through the church.

> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:6-7).

Now that we've tackled some of the biblical principles behind work, let's get practical on how these principles should play out in the workplace. What are tangible things that we should be doing to balance work and family?

Protecting Yourself and Your Family at Work: "Guard Your Heart"

Protecting yourself and your family begins with protecting your heart with intentionality. In the Bible, the heart is used to refer to the inner person. This is who you really are on the inside. This includes your thoughts, desires, emotions, and will.

> As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man (Prov 27:19).

God commands us in Proverbs to guard our hearts diligently.

> Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life (Prov 4:23).

The first step to balancing work and family in a biblical way is to diligently keep watch over your own heart. Any imbalance or sinful behaviors impacting your family will arise from sin in the heart.

Jesus said this:

> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander (Matt 15:19).

As we've discussed earlier, the natural pull of work in this fallen world will be away from God and away from family. Like an ocean tide, it can subtly sweep you downstream if you're not paying attention.

Like a soldier, you must be aware that you're in a battle and you need to stay alert for the enemy. Through prayer and self-examination, you should root out signs of the following heart issues and repent as they crop up.

Idolatry

John Calvin said, "The human heart is an idol factory." In our fallen state, we often put things other than God on the throne of our hearts in the pursuit of joy or satisfaction. If your job or position is the primary source of your joy and pain, rising or falling with every victory or failure, that could be a sign your work has become your identity. For a lot of

my time in the tech industry, this was a constant struggle for me. My identity had become so intertwined with my work that it was often an idol. Be on guard for traces of idolatry in your work.

> No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24).

Pride

Our society values great achievement. We love praising the most talented athletes: Michael Jordan, Michael Phelps, and Steph Curry. We may have great respect for business visionaries, like Steve Jobs. If we're honest with ourselves, we may want to be recognized as great as well. We love the praise of men. Now, to be clear, we should obviously seek to do a good job in our work and that can often lead to getting good feedback. However, constantly striving for recognition or elevation above other people can be a sign of pride welling up in our hearts.

> Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Prov 16:18).

> God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet 5:5b).

Laziness

In the day in/day out slog of work, it can be very easy to just go through the motions and slack off. "I know I should be working on that project, but I'm going to just watch YouTube instead." "This task should only take 15 minutes, but I'm going to work on it for an hour, because I don't want to work on that other harder thing that I'm putting off." Proverbs condemns the sluggard, laziness, and procrastination many times. Here's one example:

> The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. (Prov 21:25).

Greed

It's been estimated that John Rockefeller was one of the richest Americans in history. He founded the Standard Oil company in the late 1800s and it became a behemoth of a business. Adjusted for inflation,

he was personally worth $410B. He was once asked, "How much money is enough?" His reply was, "Just a little bit more."

God can bless us with good jobs that pay well. He can bless us with raises and bonuses. He can bless us with equity through stock grants. However, if you become obsessed with getting rich or if money becomes your primary source of security and status, that means that greed is taking root in your heart.

> Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt 6:19-21).

Anxiety

Our jobs can be incredibly stressful and can lead to great anxiety if we let them. I struggled with anxiety a lot during my time working in the tech industry. Trying to navigate the chaotic environment and internal politics as a first-time manager was rough for me. I thought I was going to get fired during my first year as a manager. By the grace of God, He delivered me from that and I finally found my bearings working as a leader in tech. However, stress is endemic to many of our jobs. Considering that, we need to rest in God's sovereignty and turn our anxieties over to Him.

> Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad (Prov 12:25).
>
> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).
>
> 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. It 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 (Ps 127:1-2).
>
> Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more

> than clothing? … But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matt 6:25, 33-34).

Practical Atheism/Self-Reliance

We can become so confident in ourselves and our abilities that we sometimes act like practical atheists. That could look like lack of prayerfulness over our work or thinking that we alone can influence the outcomes for our work. We should obviously be proactive in our work, but we should bathe our work in prayer and recognize that God is sovereign over all things, including our work.

> Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established (Prov 16:3).

> Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil (Prov 3:5-7).

Immorality/Adultery

I've seen many senior leaders in the tech companies I've worked for leave their spouses for a younger coworker or someone they managed. Tech visionaries like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and Sergey Brin have left behind a string of broken marriages.

Between long hours in the office, travel away from family, and the constant flow of alcohol at work events, the workplace is a battleground for temptation. Be alert to guard your marriage and your family from adultery as you don't want your family to be another casualty on this battlefield.

> For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints … So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; none who go to her come back, nor do they regain

> the paths of life. So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it (Prov 2:8, 16-22).

Bitterness

Since the workplace is filled with fallen, imperfect people, you will absolutely encounter unfairness and injustice from your leaders and your coworkers. Whether that's the result of bad decisions stemming from incompetence or malicious people seeking to take advantage of you, something is going to happen that will upset you. It's very easy to let unrighteous anger take root. Be on guard for bitterness forming in your heart and beginning to poison it.

> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice (Eph 4:31).

Ungratefulness/Discontentment/Complaining

Due to sin in our hearts and the legitimate frustrations of work, it can be easy for us to only look at the negative sides of our jobs. That can lead to complaining and being ungrateful. We have the tendency to always think the grass is greener. "If I just get another job, I'll be happy." "Why isn't my job as good as that other person's job?" While it's not wrong to pursue opportunities for a better job, we should be on the lookout for discontentment, a complaining spirit, or lack of thankfulness in our hearts.

> Do all things without grumbling or disputing (Phil 2:14).

> But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Tim 6:6-10).

Dishonesty/Corruption

You may be presented with many temptations to dishonesty in the workplace. When a project is not on track or is delivering poor results, you may be tempted to fudge the numbers when your boss asks for an update. When doing something the right way is tedious and time-consuming, you may be tempted to cut corners. When you make a mistake, you may be tempted to shift blame to someone else who wasn't really at fault. Always choose honesty even if it may have short-term consequences.

> Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel (Prov 20:17).

Losing an Eternal Perspective

The constant urgency of your job may subtly shift your focus from eternal spiritual things to temporary things. For me, it was often hard to see beyond the next day, week, or quarter, because my team had so many milestones we needed to accomplish. If you don't look up, you'll get way off track for eternal priorities, like family responsibilities.

Don't confuse urgency for importance. There's a famous quote by Dwight D. Eisenhower that speaks to this: "What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important." Our work is often urgent, but don't let it distract you from the truly important eternal priorities God has put in your life.

> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:1-3).

Fear of Man

We live in a very judgmental society. People may look down on you if you don't have the right job, the right car, the right house, or the right spouse. Depending on our families or our culture, many of these unbiblical expectations may even come from our parents. When we're overly concerned with what people think about us, we can fall into the trap of the fear of man.

My wife and I met working at a large tech company and she worked there for several years after we got married. When we had our first son, she had a desire to be a stay-at-home mom, so we made the personal

choice for our family that she would stay home with the kids. Many people we knew thought she was insane to leave her job to be a homemaker, because most people in tech look down on stay-at-home moms.

It can be very easy to let fear of what other people will think of you dictate your actions, rather than being concerned about what God will think about your actions. We need to be on guard from the fear of man.

> The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe (Prov 29:25).

Next, we'll look at how we should be pursuing wisdom in seeking to implement these truths practically in our lives.

Balancing Family and Work: "Pursue Wisdom"

In God's infinite wisdom, he hasn't given us a step-by-step recipe for applying his Word in our lives when it comes to balancing work and family. Everyone has different work and family situations. As we seek to honor Him in our work, He doesn't give us legalistic rules, like, "Only work these specific hours during the day." Instead, He gives us wisdom to apply the Bible to our individual situations. As we seek to practically apply biblical truths, we need to be pursuing spiritual wisdom from God on a daily basis:

> For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints (Prov 2:6-8).

> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him (James 1:5).

> So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (Ps 90:12).

What I'm going to share now are some practical things that have helped me in the working world over the past twenty years. Many of these are not biblical commands; they're practical suggestions. You and your spouse should discuss what makes sense for your family.

Preparation
Walking with the Lord and seeking His help are absolutely crucial to prepare you to enter the workplace.

> ***Be in the Word and Prayer Every Day*** – Being in the Word and in constant communion with God helped keep my walk with the Lord on track in spite of the many ups and downs of my job.
>
> ***If Possible, Do Your Bible Reading Before You Go into Work*** – For me, infusing God's Word into my heart before entering the workplace helped me to keep a biblical perspective throughout the day.
>
> ***Pray for Wisdom to Navigate Work and Family in a God Honoring Way*** – I needed God's help to understand how to practically keep a God-honoring approach to my work and family.
>
> ***Pray That God Would Help You Find Satisfaction in Your Work*** – If you put God first and don't look to work as an idol, only then will you be able to find satisfaction in your job from God.
>
> ***Pray for God's Blessing on Your Work*** – God is sovereign over all things, including the outcome of your work. Do your best but give the results over to God.
>
> ***Pray for God's Hand of Protection to Be on You at Work*** – We need God's help to withstand the attacks of sin and temptation at work.

Communication
Keeping clear lines of communication open with your spouse is essential to balancing work and family.

> ***Share What's Happening at Work*** – Work is a significant part of our lives, so our spouses should know the highlights and lowlights of our jobs.
>
> ***Take an Interest in Your Spouse's Work*** – Whether your spouse works in the home or in the workplace, make sure that you're showing interest in their work as well.

Discuss Your Work/Family Balance Regularly and Make Adjustments as Needed – Always keep the lines of communication open with your spouse about what is or isn't working with your current approach to work and family and make changes to strike the right balance.

Prioritization

Understanding your most important priorities at work and at home will ensure you approach your work intentionally.

Clearly Identify Your Top Priorities – If you have a mason jar filled with big rocks and sand, the order you put the rocks and sand in the jar matters. If you put the sand in first, the rocks won't fit. If you put the rocks in first, the sand will fill in around the rocks and everything will fit in the jar. Identify and protect your "big rocks" at work and plan your week around those priorities first. Less important things will fill in around your priorities. If you don't identify and protect your big rocks, you may need to work longer hours to get those things accomplished as you've spent your time throughout the day on sand.

Intentionally Structure Your Time – Related to the above point, once you've identified your top priorities, you should map out how you will accomplish those priorities over the coming days, weeks, and quarters. If you reverse engineer what needs to happen to accomplish your milestones, you can plan the work with accuracy. I would spend an hour every Monday to map out my week and several minutes every morning mapping out my day. That allowed me to schedule time to accomplish my top priorities without the days, weeks, and quarters getting away from me.

Align on Non-Negotiable Family Priorities – Every family has different priorities, but aligning with your spouse on what the top priorities are for your family is vitally important. For example, having dinner as a family each night could be a priority. If your kids play sports, not missing their games could be a top priority. Whatever your family priorities may be, it's critical that you and your spouse are on the same page about them.

Measure Your Days to Gain a Heart of Wisdom – Psalm 90:12 tells us to number our days to gain a heart of wisdom. Time with your family is precious. There's a sobering statistic that 90% of the time a child spends with their parents in their lifetime has elapsed by the time they turn 18. Keeping the scarcity of time with your children in mind will allow you to weigh the true costs of overworking.

Optimization

More time working is less time with the family, so looking for efficiencies at work can result in more family time.

Regularly Assess How You Work – With the teams I've led in the past, I regularly talked about the two sides of work: what you did and how you did it. "What you did" refers to what you produced and the results you achieved. "How you did it" relates to the actions you took to achieve your results. Someone could achieve great results, but the way they got there was messy and time-consuming. You should always be assessing how you do your work to become more efficient. Can you be more productive if you do things a different way? Are there inefficiencies in your processes? Saving time at work can result in more time with your family.

Get Feedback from Your Boss – Humbly seeking feedback from your boss on ways you can improve can help you identify areas that you could be more efficient. Your boss likely sees across a wide set of working styles and can give you feedback on ways to be more productive.

Get a Good Night's Sleep – By nature, I'm a night owl and like to decompress at night. However, if I don't get enough sleep, I feel groggy and sluggish throughout the next day. I'm not able to work as efficiently and my work takes longer. Getting a good night's sleep allows me to bring my best effort to my work and be more productive during work hours.

Delineation

Being deliberate in creating clear lines between work and family will help you achieve balance.

Set Boundaries on Work – There will always be busy seasons that crop up at work, but aiming for specific times when you will stop working for the day or week will at least keep you from unintentionally drifting into overworking.

Be Present with Your Family – Work can easily intrude on family time. That could include actual work tasks like email or phone calls, but it can also include mental space that work problems occupy when you're with your family. I've brought work stress into vacations by checking work emails and getting caught up in thinking about work while I should have been enjoying time with my family. I now delete my work email app from my phone on vacations to avoid the temptation of not being present.

Make Time for Fellowship and Serving at Church – As you strive to balance work and family, don't neglect time fellowshipping and serving at church. You and your family will be tremendously blessed spiritually by the time you spend with the body of Christ.

Conclusion

If you work as unto the Lord, guard your heart diligently, and seek wisdom daily, you can rest in God's provision for you and your family. Scripture contains many words of encouragement of comfort for the person blessed by God with work and family.

> Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might (Eccl 9:9-10a).

> There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? (Eccl 2:24)

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord (Ps 128:1-4).

Chapter 13

MANAGING FAMILY FINANCES

By Stephen Salinas

The Cost of Raising a Family

If you search online for the top things married couples fight about, you'll find different lists from a variety of different sources. However, unsurprisingly, the topic that is almost always in the top slot is "money." Money can be a huge source of stress for couples. We obviously need money to live and if money is tight, that can put a strain on the marriage relationship.

Once you add kids to the picture, that adds to your cost of living. Kids are expensive. Can you believe they want to eat every single day? My kids have the nerve to want to eat multiple times a day. And now that my boys are teenagers, they eat way more than I do.

Kids need clothes on their backs and shoes on their feet that they're constantly outgrowing. When kids are little, their clothing sizes are marked by months not years, because they outgrow them that rapidly. I remember we had some baby clothes that my kids only wore once or twice, because they had outgrown them in just a few weeks.

Adding in the fact that kids are constantly on the move, they wear out or ruin clothes frequently. Even though my kids are older, they still wear out their school shoes regularly. Their shoes get holes in them, get ripped, or just get too nasty to wear out in public every few months.

And those are just day-to-day costs. Once you factor in bigger ticket items like braces or college, the numbers start skyrocketing.

Additionally, the cost of living is always rising. Inflation can impact everything from eggs to gas prices. Natural disasters result in the cost of home insurance rising. Implementation of tariffs raises the cost of common goods. It seems like things just keep getting more and more insanely expensive. (I'm going to sound like a cranky old man, but when I first got my license in 2000, I could fill up the ten-gallon tank of my Honda Civic for less than $20!)

Another potential source of stress is that married couples often have different backgrounds with money. How you were raised, what principles you were taught growing up, and your own spending and saving habits impact how you manage money. If your approach to money is wildly different from your spouse's, that could also lead to conflict.

Additionally, our own lack of wisdom around money can add to our stress levels. When we make foolish choices around money, have the wrong heart attitudes about money, or aren't living based on what God has revealed in His Word about money, that can create more money-related headaches.

Biblical Help

Even though money can be a major source of stress, the good news is that God hasn't left us to fend for ourselves on this topic. God has given us many principles in Scripture to help us wisely steward our money to honor God, bless our families, and help others.

To be clear, the Bible doesn't give us a divinely mandated budget for our families. We aren't given divine ratios for giving, spending, and saving that we can just plug our income numbers into for a perfect budget. However, God has given us many principles about money that can help us wisely manage our finances. As we implement these in our families, we can set an example for our children so that we are passing on a biblical perspective of money that will serve them well as they become adults.

In this chapter, we'll look at both key biblical principles regarding finances and practical applications for integrating those principles into our lives.

Biblical Principles Regarding Finances

As I was preparing to write this chapter, I decided to review as many verses as I could that explicitly talked about money. I knew there would

be a lot, but I was blown away by just how many there are. I filled four pages of paper with handwritten references. The Bible clearly has a lot to say about money. Rather than including an exhaustive concordance of these verses, I've tried to synthesize those passages into high level principles.

The Ability to Make Money Comes from God

God is sovereign over all things, including any money that comes into your hands.

> Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day (Deut 8:17-18).

Any money that you have (or don't have) is ultimately from God. Knowing this is key to understanding our relationship with money. While we have a responsibility to work diligently and not be lazy, God is ultimately responsible for the money we have.

> Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin (James 4:13-17).

God Provides for Us Materially

God has promised believers that He will provide for them to meet their financial needs:

> "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of

> life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt 6:25-33).

This passage talks about worrying over food and clothing. What are those things? Those are the basics needed for survival. If you don't have food, you will starve to death. If you don't have clothing, you could die from exposure.

Those of us who live in the US live in a very privileged time and place. While we worry about finances, most of us are not in danger of starving to death. We don't live in an agrarian society where we're one bad harvest away from food scarcity. However, the people that Jesus was talking to in Matthew 6 lived in that exact environment. To those people, Jesus told them to trust God and not worry. That still holds true for us over two thousand years later.

> The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked (Prov 10:3).

We're to Work to Provide for Ourselves and Our Families

The primary way that God provides for us financially is by providentially supplying us with jobs where we can work for compensation. Able-bodied men should be working to make money for themselves and their families. Now, there are times when a man is physically unable to work either because of sickness or disability. There are other times when he loses his job and hasn't been able to find another one, but there is a desire to work. However, those cases are the exception. God expects able-bodied men to be working to provide for themselves and their families.

> Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that

> you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: **If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.** For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living (2 Thess 3:6-12; emphasis added).

Provision is good motivation to work:

> A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on (Prov 16:26).

Able-bodied men who do not provide for their families are worse than unbelievers:

> But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:8).

We can bless our families with our money:

> A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous (Prov 13:22).

Money Is Morally Neutral, but It Can Reveal Our Hearts

When I was in college, I had a professor tell my class, "The Bible says that money is the root of all evil. That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard." I had to raise my hand and read the actual verse to her to explain that the Bible doesn't say that money *itself* is the root of all evil. Money is neither good nor bad in and of itself. It's merely a tool that could be used for good or bad things.

While money is morally neutral, it can reveal righteousness or evil inside of our hearts. Where we spend our money and how we view money reveals what we value and love. Money is an idol to many that

competes for worship. We see this all the time where I live in Silicon Valley. People pursue money with zeal and worship money.

Jesus said this about the way that money can become your master if you don't watch over your heart:

> No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24).

Loving Money Is Sinful/Contentment Is the Antidote to Greed

While money is not evil in and of itself, loving money, coveting money, and being greedy for money is always condemned in Scripture.

> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Tim 6:10).

Jesus condemned the Pharisees, the self-righteous religious elite, on many occasions. Here's how they were described after Jesus said you cannot serve God and money:

> The Pharisees, **who were lovers of money**, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:14-15; emphasis added).

This is so important that a key qualification for a church elder (or pastor) is that they are not lovers of money:

> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, **not a lover of money** (1 Tim 3:2-3; emphasis added).

Similarly, deacons are not to be greedy for dishonest gain, which comes from a love of money:

> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, **not greedy for dishonest gain** (1 Tim 3:8; emphasis added).

This is how Paul describes the sinful people of the last days:

> But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, **lovers of money,** proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people (2 Tim 3:1-5; emphasis added).

In this list of horrible descriptions, "lovers of money" comes second on the list. In a similar vein, the author of Hebrews issues this command:

> Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Heb 13:5-6)

The antidote to loving money is being content with what God has given you. Here is the full context for the 1 Timothy passage we looked at condemning the love of money:

> But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Tim 6:6-10).

It Is Not Sinful to Be Wealthy

While Scripture always condemns the love of money, it does not automatically condemn people who have wealth. Having money and loving money are not the same things. (Although, a lot of wealthy people do love money.) There are many examples of rich believers in the Bible. For example, Abraham, Job, David, and Solomon were all very wealthy. This is what Paul commands rich believers:

> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life (1 Tim 6:17-19).

Paul doesn't say, "tell the rich of this age to become poor." He says:

1. Don't be prideful.
2. Keep your trust in God, not in riches.
3. Be rich in doing good works.
4. Be generous with your wealth and be ready to share.
5. Store up treasure in heaven by using wealth for the Kingdom of God.

It is possible to honor God with your wealth if you do those things.

Hard Work and Wise Living Can Lead to Wealth

There are many, many verses talking about how diligence, hard work, and wise living can lead to an increase in wealth. For example:

> A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich (Prov 10:4).

> Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense (Prov 12:11).

> Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth (Prov 12:27).

> The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life (Prov 22:4).

Diligence and working hard are commanded and they can often lead to God's blessing of wealth.

Laziness and Foolish Living Can Lead to Poverty

Conversely, laziness and foolish living are often linked to poverty in Scripture:

> Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her

> bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man (Prov 6:6-11).
>
> Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger (Prov 19:15).
>
> Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread (Prov 20:13).
>
> I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man (Prov 24:30-34).

To be clear, if someone is poor that doesn't automatically mean he's lazy. But if someone is lazy, there is a good chance they are not going to be wealthy. Foolish decisions around money and the uncontrolled pursuit of pleasure can also lead to poverty.

> Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored (Prov 13:18).
>
> Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich (Prov 21:17).
>
> Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it (Prov 21:20).

Money Cannot Ultimately Satisfy the Human Heart

The ultimate folly of the pursuit of wealth is that it can't actually bring true joy and peace. Solomon said this thousands of years ago in Ecclesiastes:

> He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity (Eccl 5:10).

Those who love wealth make it a false idol and false idols can never ultimately satisfy us. Scripture is clear that only the true God can satisfy our hearts. We were made to worship God and love Him forever. Nothing else can bring us true satisfaction. That is what is so sad about those people who are wearing themselves out to get rich. If they achieve their goal, they still won't be satisfied. Wealth won't ultimately make them happy, because pursuing a false god makes you miserable.

Our Security Should Be in God, Not Money

One main reason that people love and pursue money is because they think it will bring them security. Money often brings with it power, prestige, and pleasure. Ultimately, people think that they will be safe and secure if they just get enough money. They want to be untouchable and feel like they can rest free from worry. However, Scripture tells us that is a lie.

> Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf (Prov 11:28).

Wealth is a horrible foundation to place your trust in because it is fleeting. Wealth can disappear in a flash and you can't ultimately take it with you when you die.

> Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven (Prov 23:4-5).

> There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger (Eccl 5:13-17).

One of the worst stock market crashes in US history was on October 24, 1929. You likely know this date as "Black Tuesday." This was the final straw that took down the economy and plunged the US into the Great Depression. Many lost everything in that crash and suicide rates

increased as a result. That's one example of how quickly wealth can vanish. If you place your security in money, your peace can disappear as quickly as your money can.

The main reason that wealth is a terrible source of security is because it cannot protect your soul, which is your most valuable possession:

> Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:13-21).

Gaining Wealth Sinfully Is Always Condemned

The Bible always warns against gaining money through sinful means. Even if sin may get you more money in the short run, it will always end in trouble in the long run.

> Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death (Prov 10:2).

> In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked (Prov 15:6).

> Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel (Prov 20:17).

Don't compromise to make more money. It's never worth it. It's far better to walk with the Lord and have less money than to gain money sinfully:

> Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it (Prov 15:16).

> Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways (Prov 28:6).

Desiring to Get Rich Quickly Is Foolish
Trying to find shortcuts to get rich quick is unwise.

> An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end (Prov 20:21).

> Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it (Prov 13:11).

Gambling, playing the lottery, and making bad speculative investments all play into this. Scripture commends the measured, thoughtful accumulation of wealth over time from hard work.

We Are Called to Financially Help Those in Need
One reason that God blesses us financially is so that He can use us to help others.

> Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him (Prov 14:31).

> Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed (Prov 19:17).

> Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered (Prov 21:13).

> Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor (Prov 22:9).

For example, we should be helping family members, other believers, and people in our social circles. A great way to facilitate this is by giving to a benevolence fund at a church if it is distributed to members with legitimate needs.

We Are Called to Cheerfully Give to God
A heart overflowing with love for God will want to give cheerfully to further His kingdom.

> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart,

> not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:6-7).

Sometimes people call this a tithe, but a straight from the top 10% is not commanded in the New Testament for believers. (Even in the Old Testament, the combined taxes for Israel accounted for more than 10%.) For Christians, we are not commanded a specific percentage to give but are rather told to be generous and cheerful in our giving.

We Should Invest in Eternal Priorities

> Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt 6:19-21).

It can be tempting to use all your money on meeting temporary priorities. However, we need to keep the big picture in mind. We of course need to pay our bills and meet our current obligations, but we don't want to miss out on the reward of investing in eternal priorities. Investing in ministry and using your money to further God's kingdom will result in rewards lasting for eternity.

We Can Enjoy What God Has Blessed Us with Financially

After all of this, I don't want the takeaway to be that we need to live like monks. We shouldn't be obsessed with material things, but that doesn't mean we need to take a vow of poverty. God blesses us materially and we can enjoy what he's blessed us with.

> The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it (Prov 10:22).

> Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart (Eccl 5:18-20).

Solomon goes on in Ecclesiastes to describe the inability to enjoy the blessings of God as a curse:

> There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil. If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place? All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind (Eccl 6:1-9).

We can praise God for the many material blessings He's blessed us with. If we view them as gifts from God, we can give thanks to Him for everything. A good meal, a car that works, a comfortable bed, a nice vacation with our families to make memories, etc. All of these are blessings that should cause us to praise God.

We Are Called to Be Wise Stewards

What is a steward? A steward is someone who manages something that doesn't belong to him. As Christians, we need to understand that any money God gives us doesn't ultimately belong to us. We're stewards of our Master. The Parable of the Talents that Jesus tells in Matthew 25:14-30 perfectly illustrates the concept of a steward:

> "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made

> two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 25:14-30).

God will hold us accountable for how we used the money (and every other resource) that He gave us to steward. Now, to be clear, I'm not saying you can't spend it on things for your enjoyment or to bless your family. We absolutely can, but we need to have wisdom in how we use our money. A foundational component of having wisdom in this area is understanding that we should be honoring God with our money.

Practical Application

How should we be applying all these biblical principles about money that we've just reviewed? Since we don't have a divinely mandated budget for family finances, we have freedom in Christ on the specifics.

But here are a few practical pieces of advice around family finances to have wisdom in managing your finances:

Be Intentional
It's hard to be wise if you're flying by the seat of your pants. Have a specific approach that you've settled on with your spouse to make sure you manage your finances with purpose, rather than just hoping things work out for the best each month.

Know Your Flocks

> Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever; and does a crown endure to all generations? (Prov 27:23-24)

Livestock was a significant part of people's wealth in the time this proverb was written. The advice of this proverb is to give careful attention to what you have, because money is fleeting. Know what you make and spend, because it's easy for money to come in and out the door quickly. Don't overspend. Be intentional about where your money is going.

Married Couples Should Combine Their Finances
It's very common for couples these days to keep separate bank accounts and sources of money even after they get married. It can be a hassle to combine bank accounts. Additionally, some people are nervous about giving their spouse access to their money because they don't fully trust them. Others may not want to have accountability for their spending habits. Whatever the reason, married couples operating as if they each have their own individual pool of money isn't biblical.

In Genesis 2:24, the Bible says that married couples are "one flesh." In marriage, a husband and wife come together as one family unit and that should include family finances. If you're married, you should be combining your money and having one pool of money for your family. Don't keep financial secrets from your spouse or view money like it belongs to one spouse or the other.

Additionally, from a practical standpoint, each spouse should have the logins and passwords for all accounts. If something happens to the only spouse with the passwords, that could lead to major problems for the other spouse. Along those same lines, having a will with information about your accounts is highly recommended so that you can provide for your children should something happen to both of you.

Communicate with Your Spouse
Since money can be a huge source of stress or topic of arguments, you should be overcommunicating with your spouse about money. Seek alignment on your approach to every aspect of your finances, such as spending, saving, and giving. Listen to the wisdom of your spouse and ensure you're communicating about everything related to money.

Budget
As I've mentioned several times, Scripture doesn't mandate having a budget. However, I believe that it's wise to have one. A budget can be a useful tool to help you steward your money well to make sure that you're living within your means and not spending more than you're bringing in. It can allow you to see all your ongoing expenses, as well as help you intentionally allocate funds.

There are different approaches to budgeting. Some people manage down to the dollar every month and others keep a more general budget that allows flexibility. Choosing which approach is best for you depends on where your family is at during this stage of life. If money is tight, having a granular budget could be helpful to ensure you're not overspending. There are many good resources online with templates for creating a family budget.

Prioritize
Setting financial priorities for your family is important. Obviously foundational things like food, clothes, and providing a roof over your head are a top priority, but what else is important to your family? Where are you willing to cut back and where are you wanting to put more resources toward? Clearly articulating family financial priorities with your spouse is a key part of being intentional.

Plan
When budgeting and prioritizing, don't just think about the day-to-day. Think about the long-term. Saving for unexpected expenses, like car repairs or medical bills, is wise and can help prevent stress when unforeseen costs eventually arive. Planning for longer-term expected expenses, like braces, vacations, college tuition, and retirement can also help you prepare for the future.

Seek Help from Experts
None of us are born with perfect financial knowledge. Educating ourselves is important for us to manage our finances wisely. Seeking out good financial books, talking to qualified, reliable financial

advisors[1], or seeking advice from people you know who are good with their money can be helpful.

Give Generously to God
I mentioned this previously but keep an eternal perspective when thinking about your finances. Yes, you need to meet your daily needs, but don't miss out on eternal rewards. Keeping eternal priorities top of mind will help you ensure that you are stewarding your money well.

Freedom in Christ
The Bible contains many principles about money, but God has given us freedom in managing the details. Don't fall into legalism. There is more than one approach for Christians to manage their finances in a God-honoring way. Find what works best for your family, but don't feel bound to do exactly what another Christian family is doing.

Trust God
Remember that God will provide for His children. We want to act wisely so that we can honor Him, but rest in the fact that God will provide for your needs. We don't need to worry. He is our loving Father and He will always provide for His children.

Conclusion

God has graciously provided married couples with many principles in the Bible to navigate the stressful world of finances. By trusting God and obeying His Word, we can take the guesswork out of managing our family finances in a God-honoring way. Even when money is tight, we can rest in the peace and comfort of knowing that the sovereign Ruler of the universe is providing for us.

[1] Such as a certified fiduciary. The ideal is to have a qualified advisor who can support and complement your biblical convictions and worldview.

Chapter 14

MAKING WISE FAMILY DECISIONS

By Stephen Salinas

Decision-Making and Nuclear War

What do you know about the Cuban Missile Crisis? Many historians say this was the closest that the US has ever come to nuclear war. After a US-assisted attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro failed during the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, Cuba allowed the Soviets to put nuclear missiles in Cuba to deter further invasions. This was in the midst of the Cold War when tensions between the Soviet Union and the US were already sky-high. These nuclear warheads were positioned within striking distance of anywhere in the US. With the push of a button, the Soviet Union could unleash a nuclear holocaust on the US. When the CIA confirmed the presence of these nuclear devices in Cuba in October 1962, President John F. Kennedy and his staff were briefed on this nightmare scenario.

Decisions that JFK and his staff were confronted with could mean the difference between nuclear war and peace. Responding too harshly would risk igniting the wrath of the Soviet Union and could result in nuclear strikes and mutual assured destruction. Responding too softly would allow the Soviet Union to gain the upper hand and could also result in nuclear war. There was a narrow middle ground of being tough and unyielding, but not too aggressive to provoke an attack. Amazingly,

that's the balance JFK was able to strike through deft diplomatic maneuvering over the course of a 13-day standoff. This terrifying episode is a clear example of the importance of wise decision-making.

Decision-Making and Your Family

I'm going to take a wild guess that none of the decisions you're making for your family will result in nuclear war. However, there are many big and small decisions that you'll be confronted with that will have a big impact on you and your family.

Couples are faced with huge decisions in their marriages all the time. Should we move? Should we switch jobs? Should we start trying to have kids? How many kids do we want? How should we educate our kids—public, private, or homeschool?

Oftentimes, how you go about making decisions is more important than the actual decision itself, assuming the issue is not explicitly outlined in Scripture. We haven't been given a 10-step flowchart in the Bible to automatically spit out correct decisions for gray areas. The key is pursuing wisdom. How you approach the process of making a decision and how you interact with your spouse during that process should be based on the principles that have been revealed in the Bible.

Categories of Decisions

Not all decisions are created equal. Not every decision is going to be the Cuban Missile Crisis. At the outset, let's define different categories of decisions that we'll face in our marriage.

Big Decisions vs Small Decisions

If you stop and think about it, we all make many, many decisions every single day. Do you want to guess how many decisions the average person makes in a single day? It's been estimated that the average person makes between 33,000-35,000 decisions each day.[1] 95% of these decisions are subconscious. Subconscious decisions include where you should step when you're walking, how fast you should be walking, the tone and volume you use when speaking, etc. Conscious decisions include what you're going to eat for breakfast, what you're going to wear to work, what time you should leave for work, etc.

Most of these decisions are not a big deal. When it comes to marriage and family life, it's quite similar. You make many decisions

[1] Amanda Reill, "A Simple Way to Make Better Decisions," *Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 5, 2023, https://hbr.org/2023/12/a-simple-way-to-make-better-decisions

every day that are small and don't have major consequences. What should we eat tonight? What time do we need to leave to pick up the kids from school?

Other decisions may feel big but are not that important in the grand scheme of things. For example, "What color shower tile should we choose for our bathroom remodel?" That feels like a big decision in the moment, but, in the grand scheme of your life it's really not that consequential.

"Should we move to another state?" or "Should I quit my job?"—those are big decisions. Knowing the difference between big and small decisions is an important distinction for couples to grasp.

Explicit Biblical Issues

Another category of decisions relates to topics that are clearly called out in the Bible. This is as close to a flowchart as we'll get. If the Bible explicitly says to do something; you need to do it. If the Bible explicitly says not to do something; don't do it.

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1:22).
>
> So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin (James 4:17).

"Should we move in together before we're married?" No—that's clear cut. "Should we regularly give to the Lord financially?" Yes—that's also clear cut. As Christian couples, we should always begin by aligning our decisions to what the Bible says when the issue is explicitly laid out in Scripture.

Gray Areas

What if the Bible doesn't explicitly address a decision that we have to make?

- "I know I should work hard as unto the Lord, but should I switch from my current job to a new job?"
- "I know that children are a blessing from the Lord, but should we start trying to have kids now?"
- "I know I am ultimately responsible for teaching my children about the Lord, but should we choose public school, private school, or homeschool?"

You won't find a specific verse in the Bible to directly answer those questions. A lot of decisions that married couples must make fall into this category. Assuming we're walking with the Lord, we have freedom in Christ to make decisions when there is not a clear command in Scripture to do one thing or another.

In those cases, we can look to get inferences from Scripture. Are there other verses that can help guide us even if they don't explicitly call out a course of action? The most important priority in these cases is to seek wisdom.

> My son, do not lose sight of these—keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet (Prov 3:21-24).

Who is Ultimately Responsible for Family Decisions?

In God's infinite wisdom, He has created marriage to be the union of a man and woman who each bring gifts and strengths into the marriage to complement one another. One natural question that may come up when Christian couples are making decisions is, "Who bears the ultimate responsibility before God for family decisions?"

Throughout the Bible, we see that God has designed specific roles for husbands and wives in marriage that model the relationship between Christ and the church. (See chapter 3 for a thorough discussion of this topic.) For example, we see this in the Book of Ephesians:

> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior (Eph 5:23).

As head of the household, the husband is ultimately accountable before God for all family decisions. God holds the husband responsible for the direction of the family. That includes the spiritual, physical, emotional, and financial well-being of the family.

In light of that, the husband should be leading his family proactively. That includes taking final responsibility for all major decisions impacting the direction of the family. On the one hand, that means that husbands shouldn't be passively checked out or uninvolved in major family decisions. But on the other hand, that doesn't mean that the

husband should be making all decisions by himself in a vacuum based solely on what he wants.

The Wise Husband and Wife

Wise husbands should work hand in hand with their wives in making decisions. A truly wise husband should consider all the gifts, strengths, and wisdom that his wife possesses and seek to fully understand her perspective when decisions need to be made.

There are many (many) areas where my wife is more skilled than I am and she can see things that are in my blind spots. I would be an idiot if I didn't work with her in our family decision-making process, even though I know that God is ultimately holding me responsible for the direction of our family. For example, she is far more sensitive than I am about how our kids are feeling about things. I tend to be more unemotional and logical in making decisions that impact them. Her perspective balances out my purely logical ways of thinking.

Proverbs tells us about the many blessings that the excellent wife brings to the table:

> An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life (Prov 31:10-12).

A husband who ignores his wife's perspective is arrogant and foolish. Ideally, husbands and wives are working together hand in hand through the decision-making process, even though the ultimate accountability falls on the husband.

The Sacrificial Husband

Additionally, husbands are supposed to lead their wives sacrificially (Eph 5:25-28). Sacrificial husbands shouldn't always force their own preferences in decision-making. They should be seeking to lovingly meet the needs and desires of their wives over and above their own. They should always be seeking the spiritual good of their wives.

The Submissive Wife

In cases where there are disagreements and the husband is not advocating for something sinful, wives are called to submit to the leading of their husbands (Eph 5:22). Additionally, submissive wives shouldn't pressure their husbands to conform to their preferences.

They too should be seeking to love and serve their husbands by meeting their needs.

As we explored in chapter 3, the concept of wives submitting to their husbands is extremely offensive to many in our modern culture. However, this is God's perfect, timeless design for the marriage relationship. God's ways are not the ways of the world, so it's not surprising that this seems so countercultural.

If husbands and wives are sacrificially loving one another, seeking to serve one another, and wanting to honor God, the husband's leadership and the wife's submission are working in tandem. Husbands and wives working together to make wise decisions will bless each other and their families. Unfortunately, the approach husbands and wives take to decision-making is not always wise. Let's look at several foolish ways of decision-making that we should seek to avoid.

Foolish Ways of Decision-Making

Since we still live in a fallen world and we're not yet perfected, there are many foolish traps that even Christian couples can fall into when making decisions. Here are several foolish types of decision-making approaches.

Recklessly/Impulsively

Description: Making decisions without considering the longer-term consequences.

Examples:

- Making knee-jerk decisions.
- Pursuing decisions based on excitement or emotion.
- Not praying about big decisions.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty (Prov 21:5).
>
> One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless (Prov 14:16).
>
> It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows (Prov 20:25).

When we don't take a big picture view of things or we don't think through the logical implications of our decisions, we can fall into the trap of making decisions that seem to be good in the moment but lead to a poor outcome in the long run.

Fleshly

Description: Only making decisions based on temporary or physical considerations, with no consideration for spiritual aspects.

Examples:

- Not making time for church or serving, because you're too busy with other obligations.
- Only being concerned with your children being successful, without considering their spiritual well-being.
- Moving for a "better quality of life" (e.g., a bigger house) without researching solid churches in the area.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt 6:31-33).

Making decisions solely based on non-spiritual considerations comes naturally to us when we're walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit. This is how the world thinks and it's easy for us to get swept up in this if we're not careful. We don't need to over-spiritualize every decision, but if we're always trying to "keep up with the Joneses" or following the examples of unbelievers, we'll only be concerned with the here and now and we won't have an eternal mindset.

Naïvely

Description: Making unrealistic decisions that are dependent on everything working out perfectly to be successful.

Examples:

- Always assuming the "grass is greener on the other side."

- Purchasing a home you can't afford while hoping that you'll eventually figure out a way to make more money.
- Investing in get rich quick schemes.
- Blindly trusting people who have already shown themselves to be untrustworthy multiple times.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps (Prov 14:15).
>
> The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge (Prov 14:18).

Making big decisions hoping that everything will work out perfectly while ignoring major red flags is never wise. That kind of hope is not a strategy. Things generally don't work out perfectly without any problems. If you don't have a realistic view of the situation, you may be getting yourself and your family into unwise situations. You should hope for the best, but plan for the worst.

Passively

Description: Avoiding decisions and always letting outcomes happen naturally.

Examples:

- Always doing what is easiest, even if it isn't wise or right for your family.
- Avoiding making big decisions because they're too hard.
- Being reactive and not proactive in your decision-making.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied (Prov 13:4).

I'm naturally a laid-back person. When my wife and I first got married, I was proactive about some things, like our spiritual development or finances, but I was reactive to a lot of things. My wife is naturally more action oriented than I am, so it drove her nuts that I wasn't proactively addressing house issues.

For many guys, passivity is their default setting. Some of this comes from laziness; some of this comes from apathy. Not wanting to put in the work to make decisions or not caring enough to address an issue is a form of this. Being in reactive mode is bad for your family.

Timidly

Description: Making decisions based on fear.

Examples:

- Analysis paralysis—being too overwhelmed to decide, because of all the potential options.
- Fear of failure—not deciding, because you're afraid to make a mistake.
- Always taking the safest decision, even if it is not best for your family.
- Making decisions for your family based on what your parents want.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control (2 Tim 1:7).

For those who are thoughtful when making decisions, you may be overly risk averse. In general, it's good that you don't want to take unnecessary risks. However, nothing in life is truly risk-free. If you only base your decisions on all the things that could possibly go wrong or if you can't make a decision because you're afraid of failure, that's not good for your family.

A friend of mine was like this in that he would not make a decision until he had researched every aspect of it to the Nth degree. He and his wife had a broken dryer for over a year and they had to do laundry at other people's houses, because he had narrowed down his research to a few dryers, but still hadn't decided which one was the absolute best. This was a classic case of analysis paralysis. He spent so much time researching the best option because he was afraid of making the wrong choice that his family was without a dryer for a year.

Another form of this is being afraid of upsetting family members. An example of this is choosing things for your family that neither you nor your spouse want in an effort to please your parents or in-laws. This could also take the form of trying to conform to cultural

expectations even though that is not best for your family. This is the fear of man at play and is not the way to be making decisions for your family. (See chapter 15 for more on this topic.)

Ignorantly

Description: Making decisions without understanding the details.

Examples:

- Making commitments without researching what they entail.
    - Buying a house without understanding the hidden costs.
    - Investing in the latest meme stock or cryptocurrency because everyone else is doing it.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way (Prov 19:2).

If you're making a big decision about something that is complex, but you haven't done any research or consulted with people who are educated about the issues, you could be setting yourself up for failure. If you make a long-term commitment without researching all that you're signing up for, you may be paying for your mistakes for a long time. While you don't want to fall into analysis paralysis, not doing any research can be equally foolish. Lack of due diligence can lead to huge traps.

Selfishly

Description: Making decisions that only benefit yourself.

Examples:

- Always pushing for your way over the needs or desires of your spouse.
- Spending significant portions of your family's income on your hobbies or pet projects.
- Spending your time and energy on things that only benefit you and don't serve your family or others.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves (Phil 2:3).

If you are always pushing for your own way and what you want while ignoring your spouse's needs or desires, that's selfish. Consistently making decisions that only benefit you is harmful to your marriage and your family.

By the grace of God, if you've placed your faith in Christ, He has paid for our foolish or sinful decisions on the cross. However, as followers of Jesus, we should want to honor Him by making decisions that are in keeping with His Word.

Next, we'll look at biblical principles that will help us make wise decisions.

Biblical Principles for Wise Decision-Making

Fear the Lord

Description: Seeking to honor God in all things.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Prov 9:10).
>
> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).
>
> "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14-15).

When we talk about a Christian "fearing the Lord," this is not being afraid of God (who is now the Christian's loving Father) but rather seeking to honor Him in humble reverence. This is the North Star for all Christian living and should be the starting point for all decision-

making. How can we honor God with everything we say, think, and do? How can we approach this decision as a husband and a wife in a way that is pleasing to God? Will this decision be in obedience to God's Word? Will it glorify Him? Will it strengthen our walk with Him, or will it hurt it? Starting with this focus will help orient the way you interact with your spouse in the process and will set the right foundation for the decision itself.

Know God's Word

Description: Studying, internalizing, and treasuring the Bible so that you understand all that it teaches and how it can be applied to your life.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you (Ps 119:11).

This is basic, but you actually need to know the Bible to understand if it says something explicit about a topic. If you don't have a deep grasp of what the Bible says, you won't understand if there are implicit principles that can be applied to your decision-making. If you don't love God's Word, you won't have a heart that seeks to honor Him in your decisions. While it's not possible to have a perfect knowledge of every aspect of the Bible, that should be our heart's desire. If you're encountering a big decision, you can study what the Bible says about that topic to build up your knowledge in this area. Reading books related to a particular topic by trusted Christian authors can also be helpful to get a deep dive of what the Bible says about that topic.

Seek Wisdom

Description: Always seeking to apply God's Word to real-world situations and praying for God to bless you with wisdom from the Holy Spirit.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her (Prov 3:13-15).

> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him (James 1:5).

You must love wisdom to want to pursue it. Wanting to be wise isn't just about wanting to have all the right answers. It comes from a heart that loves God and loves His truth. King Solomon is probably the most obvious example of this (besides Jesus) in the Bible. In 1 Kings 3, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and gave him carte blanche on what he would like to receive from God. Instead of riches or power, Solomon asked for wisdom. God granted his request for wisdom over and above anything he could imagine. He was wise in the truth of God and he was also wise in how to apply it in the circumstances of life. Remember the example of the two women who were fighting over a baby? Judgment for this scenario wasn't expressly outlined in Scripture, but he used wisdom to come to the right way of resolving that situation.

Lift Up Your Decisions to God in Prayer

Description: Committing both the decision-making process and your eventual decision to the Lord in prayer.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6-7).

Pray to the Lord for help in decision-making. Pray for wisdom in approaching the problem. Pray for obedience in how you and your spouse go through the decision-making process. Pray that God would bless your decision. Instead of being anxious, we should lift up our requests to God in prayer. He is sovereign over all things, He loves us, and wants what is best for us, so we should always ask for His help.

Consult Wise Believers/Experts

Description: Seeking the advice of other wise Christians for big or complex decisions.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety (Prov 11:14).
>
> Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm (Prov 13:20).

God has gifted us with brothers and sisters in the Lord and godly leaders to help speak truth into our lives. They can help you see through any blind spots you may have. They also may have experience that you're lacking. To be clear, I'm not saying you need to get advice for every decision you're making. ("Pastor – what do you think we should have for dinner tonight?") However, for particularly big decisions, complicated decisions, or decisions where you and your spouse are stuck, it can be smart to consult the wisdom of others. In non-spiritual, specialized matters, consulting secular experts can be beneficial. For example, consult a tax expert if your taxes are complicated. Consult a doctor about health matters. Consult a mechanic about car issues.

Prioritize the Spiritual/Eternal

Description: Making decisions in a way that prioritizes outcomes that will have the biggest impact on spiritual development or eternal rewards.

What Does the Bible Say About This?

> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor 3:11-15).
>
> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of

> God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt 6:31-33).

Make sure that you don't neglect the spiritual good of your family or others by being consumed with the day-to-day practical decisions of life. We all need to make those practical decisions, but you can seek to honor God in those decisions by always keeping an eternal perspective. Know what is eternal and what is spiritually valuable. Redeem even the little moments by seeking to honor God in your approach. Make sure that you're not trading in eternal rewards of gold and silver for wood, hay, and stubble.

Trust in the Sovereignty of God

Description: Believing that God is in control of all things and will work everything in your life for your good and His glory.

What *Does the Bible Say About This?*

> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).

> Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Prov 3:5-6).

As a teenager, I was anxious about finding God's will for my life. How do I make sure that I go to the right college, pick the right job, and marry the right person? What if I make the wrong choice? Understanding Romans 8:28 and the sovereignty of God was life-changing for me. God's will for our lives is not something that we need to decode or else we're in big trouble. If we seek to obey God's revealed will for our lives (e.g., what He's commanded in Scripture) and we seek to honor Him in wisdom, we can rest in our decisions. God is providentially working everything in our lives—the good, the bad, and the ugly—for our ultimate spiritual good. God never condones sin or tempts anyone to sin, but He still providentially uses our sinful or foolish choices for our ultimate good. That isn't a license to be sinful or foolish. We should actively seek to put sin to death in our life to honor God and to avoid the painful consequences of sinful choices. However, if we obey what Scripture has explicitly outlined and pursue

the wisdom of God for everything else, we don't have to be anxious about our decisions.

Conclusion

If you've followed these biblical principles, you can move forward in your decision with confidence and trust in God:

- Fear the Lord.
- Know God's Word.
- Seek Wisdom.
- Lift Up Your Decisions to God in Prayer.
- Consult Wise Believers/Experts.
- Prioritize the Spiritual/Eternal.
- Trust in the Sovereignty of God.

Even though decision-making can naturally be a source of stress, God has given us many principles that we can use to successfully navigate the decision-making process in a way that honors Him. Ideally, husbands and wives should be working together in harmony to make wise decisions.

The next time that you find yourself needing to make a big decision, consciously make the choice to pursue wisdom in that process. It will be a blessing to you and your family. You won't regret it.

Chapter 15

HONORING YOUR PARENTS WHILE BUILDING YOUR OWN FAMILY

By Jason Ng

One of the most challenging lessons for a young couple is learning how to honor their parents while establishing a new home together. However, Scripture does not see these as opposing responsibilities. In Exodus 20:12, God commands us to honor our fathers and mothers, and in Genesis 2:24, He declares that marriage creates a new household, where a husband and wife leave their parents and cling to each other. Both principles are true. The key is to live them out with wisdom, patience, and love.

This chapter explores what Scripture teaches about honor and discusses how it looks in everyday family life. You will find practical language you can use for real-life scenarios and steps to diffuse tension during difficult moments. It also shows how to invite grandparents into your children's lives without compromising the calling God has given you as a parent.

What Honor Means

Honoring someone involves recognizing their worth and treating them with dignity, reflecting reverence, respect, and care as seen in the Bible. This is expressed through words and actions.

Exodus 20:12 urges us to honor our parents, linking this respect to a promise of well-being. God demonstrates that the health of the family influences society, as respect for authority begins in the home and extends into church, school, work, and community. Similarly, Leviticus 19:3 links reverence for parents with keeping the Lord's Sabbaths, indicating that honoring parents is a significant spiritual act, on par with worship.

For adults, honoring does not equal obeying; it allows for respectful disagreement and choosing different paths without losing honor. Children are told to obey their parents. Adults are told to honor their father and mother. Heart posture, tone, gratitude, and trust in the Lord all shape what it means to honor. Honor is not flattery or pretending everything is perfect. It involves recognizing your parents' God-given worth, speaking of them with respect, expressing gratitude for how God has used them in your life, and caring for them appropriately. Honor also requires keeping God first. You must live before Him with a clear conscience. When your parents' wishes conflict with God's will, you should choose the Lord and do so with humility and grace.

Respecting Their Role

Respect begins with how we speak. Words that hurt leave scars. Many conflicts between couples and their parents don't start with the decision itself, but with how it's communicated. You can disagree respectfully and still speak kindly. You can set boundaries while acknowledging your parents' sacrifices over the years.

Respect also shows in how you talk about your parents to others. Your children hear these stories. If they hear you mock your parents, they might learn to mock you. If they hear gratitude, they'll learn appreciation. Speak positively of your parents in front of your children. Share true stories of provision, correction, and care. Recall specific moments when your parents supported you in your youth. Such memories teach your children what honor looks like.

Respect doesn't mean avoiding tough topics. It means approaching them with a gentle tone. For example: "Dad, I appreciate how you taught me to work hard. I also need to tell you that we're uncomfortable with this plan. Here's what we will do instead." You are both a son or daughter and a spouse, so you need to address both roles thoughtfully.

Expressing Gratitude

Gratitude is a habit that requires practice. Ephesians 5:20 urges us to give thanks to God the Father always, and Colossians 3:15 encourages

us to be thankful. When you express gratitude to your parents, you're helping your own heart recognize God's hand in your life. Gratitude transforms vague memories into meaningful praise. It doesn't have to be complicated.

Call your mother just to say, "Thank you for how you cared for us when our second child was born. We remember those meals. We remember you coming over so we could sleep. We are grateful." Send your father a note highlighting a specific lesson he taught you. Small acts of service also count, fixing a loose cabinet door, dropping off a meal during a busy week, or inviting them to your child's game and saving them a seat. Though these gestures may seem minor, they create a strong bridge, one that will serve you well in tough conversations.

If your story involves deep wounds, practicing gratitude might feel like a sacrifice. Still, you can honor what is good by thanking God for the positive things He has brought through broken people, while also being honest about sin and pain. Gratitude doesn't dismiss pain; it simply refuses to let pain be your only story.

Listening to Their Advice

Proverbs 1:8-9 and Proverbs 23:22 remind children to listen to instruction and respect their elders, especially as parents age. Listening isn't necessarily agreeing but showing that their experience matters. It signals a desire to learn, even if one chooses a different path.

Before making major decisions, seek your parents' advice. Ask questions like, "We're considering moving. What did you learn when you moved for work? What would you have done differently?" Then listen openly. Take notes and repeat back what you hear to confirm understanding. For example, "So you're saying the first year will be tougher than we expect and that the church we choose will impact our family deeply. That's helpful." If you decide differently, communicate respectfully and clearly. Say, "We heard you. We considered your advice. After praying and discussing, we've chosen a different route. We love you."

Listening shows respect and shields you from pride because we often don't see our blind spots. God often uses parents to reveal these and to slow us down enough to notice potential problems. Ignoring advice isn't heroic; it can be foolish and unwise.

Honor Across Life Stages

Honoring shifts with the seasons of life. In childhood, it appears as obedience, aligning with Ephesians 6:1-3, which affirms obedience as

right and references the Fifth Commandment with its promise. Obedience here fosters trust and safety.

In adolescence, honor still manifests as obedience, but seeks for ways to pursue respectful independence. It involves listening and speaking without contempt.

In young adulthood, honor is shown through seeking counsel and practicing grateful independence, making personal choices about work, education, church, friendships, and habits, while keeping parents informed and valuing their input.

In marriage, honor evolves to include respecting and thanking parents while guarding the marriage bond by "leaving and cleaving" as emphasized in Genesis 2:24. At this stage, the newly married couple is an independent family unit that must make decisions for themselves. In many cultures, even adult married couples are still expected to obey the wishes of their parents. However, that is not found in Scripture. Honoring parents as adults does not mean obedience. As the newly married couple sets out to honor their parents while carving out their own family unit, clear communication protects the home and helps parents love well in this season.

During middle age, honor often appears as caring for aging parents, driving them to appointments, helping with bills, and patiently listening to their stories. It also involves preserving dignity, making decisions with them, and involving them in family life.

In old age, honor is expressed through remembering stories, displaying pictures, reading Scripture, praying, keeping promises, showing patience, and sitting with and holding hands to demonstrate love, as Proverbs 23:22 encourages us to listen and cherish an aging mother.

Honoring Parents While You Build Your Marriage

Marriage establishes a new central focus, with Christ at the core, followed by the husband and wife united as one flesh. When parents forget this hierarchy, the home can feel crowded, and when couples forget, their marriage may seem fragile. The aim isn't to push parents away, but to ensure the center remains secure, allowing love to extend to both families.

Consider language that clarifies the center's position: "We appreciate your care. We also need to make this decision as husband and wife. We will let you know our choice after we've made it." Or: "This year, we'll spend Thanksgiving with your family and Christmas

morning at home. We'd love to see you that afternoon." Clear communication reduces confusion and anxiety.

Money is another area where the center must be maintained. If parents offer financial help, accept it gratefully, provided it doesn't come with conditions that undermine authority. If a gift is used for control, it's not really a gift, but leverage. You might say, "Thank you for your generosity. We need to make financial decisions together and will keep you informed." If you need to refuse, do so kindly: "Thanks for offering to cover the down payment. We prefer to handle this ourselves. It may take longer, but it's healthier for our home."

Child-rearing is the third critical area requiring a strong center. Grandparents often have strong opinions about sleep, food, education, screens, and discipline. You can honor their experience while staying true to your beliefs: "We appreciate how you raised us. We've decided to keep bedtime at seven for now, as it suits our child's needs. Thank you for understanding." Short, clear sentences help keep communication clear.

Setting Boundaries with Love

Boundaries safeguard love. They aren't barriers to exclude people, but fences with gates that open and close at appropriate times. The aim isn't distance, but order. Clear boundaries lead to peaceful visits, while vague ones can cause conflicts from minor issues.

Pray before speaking. James 1:5 assures that God grants wisdom to those who ask. Seek words that are truthful, gentle, and patient. Plan calm conversations without waiting for conflict or discussing boundaries during an argument. Choose a peaceful moment, sit face-to-face, and speak responsibly. Use language that owns your choices, like "We have decided," "We will," or "We are choosing." Avoid blame in front of others.

Be specific, as vague statements cause confusion. For example, say "Please text before you stop by so we can prepare," or "We will keep phones away at dinner," or "Sleepovers aren't comfortable now; we'll revisit this in a year." Specifics strengthen relationships.

Expect emotions; you can't control your parents' feelings, but you can control your tone. Remain kind even if they're upset. Repeat boundaries calmly: "I hear you're disappointed. We love you. We'll see you at church and would enjoy having you over Sunday afternoon."

Follow through; inconsistent boundaries aren't credible. Enforcing boundaries is loving, not cold. Families usually adjust over time. If not, continue to honor your commitments with patience and prayer.

Involving Parents in Healthy Ways

Grandparents are a special gift (Prov 17:6), providing roots for your children through their stories and presence. Involve them in ways that align with your family's routine, such as inviting them to weekly activities, reading aloud at bedtime, sharing a Psalm during breakfast, or teaching a skill your child wants to learn, like baking bread, changing a tire, or fixing a fence.

Show respect for your parents by listening and expressing gratitude. Maintain regular communication with brief video calls and sharing photos and updates. If a grandparent oversteps, set clear boundaries. For example, "We'd like you to pick up the kids on Thursday and take them to the park. Snack options are fruit or cheese; please avoid candy until after dinner." This is about guiding and honoring your family's rules, not micromanaging.

Teaching Your Children to Honor Grandparents

Children learn about honor by observing you. If you speak disdainfully about your parents, your children will copy that attitude. Conversely, if you speak with respect and gratitude, they will imitate that as well.

Share stories with your children about how Grandpa worked nights so you could attend school, or how Grandma prayed for you every day. Let them see you helping your parents by delivering a meal or writing a thank-you note. Build simple habits by encouraging your children to express thanks with words and small notes. Help them create birthday and anniversary drawings. Teach them to greet grandparents warmly. Establish small rituals like a hug before they leave, reading a verse together, or saying a prayer before meals.

Show your children respectful disagreement. When setting a boundary with a grandparent in front of your child, keep your voice calm and use kind words. Your child learns two lessons: that parents make decisions for the family, and those decisions can be communicated gently.

When Expectations Clash with God's Call

Jesus said in Matthew 10:37 that anyone who loves father or mother more than Him is unworthy of Him. Galatians 1:10 teaches us to prioritize God's approval over the approval of other people. These are strong words because family ties are powerful.

Sometimes, your parents' expectations might clash with obeying the Lord. You could be called to serve in a church far from home. You might choose a different school for your children than your parents

prefer. Or you might plan your family weekends around church and rest, which may not always align with extended family plans. When these conflicts arise, pray and seek God's guidance. Read your Bible. Ask experienced believers for advice. Once you have clarity, speak to your parents respectfully. Share that your decision stems from your desire to follow Christ. Keep the relationship open with warm words. Don't let guilt control you.

The Lord is your Master. We should strive to be like Him in how we interact with and communicate with others. A simple way to communicate with parents when sharing a hard decision is: "We love you. We know this news may be hard. We have prayed and believe this is God's direction. We will try to stay connected. We are thankful for you." After the talk, continue to show love. Call, visit when possible, and send photos. Love can help heal and soften conflicts over time.

Living Peaceably Without Compromise

Romans 12:18 urges us to live peaceably with everyone, as far as it depends on us. James 3:17 describes wisdom from above as pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. Peace is not the same as agreement; instead, it is the outcome of speaking truth in love and loving without lies.

Sometimes peace is achieved through compromise that respects your convictions. If your parents want a weekly dinner that conflicts with your family's schedule, suggest a monthly dinner instead that you can enjoy. If holiday travel is overwhelming, propose alternating years. If a tradition conflicts with your faith, create a new one that embodies the same spirit in a way that fits your home.

At times, you may need to stand firm to end a conflict, not through agreement but with calmness. Clearly state what you can do, not just what you cannot. For example: "We cannot attend the late party, but we can stop by from two to four. We'll be glad to see everyone." Maintain a calm tone, honor your promises, and over time, this consistent approach builds trust.

Caring for Aging Parents

As parents grow older, children have meaningful ways to honor them. First Timothy 5:4 teaches us to show godliness to our family and to repay our parents. This will look different for each family, depending on health, finances, distance, and size. The core remains the same: making room in your life to serve those who served you.

Start conversations early. Ask your parents about their hopes as they age, medical wishes, living arrangements, finances, spiritual care. Write down key information, share contacts for doctors and neighbors, and offer to accompany them to appointments. Invite them for regular meals at your home to prevent isolation. Respect their dignity by seeking their opinions before making decisions affecting daily life. If they can still choose, let them; if not, explain safety decisions kindly. Sit with them during times of loss of independence, grief will come in waves. Be patient.

Include your children in caregiving, let them carry small plates, read Scripture aloud, and see what love looks like at life's end. If you have siblings, work together in unity. Divide responsibilities according to skills and proximity, keep records, and communicate often. Don't let old rivalries influence current caregiving. Your shared goal is honoring and caring for your parents (1 Tim 5:8).

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Family pain can run deep. Failures by parents and children, along with words spoken years ago, may still cause hurt. The gospel offers guidance here. Ephesians 4:31-32 urges us to set aside bitterness and forgive one another, just as God in Christ forgave us. Forgiveness doesn't mean the sin was insignificant; it signifies that Christ's greatness outweighs it. He has forgiven us a debt we could never repay. We forgive because we have been forgiven (Col 3:13).

Forgiveness is a choice that might need to be reaffirmed as feelings resurface. Sometimes, wise boundaries are necessary after forgiving. A wound that has been forgiven doesn't mean you must put yourself in danger; you can forgive and still maintain a safe distance when needed. The Spirit will guide your discernment.

Pursue reconciliation when possible: make a call acknowledging the hurt and extending grace. Consider inviting a church meeting with a pastor present if helpful. Pray for a tender heart, courage to accept your role, and simple, truthful words spoken in love. Even if reconciliation doesn't happen, obeying Christ will bring peace to your heart.

Love as the Foundation

Jesus said in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Love is the path of honor. Love is patient with slow change. Love is kind when memories are uneven and schedules are tight. Love does not rejoice at conflict but rejoices with the truth. Love keeps showing up with a meal, a prayer, a thank you, a

boundary, a visit, and a blessing. Love will lead you to honor parents with speech that builds up and doesn't tear down. Love will lead you to gratitude that notices hidden sacrifices. Love will lead you to listen before you decide. Love will lead you to set boundaries that guard your marriage and protect your children. Love will lead you to welcome grandparents into your home with joy and wisdom. Love will lead you to forgive old hurts and to keep short accounts. Love will lead you to sit beside a hospital bed and read Psalm 23 out loud through tears.

A God-centered family grows in this kind of love. Psalm 127:1 says that unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Invite the Lord to build. Pray with your spouse for your parents by name. Pray with your children for their grandparents by name. Ask the Lord to help you honor parents without losing the center of your home. Ask Him to give you speech that is gracious and clear. Ask Him to knit your family together in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

Simple Scripts for Tricky Moments

Here are brief sentences you can adapt to your family's voice. They keep honor, clarity, and peace together.

- "Thank you for your advice. We hear you and will think about it. We will let you know what we decide."
- "We love spending time with you. Please text before stopping by so we can be ready to host you."
- "We are building our own traditions this year. We will be at our house on Christmas morning. We would love to see you later that day."
- "We appreciate your generosity. We need to make this financial decision as a couple. If we need help, we will ask."
- "We are choosing to handle bedtime this way for now. Thank you for supporting us."
- "We know this decision is disappointing. We have prayed and believe this is where the Lord is leading. We love you and want to stay close."

Simple words can carry heavy weight. Keep them short. Keep them kind. Repeat them as needed.

A Picture of Generational Honor

Imagine a Sunday afternoon. Your parents arrive at your house. Your children run to the door. You greet your parents with a hug and a smile. You have already set a simple plan. Lunch at one. A short rest. A walk to the park. Your father reads a story before they leave. During lunch, you thank your mother for the way she helped you during a hard season last year. You ask your father about a decision he faced early in his career and listen closely. Later, your parents ask about your plans for school. You answer them, then gently say that you and your spouse will make the final call. They nod. The afternoon ends with prayer. Your children watch and learn. That is honor. It is not dramatic. It is steady. It is ordinary faithfulness.

Conclusion

Honoring parents is a lifelong responsibility that starts in childhood and continues through marriage, raising children, and aging. It includes showing respect in a kind and honest way, expressing gratitude with specific gifts, listening attentively to foster learning, and caring to preserve dignity. It also means setting boundaries to protect your marriage and focus on God, along with forgiving to prevent bitterness in the home.

This cannot be done by your own strength alone; you need God's grace. Ask Him because He delights in giving wisdom to those who seek it. He can heal old wounds, transform long-standing habits, soften hardened hearts, and bring peace to your home.

Build your household on the Lord, keeping your marriage centered in Christ. Include grandparents in ways that bless your children. Teach your children respect by showing it yourself. Speak truth kindly. Set boundaries patiently. Forgive quickly. Pray regularly.

Over time, God will shape a family culture that reflects His heart. Your children will carry this culture forward. Your parents will feel your respect, and your home will mirror God's Word daily. When you become a grandparent, you'll appreciate the patterns you've established now, knowing how to bless without controlling, help without managing, and honor the new family your children create. This is the fruit of love, wisdom, and honor rooted in Christ.

Chapter 16

STEWARDING TIME WISELY FOR YOUR FAMILY

By Stephen Salinas

A Valuable Resource

Imagine a scenario where you find out that you've received an inheritance from a wealthy relative you didn't know you had. This relative was unbelievably rich and has left everything to you in cash. However, there are some unique requirements placed on how you can receive this money. You will receive $86,400 each day for the rest of your life, but you have to spend it by the end of that day, or you lose it. Whatever you don't spend is gone and you can't get it back. Additionally, this money can only go to you. It can't be passed on to your family. When you die, the funds stop coming through. I would venture to guess that you would be very intentional in trying to make the most of that resource for the benefit of you and your family.

It's easy for us to think of money as a resource that we need to be intentional with, but time is an even more valuable resource. Every day, you get 86,400 seconds, 1,440 minutes, and 24 hours to use that you will never get back and you can't pass on to someone else. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "Lost time is never found again."

From a worldly perspective, even unbelievers understand the concept of maximizing the limited time you have on earth. Have you heard the acronym YOLO before? It stands for, "You Only Live

Once." It's a modern update to the mentality of "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." It's used to justify things like: "Take that vacation; go skydiving; spend an exorbitant amount of money on something you want – YOLO!"

Rather than advocating for a mentality of living life to the extreme to maximize pleasure, I want to look at the concept of making the most of our time from a biblical perspective. As believers, our goal should be to honor God and bless our families with how we spend our time.

In His infinite wisdom, God hasn't told us in Scripture precisely how He wants us to spend our time. We're not given a divinely mandated schedule that we're expected to follow. "Here's how much time to devote to work, family, praying, eating, sleeping, leisure, etc." Since this is a gray area in Scripture, we need to use wisdom to navigate how our families spend their time. The first step to pursuing wisdom is fearing God and knowing Him:

> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Prov 9:10).

Considering that, we're going to look to God's Word to help guide us in our goal of honoring Him with our time.

A Unique Challenge for Families

For parents of young children, this topic is particularly pertinent to us. As your family responsibilities grow, your free time gets more constrained. After I got married, I remember thinking, "We're so busy. What did I do with all that free time I had when I was single?" When we had our first baby a few years later, I thought, "Man, we had so much free time before we had a baby. We don't have any free time now." Then we had two more kids and I felt the same way looking back to when we only had one kid. Now my kids are teens and tweens and have school, homework, sports, youth group, etc. I'm hard-pressed to remember what I did with the free time that I had when they were younger.

At each stage of family life, you may often feel like you have more to do and less time to do it. Managing your time gets trickier. It can be easy to not even evaluate how you're spending your time when you're just trying to keep your head above water. During this time-crunch, if we just coast into autopilot, we may unintentionally end up stewarding our time poorly. Seeking to honor God with the gift of time that He's given us takes intentionality. In this chapter, we'll see that wisely

stewarding our time honors God, blesses our families, and benefits our own health.

Time Stewardship Diagnostic

Before we start, please take a moment to review a quick diagnostic test regarding time management to get a baseline for how you feel like you're managing your time. How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent) in regard to managing your time in the following areas?

- Working *(at a vocational job or in the home)*
- Spiritual Disciplines *(e.g., reading the Bible and praying)*
- Worship/Church
- Serving
- Quality Family Time
- Fellowship/Building Relationships
- Getting Enough Sleep
- Non-Sleep Rest *(e.g., enjoying a hobby, wholesome entertainment, playing a sport, reading, etc.)*
- Exercise
- How would you rate your time management overall?
- What is the biggest challenge for you in managing your time wisely?
- What is an area of your life you would like to prioritize more time towards?

With our personal baselines set, we'll explore how wisely stewarding our time honors God.

Wisely Stewarding Our Time Honors God

At the outset, someone may ask if God really cares how we use our time. To answer that, we should start by looking at the character and attributes of God, His design for man, and the concept of stewardship.

Order vs Chaos

Looking at the Book of Genesis, the first thing to point out is that time was created by God. "In the beginning" is the first phrase of the Bible. "The beginning" speaks to the start of time. The Trinity existed in eternity-past before Genesis 1:1, but at the start of creation, God created time and the heavens and earth. Time is orderly and moves forward in a systematic way because that's how God created it. Continuing through the creation account, we see God creating order

and structure in the universe. He creates organization through separation: heaven and earth, land and sea, and day and night. We see incredible structure in the detailed design of plants, animals, and humans that could never come about by accident. There's intentionality in everything God does. From Genesis, we clearly see that God is a God of order, not chaos. Paul tells us as much in 1 Corinthians when talking about having orderly worship services:

> For God is not a God of confusion[1] but of peace (1 Cor 14:33).

God clearly cares about order and intentionality. We honor God and follow His example when we bring order to the chaos of family life. Next, we should look at God's design for man.

Dominion

God created man to have dominion over his creation.

> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28).

> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it (Gen 2:15).

God didn't create Adam to just lounge around in the garden, eat fruit, and do whatever he wanted based on his passing whims. He created Adam to use his time to be productive. He created man to intentionally have dominion over the earth.

God has an expectation that we will manage our time to be productive. Work is good and we should do our work diligently to honor the Lord. That includes a vocational job, but that also includes work in the home. Productive work in the station that God has placed you should be a big part of how we spend our time. We should be working hard as if the Lord is our boss (Col 3:23-24). (See chapter 12 for a detailed exploration of honoring God in our work.)

I would also argue that we should ensure that we are having dominion over our time and not letting time have dominion over us

[1] The word for "confusion" (*akatastasia*) can mean "disorder" in Greek.

through passive living. We should be productive for the Lord at work, in caring for our home, with our children, in our relationships, in serving the church, etc.

Stewardship

God hasn't given us a concrete schedule in Scripture showing us exactly how we should manage our time down to the minute. We have freedom in Christ in our time-management, but we should be good stewards as we seek to honor God with our time. What does it mean to be a steward?

Stewardship is caring for or managing what belongs to someone else. In this case, we're talking about stewarding or managing the time that God has given to you. We don't want to waste what God has given us. The concept of stewardship helps guide us in situations where we have freedom in Christ, such as how we use our time. In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells the parable of the talents. In this parable, we see the concept of stewardship on full display. The master gave his property to his servants and he rewarded them or punished them based on their stewardship of it. The master represents God. The one who completely squandered the master's resources was punished and he represents an unbeliever. The faithful servants who were rewarded based on the outcome of their wise stewardship represent believers who wisely manage what God has entrusted to them.

Time is a resource that has been given to us by God that He wants us to steward wisely. Scripture is clear that every person has been given a fixed amount of time on earth.

> Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble … Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass (Job 14:1, 5).

We're exhorted to be wise by considering the limited amount of time we've been given:

> For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? So teach us to number our days so that we may get a heart of wisdom (Ps 90:9-12).

The first step is realizing that we only have a fixed number of opportunities in this life. How will we use the time that God has given us? Paul tells us this:

> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil (Eph 5:15-16).

It's wise to be intentional about using our time to the best of our ability to honor God. (In further verses, Paul contrasts wisely using your time to understand the will of God with sinfully living in drunken pleasure-seeking.) Since Paul uses a Greek word for time that means "a fixed season," rather than clock time, he is after something deeper than just minding our minutes.

While we shouldn't be frittering away our minutes, hours, or days by being unproductive, we need to look at the big picture first. Living wisely means making the best use of the fixed time God has given you on earth. Rather than just maximizing productivity throughout the day, we need to live with the right biblical priorities. Making the best use of our time means maximizing our ability to honor God in the allotted time He's given us on earth.

In light of this, I would argue that God does care about how we steward our time, and we should use it to honor Him. With that in mind, how can wisely stewarding our time bless our families?

Wisely Stewarding Our Time Blesses Our Families

There are many aspects of family life that take up a large portion of time that are necessary to daily life: cooking, eating, bathing, cleaning, changing diapers, grocery shopping, working, sleeping, schooling, driving, etc. There are many other things that are not necessary, but can be beneficial: sports, entertainment, vacations, etc. That's not even talking about spiritual disciplines that are essential to the spiritual health of your family.

How do we make sure we keep the right balance between all these areas? It takes intentionality to make sure you aren't letting trivial things crowd out true priorities.

Intentionality and "Flexible Structure"

As we've mentioned, the Bible doesn't spell out specific time allotments we're bound by, so I'm not going to give out a concrete set of recommended time allotments for our families. We have freedom in the Lord to do what we think is best for our family. Each family is

different and has different needs. What I am going to recommend is being intentional with your time as you wisely consider what is best for your family. And, by that, I'm also not advocating for 100% productivity. You don't need to be working 100% of the time getting things done to be using your time wisely. Many important things don't have measurable productivity results. For example, how do you measure the return on investment (ROI) on the time a mom spends playing with her toddler? You can't, but it's important.

The first question to ask is: are you spending your time intentionally? This gets really hard when you're a parent, especially when you have multiple kids. Sometimes you feel like you're just treading water keeping your kids alive. Once you add in school, homework, discipline, and discipleship, it feels like you're just barely getting everything done.

My friend, Jason Ng (who is an author of several chapters in this book), used the term "flexible structure" when discussing how he manages his time and I really like that phrase. I'm not saying that your life needs to be micromanaged down to the minute, but implementing some structure to your time is wise. The flexible component of this is knowing that life is not predictable, especially with kids. Having a broad intention of how you want to spend your days, weeks, months, and years is important, but having the flexibility to make changes or roll with the punches in real-time is crucial.

Even something as simple as getting out of the house can be unpredictable with a baby. After my oldest son was born, our first big family outing was going to Target when he was a few days old. It took almost an hour to get out of the house because we had to feed him, change his diaper, change his clothes, clean his post-feed spit up, change his spit up covered clothes, clean up a diaper blowout in his carseat, change his diaper again, and change his clothes for the third time. It was such a hassle getting out of the house to run a basic errand. Being flexible is key to being a parent. If we had scheduled our day down to the minute, we would have been extremely frustrated by being so behind schedule in getting to Target.

On the other hand, if you're 100% flexible and you just go with the flow without any structure, your family may miss out on the blessings that come from intentionally using your time. There are many important areas of life that can get crowded out if you don't intentionally plan for them:

> ***Worship/Church*** – Ensure church is a priority even when life is crazy busy and you're tired.

> ***Family Time*** – Make sure that work isn't prohibiting you from spending quality time with your spouse or kids.
>
> ***Fellowship/Building Friendships*** – Make time to build and strengthen relationships with other believers.
>
> ***Serving*** – Use your spiritual gifts and talents to bless others in the church.
>
> ***Enriching Activities*** – Help your kids grow through experiences like music lessons, sports, etc.

When some Christian couples have babies, they become so overwhelmed or tired that they neglect attending church for long periods of time. To be clear, I'm not advocating going straight to church from the delivery room but letting tiredness crowd out regular attendance on Sunday mornings is detrimental to your spiritual health and is a violation of Scripture. As the author of Hebrews wrote:

> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb 10:24-25).

If you think of time as a resource, like money, you can think of where you choose to spend your time as making investments. You should consciously invest your time where it will benefit you and your family the most. By intentionally evaluating where you're spending your time and planning accordingly, you can bless your family by making time for true priorities (like church) or non-essential beneficial things (like music lessons or sports.)

Lastly, we'll look at how wisely stewarding our time can benefit our own spiritual and physical health.

Wisely Stewarding Our Time Benefits Our Health

Having talked to a lot of parents and young couples, some of the first things that can get crowded out when life gets busy are related to personal health. Specifically, when we get busy, we often neglect the spiritual disciplines and making time to rest.

Spiritual Disciplines

Spending time alone in God's Word and praying are crucial to our spiritual health. Reading the Bible saturates our hearts in the truth of

God. It renews our minds and keeps us from being conformed to the world. It comforts us when we're discouraged. It rebukes us when we're thinking or acting sinfully. It grounds us in truth about God and Christ so that we can face our days with a spiritual mindset.

Praying is how we commune with God. It keeps our relationship with Him strong. It's how we praise Him and thank Him for all that He's blessed us with. It's how we bring our requests to Him so that we don't have to be anxious. It's how we pour out our hearts to Him when we're hurting. It's how we lift up our families to God.

It can be easy to let our spiritual disciplines slip when we get hit with a time-crunch from family responsibilities, especially when kids enter the picture. When I was single, I was able to spend a lot of undistracted time reading the Word and praying. Having kids can make it difficult to do anything undistracted. You also have the added challenge of being exhausted all of the time. When you have a newborn and you're not getting sleep, you may fall asleep within minutes of reading or praying. That's OK –- keep prioritizing time with the Lord. You don't want to let that slip away even when you're tired or busy, because that will negatively impact your spiritual health.

Get creative. Pray short prayers throughout the day, like when you're changing a diaper or driving. (Just make sure to keep your eyes open if you're driving.) Read your Bible on the phone app when you have a free minute. Being disciplined to make time with the Lord will always be worth it. Be intentional with your time to ensure you are making time for your spiritual health.

Rest

For some of us, taking care of our physical health becomes a non-priority when we have a family. Sleep and rest are common areas that go out the window when things get busy. "According to the CDC, about 1 in 3 adults in the United States reported not getting enough rest or sleep every day."[2] Additionally, "About 20% of U.S. adults sleep fewer than five hours each night, even though experts recommend adults sleep for at least seven hours per night."[3]

Especially in Silicon Valley, where I live, neglecting sleep is the norm. I worked with people who would brag about routinely sleeping

[2] "What Are Sleep Deprivation and Deficiency?," National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NIH), last modified March 24, 2022, https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep-deprivation

[3] Jay Vera Summer, "Sleep Deprivation: Symptoms, Treatment, & Effects," SleepFoundation.org, https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-deprivation.

only four hours a night so that they could work more. We need to remember that God designed us to need rest. Isn't it fascinating that God created us to need to sleep for approximately a third of our lives? This wasn't a mistake; it was part of His plan for us. Sleep is a gift from God:

> It 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 (Ps 127:2).

We neglect sleep to our own peril. "Sleep deficiency is linked to many chronic health problems, including heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and depression."[4] Wisely stewarding our time and our bodies means that we need to make sure that we are getting enough sleep.

Unfortunately, getting enough sleep is sometimes out of our hands. As parents, there's no way around it: having kids is going to impact your sleep, especially when you have a newborn. It starts in the hospital after delivery. For all three of our kids, labor went throughout the night. We were up all night and then once the baby was born, nurses came in every hour or two to check on the baby. We didn't get more than 45 minutes of sleep at a time in the hospital. When we finally got home, feedings were happening every few hours, so we were still not getting consistent sleep.

Sleep deprivation continues until they start sleeping through the night. If you have a baby that sleeps long stretches at a time from birth, that's an amazing blessing. Our three kids were across the spectrum: one was a great sleeper, one was a pretty good sleeper, and one experienced colic for a year. It was significantly harder having a baby that didn't sleep consistently for more than an hour or two at a time.

I used to think that I didn't need much sleep to function, but that eventually caught up to me. I'm a night owl and my preference would be to stay up late and sleep in late. With a job, sleeping in gets harder, so I would stay up late and still have to get up early for work. When my son was in the midst of his colic phase, he would cry for hours at a time in the night. I would still try to stay up when he finally went to sleep to get some downtime, but I had a hard time focusing at work and I just

[4] "What Are Sleep Deprivation and Deficiency?," National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NIH), last modified March 24, 2022, https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep-deprivation.

felt awful all the time. I knew I had to make a change, so I started going to bed earlier or as soon as he would go down. That meant having less free time to read or watch a movie, but I felt significantly better. Trying to be wise in one area may mean deprioritizing other things.

Even now that my kids are older, I've found that I feel sharper during the day and I have more self-control when I get a good night's sleep. I still try to get to bed at a reasonable time even if I know I'm not going to be up at night with a baby. Trying to prioritize getting enough sleep (as best as you can) is wise.

We've been specifically talking about sleep but getting enough rest in other forms is crucial to your health as well. God modeled rest for us in the creation account:

> Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation (Gen 2:1-3).

Even though God never gets tired and has limitless amounts of energy, He rested on the seventh day of creation to be an example to us. Additionally, He gave the Sabbath as a day of rest as part of the Ten Commandments. One reason He did this was to show the Israelites the importance of rest.

> Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Ex 20:8-11).

Now, as believers in Christ, we are no longer under the Mosaic Law. We're under the New Covenant, so we don't need to observe the Sabbath like the Israelites did in the Old Testament. However, we can still look to it as an example of God giving rest as a gift.

As mentioned previously, using your time wisely doesn't mean working and being productive 100% of your waking hours. Recharging

your batteries by playing a board game, playing soccer with your kids, watching sports, reading a book, camping, going out for a nice meal, going to the beach, taking a vacation, or going on a hike are wise things to make time for in your schedule. Now, we do need to balance getting rest with the warnings that Proverbs repeatedly gives about laziness. For example:

> The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied (Prov 13:4).
>
> Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread (Prov 20:13).

However, enjoying rest and sleep in moderation is a way of wisely stewarding our health and enjoying the blessings of the Lord.

Conclusion

Amidst the busyness of life, intentionally evaluating how you're spending your time and making adjustments will help you ensure that you're using your time wisely. Stewarding your time well will honor God, bless your family, and benefit your own spiritual and physical health. While this can be challenging when you feel like you're barely treading water, cutting through the chaos and adding flexible structure to your life can positively impact you and your family.

Chapter 17

PARENTING AND LOG REMOVAL: AVOIDING HYPOCRISY AS PARENTS

By Derek Brown

Parenting is hard. It's a wonderful privilege, full of many days of joy and love. But it's hard.

Parenting is hard because we are dealing with little sinners who we are seeking to raise in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4). But it's also hard because we are, at the same time, also dealing with big sinners—ourselves.

I've been married for just over twenty years, and I've been a daddy for a little over fourteen. While marriage has been a powerful means to expose my sin, parenting has been particularly effective in putting my selfishness, impatience, and tendency to frustration on full display.

Most painful, however, has been the realization that hypocrisy in my life deeply undermines my attempts at training and discipling my children. Just as a teacher can only take their disciple as far as they've gone themselves, I can't expect my children to heed my *words* if what I say doesn't correspond to my *practice*. How can they listen to their father instruct them to speak with kindness toward their siblings when I am guilty of speaking harshly toward them? How can I exhort them to think of others when I am consumed with my own interests?

The Scourge of Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is a vice that Scripture regularly denounces. Jesus spoke often on the topic of hypocrisy, using the Pharisees as the supreme example of how *not* to conduct one's spiritual life. These men were characterized by outward religiosity that had no correspondence to an inward love for God or people (Matt 15:8-9; 23:1-36).

The Pharisees were driven by a desire for man's praise and a craving to be recognized for their outward acts of righteousness (Matt 6:2-6; 23:5-8; John 5:44). Most deplorably, these leaders required of others what they refused to do themselves. They told people how to live a life pleasing to God but did not practice what they preached (Matt 23:3; Rom 2:21).

This is hypocrisy at its most obvious. When we see a person telling someone else what they should do and yet refusing to follow their own counsel, we intuitively sense that something is wrong. We conclude that the hypocrite can't *really* believe what he is saying, for if he did, he would do what he is telling others to do. Any instruction or advice he offers us loses its force, and we easily shed his admonitions.

When it comes to spiritual truth, hypocrisy is deadly. It is deadly for the person guilty of hypocrisy because it deceives that person into thinking they are walking in righteousness because they are able to *speak* the truth. Mere words, however, no matter how true, are no evidence that a person is right with God. The life of Balaam shows us that it is possible to speak the very word of God yet be unconverted and living in opposition to true righteousness (see Num 23-24; cf. 2 Tim 3:5-7). When hypocrisy is allowed to grow unchecked in someone's life, that person will become ensnared in greater and greater self-deception, thus endangering their soul (James 1:26). Thinking of themselves as a religious person and morally superior to others while walking in unbroken patterns of sin, the hypocrite is often the most difficult to convince that they need God's grace (Luke 18:9-12).

But hypocrisy is also harmful for the person receiving the insincere counsel because it hinders the recipient from seeing the reality of what is being said. The recipient could reason this way: "If what that person says were true, surely, they would believe and obey it. But they aren't doing what they are telling me to do. Therefore, what they tell me must not be true or important." When a person speaks to us about the power of the gospel, the necessity of faith and obedience, and lays out biblical principles on how to love and please God, all the while living *contrary* to those instructions, we will be tempted to doubt the truth and

significance of what they speak. A hypocrite's words are easily deflected.

When it comes to parenting, we are naïve if we think our children are any different when they sense incongruence between our words and our actions. Indeed, children are uniquely adept at detecting hypocrisy and identifying when what we say doesn't match what we do.

Parenting: A Life of Constant Instruction

Moms and dads are in a precarious position, then, for parenting requires *constant* instruction. Although the form of instruction changes as children grow older (from mostly monologue in the younger years to increasingly more dialogue in the preteen and teenage years), the necessity of regular instruction remains in place until our children leave our homes. This is because God has called parents to raise their children in the fear and discipline of the Lord (Eph 6:4), and this calling requires that we teach our children day in and day out about who God is, how we can be right with him, and how to live according to His Word (Deut 6:1-4).

Whether we are spiritually prepared or not, once that baby emerges from the womb or comes home after the adoption is finalized, he or she must be instructed in spiritual things. We must teach our children how to trust in Christ (Acts 16:31), live a life of wisdom (Eph 5:15-17), and cultivate godly character and conduct (Eph 4:1ff). We need to instruct our children about their hearts and the necessity of love for Christ and love for others (1 Cor 16:22; 1 John 4:20). We will need to discuss the necessity of regeneration (John 3:8), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), humility (James 4:6), joy in God (Ps 43:4), perseverance through trials (Rom 5:1-5), diligence (Prov 13:4; 21:5; Col 3:23) spiritual discipline (1 Tim 4:7), self-control (Prov 25:28), forgiveness (Eph 4:32), and genuine repentance (2 Cor 7:10-13).

It's possible, however, to do *all* of this and yet find our labor mostly ineffective. Why? One possibility is that we've only taken the posture of a teacher and neglected to nurture a genuine relationship with our child. If parents don't have a real relationship with their children, their instruction will often carry the discordant tones of clanging cymbals (1 Cor 13:1-3). Effective parenting joins consistent instruction with warm affection.

But it's also possible that our instruction is ineffective because our hypocrisy has blinded our children from the truth of what we say. We may *know* what is true and recognize that our children need biblical instruction, but if we are unprepared and spiritually immature, our

instruction will largely fall on deaf ears because our children will find it difficult to believe what we say. As I've already noted, children are especially skilled at identifying hypocrisy, and they will quickly conclude that if we are not doing what we tell them to do, there is little reason why they should listen to our admonitions. A hypocritical parent who constantly resorts to the "I'm the parent, that's why" approach to training their children will only create short-lived, superficial obedience. The child will eventually cast off his or her parents' instruction because it was never delivered with the weight of godly sincerity.

The Need for Parental Log Removal

When Jesus instructed His disciples to first remove the log from their own eye before they started working on the speck in their brother's eye (Matt 7:1-5), He certainly wasn't excluding parents in His admonition. Indeed, parental hypocrisy is particularly harmful because children's minds are so tender and easily influenced. Parental hypocrisy in the early childhood and teenage years can create skepticism in the child about the reality of what mom and dad are teaching them. As a result, the child's heart begins to harden toward the Word of God during a time when it is most receptive to it. Christian parents need to take the issue of hypocrisy with the utmost seriousness.

Let's initiate the process of lumber extraction with the following questions.

- Do I teach my children to give others space to talk, but constantly talk over them and get angry when they talk over me?
- Do I admonish my children to stay off screens while I am constantly looking at my phone?
- Do I wax eloquent on time management while spending excessive hours on entertainment?
- Am I exhorting my children not to complain while I fill the home with grumbling about my circumstances, other people, my job, and my trials?
- Do I censure my child's condescending words toward their sibling with words that are equally condescending toward them?
- Do I rebuke them for their tantrums while I regularly exhibit outbursts of anger?
- Do I correct their lying while breaking my promises?

- Do I warn them about the dangers of sexual sin while feeding my own secret lusts?
- Do I reprimand my children for disrespecting their mother while speaking harshly to her?
- Do I teach my children to trust God while I am constantly fretting?
- Do I correct my child's selfishness while getting frustrated that they are getting in the way of what I want to do?
- Do I challenge my teenager's spending habits while cultivating a life of covetousness?

While no parent is sinless, we must all carefully watch over our own lives to make sure that in teaching others, we don't fail to teach ourselves (Rom 2:21). The right sequence, exhibited by Ezra several centuries ago, is first to study God's Word, then practice what it says, *then* teach it to others (Ezra 7:10). Ezra's example does not imply that we must be perfect before we can start parenting, but it does remind us of the proper order: instruction comes *after* learning and personal practice.

But we must be careful that we don't stumble in the opposite direction. We can't use our sin and the possibility of hypocrisy as an excuse not to instruct our children in the ways of the Lord. Jesus tells us to remove the log from our own eyes so that we will *see clearly* in our effort to help our brother (and our children) remove the speck from theirs (Matt 7:5). The goal of log removal is not just our personal sanctification, but the spiritual benefit of those God has entrusted to our care. When we discover hypocrisy in our lives, we must repent from it, ask our children's forgiveness, and use the situation as an opportunity to again show them our need (and their need) for the grace of Christ.

Following the pattern modeled by Ezra, effective parents will be those who cultivate a passion for their own spiritual growth and who go to Scripture with an earnest desire to read, believe, and obey what God's Word teaches. Only parents who are taking their walk with Christ seriously will be able to speak to their children with authenticity about spiritual things.

The first step to consistent parenting, then, is consistent living before God. Spending time daily in Scripture, prayer, and biblical meditation is crucial (2 Tim 3:16-17; Ps 1:1-6; 19:6-11). Our hearts are the source of all our actions (Prov 4:23), and only hearts that are full of

God's Word will be full of the Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Col 3:16-17; Eph 5:18-20; Gal 5:22-23).

Furthermore, if we neglect our relationship with God, we will find ourselves laboring in our own strength and according to our own wisdom. This is a sure recipe for parental disaster. Relying on our own strength, we will begin to feel easily angry or easily defeated in the face of parenting's constant challenges. Relying on our own wisdom, we will implement practices, form habits, and create household routines that hinder our child's spiritual health and growth.

Second, prioritizing the local church is vital, for we cannot maintain our spiritual life or grow as parents without the regular preaching of the Word, corporate worship, and fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ (Heb 3:12-15; 10:22-25). Christian husbands and wives cannot conclude that they can parent their children effectively without the local church because they can hold each other accountable.

While it is true that marriage is wonderful for accountability, the assumption that marriage can replace the local church is simply wrong-headed. The Scripture never qualifies its command to prioritize their local church by exempting married couples. Actually, it is far too easy for husbands and wives, isolated from the local church, to become a law unto themselves, reaffirming and reinforcing each other's sub-biblical ideas about parenting. Solomon reminds us:

> Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment (Prov 18:1).

This warning is for all Christians, including married couples with children.

Finally, maintaining a cadence of regular confession of sin to God (1 John 1:9; Ps 51) and others (James 5:16) is foundational to a healthy walk with Christ.

A Serious Antidote to Hypocrisy: Asking for Your Child's Forgiveness

Indeed, one of the best weapons against parental hypocrisy is regularly asking our children's forgiveness if we have sinned against them, including instances when we have failed to obey the same biblical instructions we require of them. Sadly, I've met adult Christians who report that their parents—even as believers—never admitted to sinning against them and therefore never asked for their forgiveness.

It is possible that these parents did not believe it was appropriate for parents to ask for their child's forgiveness, because in asking for forgiveness, they are weakening their parental authority. This is a skewed understanding of parental authority, however, because it does not take into account that parents, though endowed by God with authority over their children (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20), are still sinners who *will* sin against the members of their family, including their children. In truth, confessing our sin to our children when we've sinned against them and asking their forgiveness *enhances* our authority because it builds trust, respect, and love between us and our children, and it shows our children that mommy and daddy need the gospel, just like they do.

But while it is possible that an unwillingness to ask for our child's forgiveness may come from a wrong view of parental authority, it is more likely that our reluctance is rooted in ungodly self-righteousness and pride. The truth is that we simply do not want to admit to our children that we are wrong. It is humbling when you must go to your child—the one whom you are constantly teaching, correcting, and admonishing—and admit that you don't always live up to the standard you require of them. What we want is a self-righteous "edge" in the relationship where we are seen as our children's moral superiors.

But this approach to parenting is contrary to the gospel. The gospel tells us that every family member is a sinner to the core, worthy of God's wrath, and, apart from Christ, undeserving of any of God's blessings (Rom 3:10-12; Eph 2:1-3). But the gospel also tells us that we are saved entirely by God's grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, apart from our works (Rom 3:21-26; 4:5; 5:1; Eph 2:8-9). Our righteousness, therefore, is found wholly in Christ and not in ourselves (Phil 3:7-11). By refusing to ask our child's forgiveness when we've sinned against them, we are essentially telling them that a person is saved by their own righteousness—that we must hide our sin because salvation depends upon maintaining flawless character.

But when we admit our fault and ask for our child's forgiveness, we are allowing them to see that we are not relying upon our own righteousness to be right with God—we are trusting in Christ alone. We don't need to merely *appear* godly: we can admit our sins freely because we know that we are saved by grace alone, apart from our works.

All of this assumes, however, that we are asking forgiveness for actual sins. It is not holy or humble to admit to things we haven't done, grovel over non-sins, or apologize for not satisfying our children's preferences. God does not want us to fear our children or try to appease

their every desire. The parent-to-child authority structure must always remain in place.

When we exercise our rightful authority over our children, they may not always like it. Some of our decisions may not always be popular. If we are making a wise and biblical decision that is good for our children but doesn't meet their approval, we need not (and must not) apologize to them. This kind of false humility *will* undermine our parental authority. Asking our children's forgiveness for real sins will not.

Conclusion

Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the Pharisees because their hypocrisy was like leaven: even a little bit could influence their walk with the Lord (Matt 16:6). This principle holds true in our homes. A little hypocrisy can easily infect our children's spiritual lives. Over time and with enough exposure, they will begin to doubt the power of the gospel and the veracity of God's Word. Why? Because if Scripture is not working to change us, they reason, why would it ever work to change them? They will mistake external righteousness for vital faith, conclude that a verbal profession and outward religious activity are sufficient to secure their place in heaven, and get comfortable with honoring God with their lips while keeping their hearts far from Him.

While even the most sincere parents can't guarantee the authenticity of their child's walk with Christ, hypocrisy will do much to hinder true faith. Our calling as parents, then, is to labor diligently to remove the logs from our own eyes so that we can see clearly to help our children with their spiritual lives and provide them with examples that can say, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). But we cannot do this on our own. We must, like David, cry out to God to search our hearts.

> Search me, O God, and know my heart!
> Try me and know my thoughts!
> And see if there be any grievous way in me,
> and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps 139:23-24)

These are prayers that our Father is happy to answer, for they will bring Him much glory as we walk more consistently in love and obedience. Let us ask God, then, to assist us in locating and extracting sin from our spiritual vision, so that we might truly show Christ to our children and train them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Chapter 18

LEADING YOUR FAMILY THROUGH TRIALS

By Stephen Salinas

The Power of Leadership

I was 17 years old when terrorists hijacked four commercial planes and turned them into weapons to attack the United States.

On September 11th, 2001, I remember waking up and getting ready for my classes when my mom told me to turn on the TV. As soon as the TV powered on, I tried to make sense of the snarled metal and billowing smoke that I was seeing. At this point, the Twin Towers had already been hit. The South Tower had just collapsed and shortly thereafter the North Tower collapsed as well.

Seeing the chaos and destruction play out on live tv as people ran from falling debris and disappeared in a cloud of dust, I remember tears welling up in my eyes. I remember feeling a mix of sadness, anger, and fear.

Sadness at the tragic loss of human life. Anger at the thought that terrorists who hated America caused this to happen. And fear that we were clearly vulnerable as a nation and feeling helpless in the face of the unknown. How could this happen? Were there more attacks planned? Could it happen where I lived in the Bay Area? Was my family safe? Was I safe?

That prevailing mood of sadness and fear carried on for months. The nation was going through an incredibly trying time and Americans were hurting and scared.

However, I vividly remember stirring displays of leadership that gave glimmers of hope. I distinctly remember President George W. Bush visiting Ground Zero several days after the attack and meeting with rescue workers. Here's what he said in an impromptu speech[1]:

> President Bush: Thank you all. I want you all to know -- it [the bullhorn] can't go any louder -- I want you all to know that America today, America today is on bended knee, in prayer for the people whose lives were lost here, for the workers who work here, for the families who mourn. The nation stands with the good people of New York City and New Jersey and Connecticut as we mourn the loss of thousands of our citizens.
>
> Rescue Worker: I can't hear you!
>
> President Bush: I can hear you! I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people -- and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!
>
> President Bush: The nation -- The nation sends its love and compassion --
>
> Rescue Worker: God bless America!
>
> President Bush: -- to everybody who is here. Thank you for your hard work. Thank you for making the nation proud, and may God bless America.
>
> Rescue Workers: [Chanting] U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

That small gesture was a ray of hope that we were not in this alone. Now, I'm not commenting on the war in Iraq or other decisions he made during his presidency, but I will say that President Bush's leadership during that nation-wide trial was inspiring and helpful. In the midst of the sadness, he helped foster a sense of unity across the nation

[1] Transcript from https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911groundzerobullhorn.htm

that I've never seen before or since. Bush's approval rating soared from ~60% to 92% for the four months after the attack.

Leadership during trials matters. As couples and as parents, how we respond to trials impacts our families.

Husbands—how you respond to trials directly impacts your wife and your children. Your leadership of your wife and children sets the tone for the entire family.

Wives—how you respond to trials directly impacts your husband and your children. Your leadership of your children sets the tone for their response.

Unfortunately, trials are a fact of life. They are unavoidable and should be expected. In the Book of Job, we see:

> But man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7).

In this fallen, sin-tainted world, every person will encounter trouble as surely as the sparks fly upward from a fire.

When we're using the word "trial" what are we talking about? Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines a trial as "a test of faith, patience, or stamina through subjection to suffering or temptation." That's a pretty good definition. The Greek word that is translated as "trial" in the New Testament is *peirasmos* and it is defined as a temptation or a test. That's what trials are; they can be a test that we can pass or a temptation that we can succumb to depending on our response. We can encounter trials in a variety of ways:

- **Health** – Sickness, pain, loss of mobility, weakness, death, etc.
- **Financial** – Loss of income, unexpected costs, losing money in an investment, etc.
- **Job** – Losing a job, having a bad boss, work projects not going well, lazy teammates, etc.
- **Relational** – Strife in marriage, children not following the Lord, loss of friends, betrayal, etc.
- **Sin** – Consequences for your own sin, being sinned against by family, friends, coworkers, strangers, etc.
- **Persecution** – Being persecuted by the world for following the Lord.
- **Possessions** – Loss of material possessions by fire, theft, flooding, an accident, etc.
- **Inconvenience** – Traffic causing you to be late for an important meeting, getting a cold before a trip, etc.

Your perspective on and response to trials can either lead your family closer to God or further from Him.

Your Perspective on Trials

Your worldview is the lens through which you view life. How you perceive trials can have a huge impact on how you respond to them. There are foolish ways to think about trials and there are wise ways to think about them.

Here are foolish ways to view trials:

Trials Result from Randomness or Bad Luck – Believing that there is no rhyme or reason to why you are experiencing a trial.

God Is Punishing You – Assuming that every bad thing in your life is the result of God punishing you for specific sins. While there are cases in the Bible when God used trials in response to specific sin (e.g., David and Bathsheba), we should not automatically presume that a specific trial is due to a specific sin. For example, Job experienced crushing trials that had nothing to do with sin.

Trials Are Rare – Thinking that it is out of the ordinary for bad things to happen or being surprised when things don't go the way you want.

Your Trials Are Unique – Believing no one can understand or relate to your trial because it is a unique, one-of-a-kind trial.

Trials Are Pointless – Seeing trials as having no intended cause. Believing they are meaningless and unnecessary.

You Are on Your Own – Believing that you are left to fend for yourself in your trials and that God is not there to help you.

Trials Only Produce Bad Results – Having a pessimistic view that only focuses on the negative effects of trials.

Let's look at the truth of God's Word to give us wisdom in how to think about trials. Here are wise ways to view trials:

Trials Are Common

> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were

happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Pet 4:12-13).

Trials Are Necessary for the Believer

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Pet 1:6-9).

Trials Are Temporary

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Rom 8:18).

God Is in Control of All Things and Works Trials for Your Good

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).

Trials Are Not Necessarily Due to Sin

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:1-3)

Trials Refine Us and Mold Us into the Image of Christ

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that

> you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

Believers Are Overcomers in Christ/Nothing Will Separate Us from Christ

> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:31-39).

When trials strike, the first step you need to take is making sure you're keeping the right perspective. If you have wrong thinking about what is happening, that will influence your heart, which will in turn influence your words and actions.

If you dwell on incorrect thoughts that God has abandoned you, you will spiral into despair. If you lose sight of the fact that God is in control of trials, fear of the unknown will grip you. That will color your reactions and how you respond to trials. That will impact your spouse and your kids.

Dwelling on what is true is crucial. God hasn't abandoned you. He's in control. He has your best interest at heart. He will not allow anything to happen that is not ultimately for your good, even if you can't see how that is possible. He's there to comfort you in your pain.

Husbands – set the tone by keeping a correct perspective. Frame things for your wife and your children from a biblical context.

Wives – encourage your husband by keeping the right perspective. Frame things for your kids from a biblical perspective.

Let's look at how our response to trials impacts our families.

Your Response to Trials

Going through a trial is hard enough on your own. However, as husbands, wives, and parents, we are inextricably bound to our families. Even if we have a personal trial we're going through, we never truly go through it alone. How we respond to trials has a massive impact on our families.

For example, most of my trials for the past ten or fifteen years have been related to my work. There were many benefits of working in the tech industry, but it was always extremely stressful. I tend to respond to stress by internalizing it. I don't lash out. I don't get mad. I get quiet. I'm in my head thinking about my next steps in a trial. However, that impacted my family by me not being as present as I could have been at times. I was not physically missing family activities or kids' sports events, but I was in my own head a lot and not as joyful or outgoing as I could have been. That had an impact on my wife and kids.

There are many foolish ways as well as wise ways to respond to trials. How you choose to respond impacts your wife or your husband and your kids.

Let's look at foolish ways of reacting first:

Seeking Comfort in Anything Besides God – Retail therapy (e.g., shopping to make yourself feel better), self-medication with alcohol and drugs, having a "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die" mentality.

Neglecting the Word – Not having an appetite for the Bible. When you're hurting, sometimes you feel spiritually dry and you may be tempted to not read your Bible.

Neglecting Prayer – Again, when you feel spiritually dry, you may not feel a desire to speak with God. Maybe you're upset with Him or just feel numb.

Dwelling on Your Problems – Obsessing over your problems. I do this all the time. I'm a problem solver, so I think about things over and over and over until I can resolve them. This oftentimes is not helpful and can lead to anxiety or catastrophizing (e.g., jumping to the worst-case scenario.)

Isolating – Secluding yourself from others. Maybe you don't want to let others see you hurting because you don't want to be vulnerable.

Doing Nothing – Being passive and shutting down.

Blaming Your Spouse – Unfairly blaming your husband or wife for things outside of their control (e.g., if your child walks away from the faith).

Now, let's look at the truth of God's Word to help us respond to trials in wisdom.

Here are wise ways of responding to trials:

Seeking Comfort in the Lord – God is the only source of comfort that can truly satisfy us and give us true peace during a trial.

> The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe (Prov 18:10).
>
> Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! (Ps 37:3-7)

Immersing Yourself in the Word – God's Word transforms our thinking and gives us truth to dwell on amid our suffering.

> My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word! When I told of my ways, you answered me; teach me your statutes! Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works. My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word! Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law! I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me. I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame! I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart! (Ps 119:25-32)

Dwelling on Your Blessings in Christ – Rather than obsessing over our problems, we can dwell on the truth of all the invaluable resources we have in Christ to overcome our trials.

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph 1:3-10).

Praying for Help – Don't try to handle your trial alone; cry out to God for help. Trust that He hears you, He cares for you, and He's working on your behalf.

> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Phil 4:6).

> Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Pet 5:7).

> The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (James 5:16b).

Staying Connected to the Church – God has blessed us with church leaders and fellow believers in Christ to help bear our burdens. Seek counsel and encouragement from the elders of your church and other brothers and sisters in the Lord.

> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

Seeking Wisdom – God delights in answering our prayers for wisdom. He will pour out His wisdom on us to help us navigate our trials in a way that honors Him.

> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:5-8).

Our response is either going to pull us further away from God or draw us closer to Him. How will we be shaped by our perspective and response to trials?

Your Outcomes from Trials

When we encounter trials, how we think about them will directly influence how we respond to them. And how we respond to them will impact ourselves and our family. In that sense, every trial is like a "choose your own adventure."

Now, by that, I'm not saying that we control our destiny. God is in control of every trial and is working everything in the life of a believer for good. However, the choices we make can take us down a path to blessing, spiritual growth, and a deeper walk with the Lord. Or, conversely, they can take us down a dark road of self-inflicted pain, backsliding, and withdrawing from the Lord.

Let's look at foolish outcomes from trials:

A Heart That Is Further from God – Sinful responses to trials can damage our relationship with the Lord. If we're truly saved, we can never sever that relationship and lose our salvation. However, we can grieve the Lord and have a more distant relationship with Him for a season.

Increased Bitterness/Worldliness – Wrong responses to trials can damage your soul. They can leave you more bitter and angry. They can drive you further into the arms of the godless world system in a futile attempt to find joy or peace apart from God.

Loss of Heavenly Rewards – As we just mentioned, true believers can never lose their salvation. However, they can lose out on eternal rewards. Our sinful responses were dealt with on the cross of Christ when God poured out His wrath on Christ for our sin. However, our neutral non-spiritual responses will burn up when we stand before Christ. Only our righteous actions that are honoring to Him will remain.

Lack of Confidence in Salvation – If we pull away from God, we will experience a lack of assurance of salvation which can be terrifying. We won't feel the nearness of God, which may cause us to question our faith.

Steering Your Family Away from God – Responding foolishly to trials models behavior that could push your family further from God. Remember, your responses don't impact you alone; they also impact your whole family.

Our responses to trials can result in wise spiritual outcomes for us (regardless of our physical circumstances) if we respond in faith and obedience.

Let's look at wise outcomes from trials:

A Closer Walk with God – Trials can bring us to our knees and into the arms of God. If we cling to God and draw near to Him, we can experience an increasing closeness with Him that we may not have experienced if all was going well.

> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (James 4:8).

Spiritual Growth – Trials refine us and sanctify us. If we turn to the Lord during our suffering, we can grow tremendously in spiritual maturity.

> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

Heavenly Rewards – A right response to trials can result in eternal, spiritual rewards in heaven that far outweigh any temporary comfort we can possess on earth.

> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has

> built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor 3:11-15).

Assurance of Salvation – As gold is refined in fire and impurities removed, so is our faith refined in trials. As God sustains us through the fire, the genuineness of our salvation becomes apparent.

> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:6-7).

With that biblical foundation in place, how can we practically apply all these truths when we're in the midst of a trial?

Practical Tips for Leading Your Family Through Trials

Leading your family through trials takes great wisdom and there isn't a cookie-cutter response for every family. Every trial is different and every family is different. However, here are some practical principles to consider when leading children through a trial:

Shield – Protect kids from what is age-inappropriate, unhelpful, or unnecessary for them to know about. There's a lot that your kids don't need to be aware of as it may not be helpful for them. For example, if your child is five, they don't need to know about your financial problems. That may cause them undue stress and they may not have the maturity to handle it. Or, if you are experiencing marital problems, your kids don't need to know about that. Where it makes sense to shield them, you should.

Model – When it's age appropriate, helpful, or unavoidable for them to be aware of the trial, you should show kids what a godly response to trials looks like through your example. You don't need to bring them in on all the gory details but giving them a high-level understanding of the issue and then explaining a biblical framing of the issue can be helpful. Model prayer with them and looking to God's Word for the answers. Model faith that trusts God even if we don't know the outcome of a trial. Explain how God has been gracious during an

ongoing trial. For example, if dad has lost his job and he's no longer going into the office, you can let them know that dad isn't working there anymore and is looking for another job, but you know God will take care of the family. In doing this, be sure not to burden them. ("Well, our finances are pretty much shot, so I hope we'll be able to eat next week.")

Guide – One of the hardest parts of parenting is when your kids are going through their own trials. It could be bullying at school, anxiety over sports, or even their own health issues. Especially as they get older, teaching kids to navigate trials rather than rescuing them from them helps them become more independent.

One of my kids is a thinker. In fact, he's an overthinker. He loves sports, but sometimes he gets anxious before a big game. Instead of swooping in and rescuing him by telling he doesn't have to play, we've tried to give him a biblical perspective of anxiety to navigate through those trials. We've shared verses of giving our anxieties up to God in prayer. We've talked about how we can trust God for the outcome. We've prayed with and for him. We've talked about not dwelling on things that aren't true or helpful. Now, when he's feeling anxious, he'll pull out his Bible or ask us to pray with him. Framing the right perspective for kids and giving them the tools to respond in a way that honors God helps them become more independent in their faith. It keeps them from being blindsided by life when they step out on their own.

Conclusion

Trials are never easy. They're always painful and unwanted. However, keeping a biblical perspective of trials will help us to have a biblical response. And having a biblical response can positively benefit ourselves and our families.

Even if we can't always see it in the moment, God's faithfulness is on full display during trials. Drawing near to Him and seeing how He shows Himself faithful can further strengthen your family. Don't waste your trials. Use your trials for God's glory and your good.

Chapter 19

BATTLE FOR THE HEART: RESISTING THE CORRUPTION OF MAN'S WISDOM AND THE DECEIT OF FALSE TEACHERS

By Bob Douglas

Introduction

Across every generation, the church has faced a subtle but dangerous influence: the infiltration of man-based wisdom into the minds of believers. It was true in the first century when the Apostle Paul battled worldly ideas that crept into the early church. In Corinth, he confronted those who exalted human wisdom over the wisdom of God. In Colossae, he warned against being taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit (Col 2:8). In Rome, he urged believers not to be "conformed to this world but transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2a). The same battle continues today. Too often, Christians knowingly or unknowingly adopt secular ideas about the "self," borrowing from psychology, philosophy, or modern theories that exclude God altogether. These systems promise understanding but are rooted in human reasoning rather than divine revelation. When the people of God begin to view humanity through the lens of man's wisdom instead of God's Word, they lose sight of how Scripture defines the inner person. This chapter seeks to expose that drift and

remind believers that only God's Word reveals the true nature of man: the way He designed, defines, and redeems the human soul.

This drift is not confined to the academy or the culture at large—it is often present within the home. Parents, often unitentionally, adopt these same man-centered frameworks in how they raise their children, addressing outward behavior, emotional responses, or developmental patterns while neglecting the heart—the very place Scripture identifies as the source of life and conduct. In doing so, what is seen is corrected while what is unseen remains unchanged.

This is not merely a matter of doctrine, but of discipleship. How parents understand the heart will shape how they instruct, correct, and shepherd their children. If the heart is misunderstood, parenting itself will be misdirected.

From ancient Greece to modern psychology, humanity has labored to explain itself. Philosophers, scientists, and thinkers have built countless models to describe what makes a person think, feel, and act. In each, they divide the "self" into ever-changing parts: reason and appetite, id and ego, conscious and subconscious, system one and system two. Yet through every era, these frameworks have shifted with culture, contradicted one another, and failed to provide a stable understanding of man. What unites them, beyond their inconsistency, is their blindness to divine revelation, a blindness Scripture exposes:

> The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers (2 Cor 4:4a).

Because they reject God's truth, worldly philosophies cannot understand how man was created to function, what has gone wrong within him, or how true moral transformation occurs. They misdefine the design, misinterpret the problem, and therefore misdirect the cure.

In contrast, the Bible presents a clear and unchanging view of humanity because it comes from the Creator Himself. According to Scripture, man is made of body and soul. These two united elements form one whole person. The soul (or spirit) is the entire immaterial being, the living, thinking, and feeling self, made to know and love God. Entailed in the soul is the heart. The heart is the governing center of life, and the seat of intellect, emotion, and will. The mind is the soul's thinking faculty, expressing its desires and convictions through understanding and reason. The heart is therefore not a fragment of the soul but its very core, directing every thought, feeling, and decision

(Prov 4:23; 23:7; Matt 12:34-35). The heart, though created by God to bear His image, is corrupted by sin, and it is this truth that human wisdom fails to grasp (Jer 17:9). Yet the same heart/soul, when renewed by divine grace (Ezek 36:26), becomes the very place where God's transforming work begins—a reality that no human philosophy comprehends.

Unlike man's ideas, which constantly shift and contradict one another, God's design remains steadfast. Scripture speaks with one voice across all generations, identifying the same human problem—sin—and offering the same divine solution: transformation through faith in Christ. God's Word does not merely describe behavior; it reveals the spiritual root beneath it.

The Inconsistency of Human Philosophy

Throughout history, human wisdom has struggled to define what it means to be a person. Across centuries, thinkers have divided and redefined the human constitution, offering fragmentary explanations that contradict both one another and observable reality.

This same error is often carried into the home. When the heart is ignored, children are treated as problems to be managed rather than souls to be shepherded. External behavior becomes the focus, while the inner person, the true source of thought, desire, and action, remains unaddressed. In such an approach, outward conformity may be achieved, but inward transformation is left untouched.

Plato divided the soul into three parts—the rational, the spirited, and the appetitive—each representing conflicting drives within a person.[1] Freud later proposed the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, arguing that unconscious desires shape behavior through internal tension.[2] Nearly a century later, Daniel Kahneman described human thought as two systems: one intuitive and impulsive, the other deliberate and analytical.[3] While these theories vary in sophistication, they share the same fatal flaw: they are based only in human observation rather than divine revelation. None provide a coherent, unified understanding of what man is, or how he operates. Each dissects the human mind while

[1] Plato, *Republic.*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 435a –441c.

[2] Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 19 (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 25-27.

[3] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 22-45.

ignoring the heart: the moral and volitional center of thought, will, and affection. As a result, secular anthropology is not merely incomplete; it is unstable, fragmenting the person it seeks to explain.

This inconsistency extends beyond man's understanding of himself to his understanding of right and wrong, good and evil. Human philosophy cannot agree on the foundation of morality because it rejects the authority of God as the ultimate standard of truth. Aristotle saw virtue as a habit cultivated through rational practice.[4] Immanuel Kant grounded morality in rational duty, insisting that moral law arises from reason alone.[5] David Hume dismissed reason altogether, claiming that moral judgment flows from emotion and sentiment.[6] Nietzsche went further, declaring morality a human invention—a tool of the weak to restrain the strong.[7] Across these systems, morality shifts from reason to feeling, from duty to desire, never finding a stable anchor. Scripture, by contrast, declares: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10). True morality flows not from reason or emotion, but from the Creator who defines good and evil.

If this truth is not established within the home, children will inevitably absorb the unstable moral reasoning of the world. Parents must therefore anchor their children not in preference or feeling, but in the fear of the Lord, which alone provides a fixed and enduring standard.

The same instability appears in secular explanations of sin. Modern psychology often reduces sin to dysfunction or guilt to neurosis. Freud described moral conflict as an internalized repression rather than a moral failing. Jung reinterpreted evil as the "shadow," an unacknowledged part of the self to be harmonized rather than repented of.[8] Robert Allen viewed human behavior as cognitive habit, dismissing moral responsibility as outdated.[9] Nietzsche exalted human will as the

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[4] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 408:a1-11.

[5] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-38.

[6] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169-171.

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 12-19.

[8] Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul,* trans. W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1933), 47-50.

[9] James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903), 19-21.

highest virtue, rejecting sin altogether as a relic of weakness.[10] In each case, man's problem is redefined to avoid the diagnosis of Scripture. Yet, the Bible speaks plainly: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick" (Jer 17:9a). Sin is not an error in perception or social conditioning—it is rebellion against God Himself. And "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Again, when parents carry these beliefs into the home, biblical truth is compromised or redefined and discipline loses its clarity. A child's disobedience is no longer understood as the outworking of the heart, but as something external to be managed. Yet, Scripture directs parents deeper—to address not only what the child has done, but what the child desires and believes.

Finally, every secular model of change depends on human effort. Plato's reason, Kant's will, and Freud's therapy all rest on the assumption that man can reform himself. Scripture exposes this as folly. Jeremiah asks, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jer 13:23). True change does not arise from human striving but from divine transformation. Jesus declares, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3b). Philosophy promises progress; the gospel promises rebirth. The former reshapes behavior; the latter renews the heart.

Human wisdom, with all of its supposed "sophistication" remains bound by the blindness of sin. It analyzes the fragments of the human person while denying the Creator who unites them. It proposes countless cures without diagnosing the disease. Only Scripture reveals both the source of man's corruption and the means of his restoration. The contrast is not merely intellectual—it is moral and spiritual. One begins with man and ends in confusion; the other begins with God and ends in truth.

These shifting systems reveal not only the instability of human wisdom but its blindness to divine design. By isolating reason from revelation and behavior from the heart, man misunderstands both his own nature and his deepest need. What philosophy cannot grasp, Scripture makes clear: the problem lies not in man's intellect but in his heart, and the answer is not found in new theories, but in the transforming wisdom of God.

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[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 46-51.

This distinction is critical in parenting. It is possible to train a child to conform outwardly while the heart remains unchanged. Scripture calls parents to aim beyond compliance, toward the transformation that only God can bring.

The Steadfastness of the Biblical Model

Unlike human theories that divide and redefine man, Scripture stands apart, presenting a unified and enduring truth about who we are and why we need redemption. Scripture's view of man is not fragmented, as the world's philosophies are, but whole and consistent. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible portrays the same moral structure: man is created in God's image, corrupted by sin, and capable of renewal only through divine grace. The moral foundation of Scripture is rooted in God's unchanging character, not in human culture or consensus. What is right or wrong does not depend on shifting opinion but on the changeless character of God Himself (Mal 3:6). Therefore, biblical truth requires no revision; its constancy reveals its divine origin.

For parents, this provides clarity and direction. The task is not to manage isolated behaviors, but to shepherd the whole person, including the heart from which all behavior flows. When this is understood, parenting moves beyond correction in those early toddler years (Eph 6:1) into discipleship.

At the center of this biblical model is the diagnosis of sin. Scripture does not describe man's problem as ignorance, repression, or lack of education—it declares that the heart itself is corrupt (Jer 17:9). Every human being is born with a heart turned away from God, unable to change by human effort (Jer 13:23). No philosophy, therapy, or moral training can cleanse what is spiritually diseased. True change requires more than reformation—it requires regeneration. This reality must shape how parents understand their children. The issue is not merely what a child does, but what the child loves, believes, and desires. Therefore, correction must not end with behavior, but must press into the heart, where the true issue resides. Parents cannot produce this transformation, but they are called to faithfully point their children to the One who can. Their role is not to change the heart, but to expose its need and direct it toward Christ, where true renewal begins.

Through the promise of the New Covenant, God provides what human wisdom cannot: a new heart and spirit. "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezek 36:26). This is not the creation of a third part in man, but the supernatural renewal of the same inner person. The Holy Spirit transforms the heart, renewing

the mind and restoring the soul's relationship with God (Eph 2:8–9; Titus 3:5; Rom 12:2). As Paul wrote, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (Phil 2:13). Human wisdom may call for self-improvement, but the gospel calls for new birth.[11] The difference is eternal: man's wisdom trusts in himself; God's wisdom transforms the heart.

The Heart

The Bible refers to the heart more than 700 times, sometimes literally, but most often as the spiritual core of human existence, the center of one's inner life—the true seat of intellect, emotion, and will. Proverbs 4:23 instructs, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." The heart, then, is the fountainhead of character and conduct. Every word, action, and motive originates from within. It is the wellspring from which life—or corruption—flows. This truth establishes the foundation of biblical parenting. What a child does flows from what is within. Therefore, parents must not be content to correct actions alone, but must seek to understand and shepherd the heart from which those actions arise. Behavior is the fruit; the heart is the root.

The Structure of the Heart

The heart unites three faculties that define personhood: intellect, emotion, and will.

- The **intellect** represents the heart's capacity to think and reason: "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov 23:7).
- The **emotion** expresses its ability to feel and respond: "Therefore my heart was glad" (Acts 2:26).
- The **will** is the capacity to choose and act: Daniel resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself (Dan 1:8) / "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom 10:1).

These are not competing parts but integrated functions of one inner being. The heart thinks, feels, and decides as a single center of moral and spiritual life. Whatever the heart treasures, determines the direction of one's life (Luke 6:45)

[11] In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus he needs rebirth. This comes by believing the gospel that Apostle Paul clearly outlines in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

In raising children, parents must recognize and engage each of these faculties. Children must be taught not only what is right, but how to think rightly, what to love rightly, and how to choose rightly. Without this, obedience may be external and temporary, but the heart remains unchanged. Biblical parenting, therefore, addresses the whole inner person, not merely outward conduct.

The Condition of the Heart

Every person's heart is shaped by what it loves. A heart set on the flesh produces sin; a heart renewed by grace produces righteousness. The unbelieving heart is darkened and resistant to truth (Rom 1:21), bound to self and sin. The believing heart, by contrast, is softened, responsive, and made alive to God through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Rom 8:10–11). The difference is not one of capacity—both hearts can think, feel, and will—but of condition: one ruled by rebellion, the other renewed by grace.

This reality is often most visible in children. Their actions reveal their affections: what they desire, what they fear, what they value. Wise parents learn to look beyond behavior and discern the loves that are shaping it. A child who sins is not merely acting wrongly; he is loving wrongly. Therefore, the aim is not only to restrain behavior, but to redirect the heart.

The Expression of the Heart

What flows out of the heart reveals its true condition. Jesus declared, "From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts" (Mark 7:21). The problem of humanity is not external circumstance but internal corruption. The heart is the origin of our desires, reactions, and words. It is the root that produces the fruit of our lives. For this reason, Scripture repeatedly calls believers to examine what comes out of them—to measure words, actions, and motives against the truth of God's Word (2 Cor 13:5)

This principle must guide parenting. When a child lies, disobeys, or reacts in anger, the issue is not merely the act itself, but what the act reveals. The heart is expressing what it believes and desires. Therefore, discipline must not stop at correction, but must lead the child to consider what is within and to see the sin, to understand it, and to turn from it.

This stands in sharp contrast to the message of the modern world. Contemporary philosophy and psychology often teach that what flows from within defines authenticity—that self-expression is the highest

virtue and should be embraced without restraint. But Scripture reveals that what flows from within us, apart from God's grace, is not authenticity but depravity. The world says, "Follow your heart." God says, "Guard your heart." The world says, "Be true to yourself." God says, "Deny yourself." True wisdom does not affirm what arises from within; it exposes it. The believer is called not to justify what is natural but to submit what is inward to what is holy. In parenting, this means children must not be taught to trust what naturally arises within them, but to examine it in light of God's Word. They must learn that not every desire is right, not every thought is true, and not every impulse should be followed.

Guarding the Heart

Because the heart governs life, Scripture commands believers to guard it diligently. Guarding the heart means guarding what we allow to influence it. "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Prov 4:23). This instruction includes what the mind entertains, what the eyes see, and what the ears hear. Every idea, desire, and emotion must be filtered through the truth of Scripture. Paul exhorts, "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor 10:5b). This kind of vigilance is not mere moral discipline; it is spiritual discernment. To guard the heart is to resist the pull of worldly thinking that normalizes sin and to remain tender to the conviction of the Spirit. Too often, however, believers fail to guard the heart—allowing the world's wisdom to shape their thinking where God's wisdom should reign. As parents this responsibility extends directly to the home. Parents must guard not only their own hearts, but also the influences shaping their children's hearts—what they see, hear, and are taught. Every influence either strengthens truth or feeds error. What is allowed to take root in the heart will, in time, shape the life.

Guarding the heart also requires honest self-examination. When our conduct strays, we must look inward rather than outward. Behavior is never random—it is the fruit of belief. Wrong actions reveal wrong affections; sinful choices expose misplaced trust. The believer must not excuse these as "expressions of authenticity" as the world does but confront them as evidence of the flesh at work. The world says, "Be true to yourself." God says, "Examine yourself." Authenticity is not measured by expressing what we feel but by submitting what we feel to the lens of God's Word. This is a truth parents must continually remember. When correction is needed, the goal is not merely to stop

behavior, but to uncover and address the belief or desire driving it. Without this, correction remains superficial and temporary.

When sin or compromise is exposed, Scripture gives a clear path forward: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2). This is the call to action. After taking every thought captive, the believer must allow God's truth to reshape those thoughts through repentance and renewal. Transformation is not behavior management; it is the Spirit's work of renewing the mind so that the heart's desires align with God's will. Parents must train their children to think in this way and to evaluate their thoughts, desires, and decisions in light of Scripture, rather than instinct or culture.

The Word of God accomplishes this transformation. It cuts through pretense, exposes what is false, purifies what is corrupt, and renews what is surrendered (Heb 4:12). As the heart is confronted by Scripture, the believer learns to reject worldly patterns of thought and embrace the mind of Christ. In this way, guarding the heart becomes more than protection—it becomes participation in God's transforming work. This is why Scripture must be central in the home—not merely as a means of correction, but as the instrument through which the heart is exposed, instructed, and renewed.

The Renewal of the Heart

The great miracle of redemption is that God renews what sin destroyed. The heart that once loved darkness begins to love truth. The will that resisted God begins to submit. The mind that was clouded by sin is enlightened by grace. This transformation is not self-improvement or psychological adjustment, but true spiritual rebirth. As Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). The gospel does not call us to accept ourselves as we are but to become what we were created to be: people whose hearts are made new by the power of the Spirit. Therefore, the aim of parenting is not merely well-behaved children, but children whose hearts are increasingly aligned with truth—who begin to love what is right and turn from what is sinful.

Wolves, Ear-Ticklers & Con Men

This warning is not only for individual believers but for parents as well. What children are taught both inside and outside the home will shape their understanding of truth, sin, and God. Parents must therefore be vigilant, guarding their children from voices that distort the gospel and mislead the heart.

Guarding our heart is not solely awareness of worldliness and man-based philosophy. Unfortunately, we must also beware of wolves, ear-ticklers, and con men inside the church. Those who twist the truth to enrich themselves or are purveyors of false doctrine that lead people away from the truth of God's Word. Just as Paul battled against man-based philosophy, he also contended with false apostles and deceitful workers who distorted the gospel for personal gain (2 Cor 11:13–15; Gal 1:6–9; Acts 20:29–30), so the modern church faces those who twist the message of Christ to suit worldly appetites. Men and women like Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, John Ortberg, Brian McLaren, Richard Rohr, and others have reshaped biblical truth into self-help, mysticism, and psychological spirituality—all at the expense of the gospel. Though they wear the clothing of Christian teachers, their message denies the cross, redefines sin, and presents a gospel centered on man rather than on Christ. As Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matt 7:15). Their words may sound uplifting, but their fruits lead to deception, spiritual apathy, and eternal loss. Beyond the heresy of salvation through works, they are con men enriching themselves by fleecing the flock (Ezek 34:2–4).

Solomon warned, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4:23). The heart is not a playground for popular theology—it is the battlefield of eternal consequence. False teachers are not merely mistaken; they are dangerous. They "secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Pet 2:1) and "pervert the grace of our God into sensuality" (Jude 4). They appeal to human reason, emotion, and desire, promising spirituality without submission and grace without repentance. Their language is charming, their theology deadly.

Prosperity and Therapeutic Faith – Joel Osteen & Joyce Meyer

Osteen and Meyer have built global empires by blending biblical language with the self-help optimism of the modern age. In their best-selling books *Your Best Life Now*[12] and *Battlefield of the Mind,*[13] faith is reduced to a formula for personal success and emotional wellness. The gospel becomes a tool for self-improvement rather than a call to die to self. The theology of these two con men (or con woman in Meyer's

[12] Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: FaithWords, 2004).

[13] Joyce Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in Your Mind* (New York: FaithWords, 1995).

case) replaces repentance with positive thinking and transforms prayer into positive affirmation.

Scripture, however, declares that faith is not a means of control but a surrender to God's sovereign will. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). True discipleship involves suffering and sanctification, not worldly success. The Christian life is not a self-esteem project—it is a cross-bearing journey.

The Psychology of Formation – John Ortberg

Ortberg's works such as *The Life You've Always Wanted*[14] and *Soul Keeping*[15] helped popularize the modern spiritual-formation movement. While he encourages prayer, solitude, and Sabbath, his approach often reframes sanctification in psychological terms by emphasizing emotional health and self-awareness more than repentance and obedience. By blending therapeutic insight with spirituality, Ortberg presents a Christianity that sometimes pacifies feelings, but leaves sin untouched, therefore, removing the need for the cross.

The Bible teaches that transformation flows from regeneration, not self-reflection. "He saved us … by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). The Spirit, not introspection, creates holiness. When transformation becomes therapy, grace becomes guidance, and the cross becomes optional.

Corporate Faith and Performance – Craig Groeschel

In *Soul Detox*[16] and *Divine Direction*,[17] Groeschel frames discipleship through the lens of leadership performance and organizational success. His ministry model mirrors the marketplace: it is focused on strategy, branding, and metrics. While his zeal for evangelism is commendable, the result is often a church culture measured by attendance and engagement rather than depth and doctrine.

The Apostle Paul warned against being "Conformed to this world" but urged believers to be "transformed by the renewal of your mind"

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[14] John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

[15] John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

[16] Craig Groeschel, *Soul Detox: Clean Living in a Contaminated World* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2012).

[17] Craig Groeschel, *Divine Direction: 7 Decisions That Will Change Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

(Rom 12:2). Groeschel's corporate paradigm risks turning spiritual growth into business growth, where efficiency replaces faithfulness. Christ calls His church to endurance, not enterprise.

The Gospel of the Mind – Caroline Leaf

Dr. Caroline Leaf's popular works *Switch On Your Brain*[18] and *Think and Eat Yourself Smart*[19] combine neuroscience with theology, teaching that believers can "reprogram" their brains through thought control. While science can illuminate aspects of creation, Leaf's framework subtly replaces the Holy Spirit's transforming power with neuroplasticity and self-effort.

Scripture distinguishes between the renewal of the mind by God's Spirit and self-induced mental change. "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Eph 4:23) points to divine agency, not cognitive therapy. Sin is not merely a mental misfire; it is rebellion against a holy God. No amount of thought-management can cleanse the conscience—only the blood of Christ can.

The Emerging Lie – Brian McLaren & Marcus Borg

McLaren's *A New Kind of Christian*[20] and Borg's *The Heart of Christianity*[21] recast faith as an evolving, inclusive journey shaped by cultural progress. They reject biblical inerrancy, question the uniqueness of Christ, and redefine salvation as social transformation. In their theology, doctrine becomes flexible, revelation becomes symbolic, and truth becomes plural.

But Christ Himself declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Scripture is not a record of human discovery but God's unchanging revelation. The gospel does not evolve with culture; it confronts it. Any message that removes repentance and the exclusivity of Christ is not good news—it is the oldest deception repackaged for modern ears.

Universalism and the Loss of Hell – Rob Bell

In *Love Wins*,[22] Rob Bell reimagines the gospel as universal reconciliation, suggesting that God's love will ultimately save all people.

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[18] Caroline Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).

[19] Caroline Leaf, *Think and Eat Yourself Smart* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

[20] Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

[21] Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2003).

[22] Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

His vision of grace without judgment eliminates the fear of God and the need for repentance. By erasing hell, he empties the cross of its purpose.

Jesus spoke plainly about eternal punishment: "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt 25:46). To deny hell is to deny justice; to deny justice is to cheapen grace. The cross reveals both God's mercy and His wrath. Without judgment, there is no salvation—only sentimentality.

Mysticism and Heresy – Richard Rohr & John Shelby Spong

Rohr's *The Universal Christ*[23] and Spong's *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*[24] represent the final drift of modern apostasy—from distortion to outright denial. Rohr's panentheistic "Christ in all things" dissolves the distinction between Creator and creation, while Spong's liberal theology rejects the divinity, resurrection, and authority of Christ altogether. Both replace divine revelation with human speculation, trading faith for philosophy.

Scripture answers with clarity: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a). Christ is not a cosmic energy nor a moral example: He is the incarnate Son of God, the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). To make Him less is to preach "another Jesus" (2 Cor 11:4).

Final Thoughts on Wolves, Ear-Ticklers and Con Men

The danger is not merely in what these teachers say, but in what they consistently leave unsaid: the holiness of God, the gravity of sin, the necessity of the cross, and the urgency of repentance. Their omissions erode the foundation of saving faith. Paul warned that in the last days, many would turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim 4:3-4).

It is not unloving to expose such voices—it is faithfulfulness to Christ and Scripture. The Christian must test every spirit (1 John 4:1), hold fast to sound doctrine (Titus 1:9), and contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). In an age of deception, guarding the heart means guarding the mind, refusing to be taken captive "by philosophy and empty deceit … and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8).

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[23] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019).

[24] John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

Conclusion

The heart, as designed by God, is the governing center of the human person. It directs thought, emotion, and will, shaping every word and action. The soul is the whole immaterial person, and the heart is its core. Through Scripture, we learn that God engages the heart directly (Eph 2:8-9), renewing and transforming it through His Spirit. The heart of the believer is made alive and responsive to God; the heart of the unbeliever remains resistant and blind to truth (Ezek 36:26).

Throughout history, human wisdom has sought to explain man's inner life, but apart from revelation, it always fails. It misdefines human nature, misdiagnoses the real problem of sin, and therefore misdirects the moral cure. Human philosophy studies behavior but not the heart, guilt but not sin, virtue but not holiness. Only Scripture reveals the true design of man, the depth of his corruption, and the power of divine grace to renew him. The failure of human wisdom magnifies the brilliance of divine design: God alone truly knows the heart He created, and only His truth can transform it.

Therefore, believers must guard not only their hearts but also their minds from the steady current of godless ideas that flow through modern culture. We must be discerning about the voices we allow to shape our understanding of humanity, morality, and purpose. Whether through books, media, education, or counseling, every philosophy that begins with man rather than God and his Word will ultimately lead away from truth. Paul's warning still stands: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). To follow Christ faithfully, we must think biblically (Rom 12:2) by testing every idea by the Word of God (2 Cor 10:5) and holding fast to the truth that alone renews the heart.

This truth bears directly on the calling of parents. To raise children is, at its core, to shepherd the heart: to guide what they believe, what they desire, and how they choose. Parents must not settle for outward conformity or temporary obedience but must labor faithfully to direct their children to the truth of God's Word, teaching them to examine, guard, and submit their hearts to Him. Only then will parenting align with God's design, producing not merely well-behaved children, but hearts transformed by grace.

Chapter 20

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN THE SALVATION OF CHILDREN

By Jason Ng

The Weight of a Parent's Fear

If we speak honestly, the heaviest burden a Christian parent carries is a quiet, persistent ache: what if my child is never saved? This thought often waits in the shadows of the heart. It surfaces in the stillness of the night, after the last prayer is whispered and the house grows quiet, pressing against the soul when we least expect it. It is a fear that weighs upon the spirit during family worship or in the quiet moments after the church doors have closed. You watch your child and wonder what is truly taking root within their heart. They may possess all the right answers and navigate the familiar rhythms of the faith with ease. They know the stories, the songs, and the language of the church. Yet, a parent wonders: has the seed truly found soft soil? Do they see their own need for a Savior, or are they simply cloaked in the comforts of a Christian home? To wonder if Christ is truly precious to them is a significant weight to bear.

Tied closely to this is the fear of our own responsibilities: what if I miss the mark? We worry that a firm word was too harsh or a soft response too passive. We wonder whether we have crowded out the gospel with rigid rules or failed to deal with sin as we should. We replay conversations in our minds, searching for the moment we might have

turned their heart away by saying too much or failing to say enough. "I should have handled that better," we tell ourselves.

The small, ordinary moments often haunt us more than the large ones. A sharp tone born of exhaustion, a rushed family devotion, or a clumsy answer to a deep question can feel like a permanent stain on their soul. We begin to believe that a child's eternity hinges on our own flawless performance. We carry these failures as if the outcome of their life traces back to our worst days, forgetting that grace is for parents, too. When fear takes the lead, parenting often becomes a work of control. Every bad attitude, act of dishonesty, or moment of laziness feels like a sign of eternal disaster. We become tense, treating every small choice as a final verdict on their soul. "What does this mean?" or "Where is this heading?" we ask. This pressure can make a home fragile, or it can lead a parent to lose heart entirely, continuing the outward motions of teaching while the inward fire of hope grows cold.

Our deepest desire is not merely for a well-behaved child. While we long for them to be wise, kind, and honest, we are after something much deeper. We long for them to know Christ, to be born again, and to love the truth from the heart. This is where the ache is sharpest, for we know that while we can plant and water, only God can command the dead heart to live. We cannot produce the very thing we desire most.

Bring this fear into the light of God's sovereignty. We have a real and high calling, to love the Lord, to teach His Word, and to model repentance, but we are not the Savior. We are witnesses and teachers, not the Holy Spirit. God does not demand that we change the heart; He asks only that we remain faithful to the work He has placed in our hands. The job of salvation belongs to Him alone. This truth is humbling, but it is also a profound relief. Your child's future does not rest on the shaky ground of your perfection.

Your failures are real, but they are not final. Repent where you have sinned, seek forgiveness where you have caused hurt, and seek to grow in wisdom. But you do not have to live as if one wrong move will ruin everything. God calls us to faithfulness, not to the impossible task of flawless performance. Regret can be a heavy stone for many parents to carry. You may see years of distraction, harshness, or inconsistency behind you. Yet, the gospel is sufficient for every mother and father. Christ's cross covers your mistakes as surely as it covers the sins of your children. There is grace enough to begin again, even if you feel you have started late. His promises do not expire, and His Spirit helps us change.

Let this fear drive you toward the Lord rather than away from peace. Let it deepen your prayers and sharpen your diligence, but do not let it rule your home. Your child belongs to the One who writes only true stories. They are in better hands than yours. This does not make your role smaller; it simply puts it in the right place, allowing you to labor with intention while resting in His care. Do the next right thing. Speak of Christ, deal honestly with sin, and model the repentance you wish to see. Pray with boldness for their soul, and then lay your head down. You can sleep in peace, for the Shepherd of your home never slumbers.

Trust God's Sovereign Hand

The main point of this chapter is simple and strong: we point our children to Jesus with our actions, words, and home life, while we rest in God's sovereign plan for their salvation. We labor with intention and sleep in peace. Scripture gives many voices to this truth. God's sovereign choice humbles and frees us. In Ephesians 1, Paul writes that salvation is born in the will and love of God:

> He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:4-5a).

Parents cannot create new hearts. We can plant and water. Only God gives the growth. This truth does not weaken effort. It purifies it. We work because God works. We pray because He hears. We teach because He saves. God's purpose stands. "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose," the Lord declares in Isaiah 46:10. History is not a tangle of chance. Your child's life is not a roll of the dice. The Lord knows and determines the end from the beginning. Nothing can block His hand. This gives courage on days when progress feels slow and nights when fear grows loud.

God has not turned away. He keeps His Word. God's mercy is the ground of hope. Paul writes in Romans 9, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy." We cannot push grace into a child's heart, and we cannot keep it out. Every conversion is a miracle of mercy. That is why parents pray with boldness, because God may choose to have mercy on us and use us as the agents by which to bring about His work of salvation. We ask, knowing that God loves to give good gifts. We ask for conviction of sin, for a new heart, for delight in Christ. We ask again tomorrow.

We do not bargain or demand. We come as children to our Father. Jesus Himself speaks to our need:

> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (John 6:44).

These words might seem heavy until we see the kindness in them. The pressure to produce faith falls off our shoulders. We become what we were meant to be. Witnesses. Teachers. Intercessors.

We tell the truth. We model repentance. We keep praying. We trust our Heavenly Father. Trusting in God's sovereignty changes daily life. It lightens the crushing sense that every moment is make-or-break. Parents who trust God can enjoy their children as the gifts they are. They can correct without panic. They can wait without despair. In Philippians, Paul invites us to bring every worry to God with thanksgiving and promises the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6-7). This peace is not indifferent. It is the steady rest of a soul that knows the Shepherd is near.

Trust also strengthens perseverance. The Book of Galatians urges us not to grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up (Gal 6:9). There will be long stretches where the fruit is unseen. There will be days when a child seems to forget every lesson. There will be seasons of wandering. Keep sowing. Keep praying. Stay gentle and firm. God's timetable is not ours. He is never late. In 2 Timothy, Paul reminds us that even when we are faithless, He remains faithful (2 Tim 2:13). He cannot deny Himself. Bring this trust into specific fears about health, education, friendships, choices about media and technology, sins that surface early, and doubts that appear in teen years. The pull of the world and the uncertainty of the future can be overwhelming. In prayer, name these concerns and ask God for wisdom, trusting He will grant it generously. Seek advice from mature believers and make wise decisions. Then, find rest in God's sovereignty.

Trust does not mean we neglect responsible actions. We still wear seatbelts, teach good manners, choose schools carefully, and set device filters. We continue to say "yes" and "no," apologize, and forgive. The key difference is having a firm trust beneath our actions. We do these things out of love and under God's care, not to replace Him. This perspective allows us to be faithful parents instead of being driven by fear.

The Parable of the Soils: Sowing with Hope

The Parable of the Soils in Mark 4:1–20 provides a steadying anchor for the parent's heart. Jesus describes a sower scattering seed across varied terrain. Some fall upon the hardened path, quickly snatched away by birds. Some land on rocky ground, springing up with immediate energy but failing to endure for lack of root. Other seeds fall among thorns, where the cares of life choke out the growth. Yet, some fall on good soil and yield a rich harvest. As Jesus explains, the seed is the Word of God, and the soils represent the diverse postures of the human heart in response to that Word.

For parents, this picture clarifies our fundamental calling. We are not the soil, nor are we the source of life for the seed. We are simply sowers. Our work is to faithfully scatter the Word before our children, reading Scripture, speaking of Christ, answering deep questions, and correcting sin with grace. We labor in prayer and bring truth into the ordinary turns of the day. This stewardship may not always feel dramatic, but it is the primary work God has placed in our hands.

The parable serves as a sobering reminder that not every hearing results in fruit. Some children may hear the truth and seem entirely unmoved, as if the words never landed at all. Others may show a burst of interest or emotion that eventually withers under pressure. Some do not openly rebel but instead become slowly crowded out. The subtle pull of school, sports, and entertainment can fill a heart until the Word is pushed to the margins. This drift often happens quietly, making it all the more difficult to witness.

The thorny soil hits particularly close to home, as a child need not be rebellious to lose their way; they simply need to be full. When a heart is preoccupied with noise, distraction, and lesser loves, there is no room for the King. A parent may notice that a child has boundless energy for hobbies or screens but grows restless when the Bible is opened. While this is not a final verdict, it is a signal to pay attention. Thorns do not appear overnight; they grow inch by inch through a thousand small choices.

The good soil represents the harvest we long for, the Word taking deep root and bearing fruit. We desire to see more than Christian vocabulary or outward church habits; we seek repentance, a hunger for truth, and a genuine love for Christ. Even here, the parable keeps us humble. When fruit appears, we cannot take credit for our parenting methods. We simply say, "The Lord has been kind." The seed is good, but only God can command the growth.

This teaching protects parents from two dangerous extremes. The first is despair, where we believe our prayers and teaching are in vain because we see no immediate fruit. We must remember that much of God's work happens beneath the surface, where roots grow long before the harvest is visible. The second is pride. When a child is tender and responsive, we are tempted to trust in our own routines and home culture. Jesus, however, leaves no room for such boasting. Life and growth belong to Him alone.

Our response, then, is to keep sowing. We open the Bible even when our children seem distracted. We pray when the answers feel slow. We speak of Christ in the car rides, the mealtimes, and the moments after failure. We scatter the seed because God is faithful to His Word. Parents speak the truth, but God prepares the soil; we spread the seed, but He opens the heart. This is a difficult lesson in humility, but it is also a source of profound comfort.

Seeing Gospel Opportunities in the Ordinary

Many parents assume that gospel conversations belong only to planned moments, such as family worship or church gatherings. While these rhythms are essential, some of the most significant opportunities arise when the day falls apart. They appear amid tears, selfishness, conflict, and failure. In other words, the gospel meets us right in the middle of a normal, messy family life. When the gospel is central to a home, it shapes how we handle the moments before us. A lie told to avoid trouble, or a sharp word spoken in anger are not just problems to be solved; they are invitations to address the heart. These moments allow us to move beyond surface behavior and speak to the soul's deeper needs.

Discipline, in this light, becomes far more than a mechanism for order. It is a chance to show a child what sin truly is, not merely a broken house rule, but a heart posture toward God. When a child falls short, a parent can slow down and ask, "What were you wanting in that moment?" or "What does God say about this?" These questions help the child see that their struggles are not random slip-ups but flow from a heart in need of grace. Consider a simple lie about a chore. A parent could merely issue a consequence and move on, but discipleship goes deeper. We ask why the lie was told. Was it to protect their image? To avoid embarrassment? By uncovering these motives, the parent can say, "You were trying to cover yourself instead of walking in the truth." This moves the conversation from mere behavior modification to the heart-work of the gospel.

Sibling conflict offers a similar training ground. What looks like a fight over a toy is often a battle of the will, a desire for control, attention, or victory. A wise parent helps children see these underlying motives. We lead them not just to a mumbled apology, but to a place where they can name their sin, seek forgiveness, and recognize their need for a tender heart. Teaching children to seek forgiveness with clarity is an important skill. We move away from forced apologies and toward honest ownership: "I was wrong for yelling at you," or "I sinned when I lied." This language teaches them that sin must be named and brought into the light, not hidden behind vague or empty words. Perhaps the clearest gospel witness a child will ever see is a parent who is quick to repent. When a father is too harsh or a mother speaks in irritation, the response matters. By coming back and saying, "I was wrong; please forgive me," a parent models the very grace they teach. It demonstrates that no one in the home is above repentance and that Christianity is about telling the truth about our need for Jesus.

Keeping the gospel central also requires that we speak plainly about its truths. Children need to hear more than just "be good"; they need to know who God is, what Christ has done on the cross, and what it means to believe. They must understand that forgiveness is a gift of grace, not a reward for improved behavior. This is a message they need to hear again and again. Gospel opportunities also come through seasons of fear and sadness. A child who is anxious at night or hurting from a broken friendship needs more than quick comfort. These are moments to show that Christ is for the weak and the troubled as well as the sinner. He is the one who receives all who come to Him, providing a peace that settles into life's realities.

Looking for gospel opportunities means learning to see the ordinary through the lens of grace. Discipline, confession, and even a parent's own failure can become signposts that point back to Christ. We don't have to force a sermon into every moment; we simply recognize that the troubles of family life are the exact places where the gospel makes the most sense.

The Quiet Labor of Resting in the Lord

Resting in the Lord is a simple concept that often proves difficult in the daily heat of parenting. It is easy to speak of trust, but far harder to practice it when a child seems indifferent to spiritual things or when our own failures feel heavy. In those moments, rest becomes a real fight of faith, a deliberate choice to lean on the Shepherd's strength rather than our own.

Biblical rest is not passivity or indifference. It does not mean we stop caring or laboring. Instead, it means we do what God has called us to do, teaching, praying, and loving, and then we leave in His hands what was never ours to control. This is the hardest work for a parent, for it involves the souls of those we love most in the world. Rest begins with a deep remembrance of God's goodness. Fear gains ground when we lose sight of His character, acting as if He is distant or unconcerned. But our God is wise, patient, and perfectly loving. He is not careless with your home or your children. In truth, He shows a care for them that far exceeds your own.

We must take time to dwell on this reality. Think of how the Lord has dealt with your own immaturity and how He has carried you through seasons of doubt. Remember the prayers He answered with a wisdom that surpassed your requests. Fear feeds on forgetfulness, so we combat it by recounting the history of His faithfulness in our own lives. Trusting in God's sovereignty is the foundation of this rest. Parenting quickly reveals our limitations; we can set boundaries and read Scripture, but we cannot command a dead heart to live. This realization can lead to panic or to a holy dependence. There is immense relief in remembering that God never asked you to be the sovereign ruler of your child's soul.

When we stop acting as if everything depends on us, the tone of our parenting changes. Correction loses its edge of desperation, and boundaries are no longer driven by fear. Because God is sovereign, we can be steady and faithful without the crushing weight of believing that one failed moment will ruin a child's eternity. This trust is essential during the long seasons where fruit is slow to appear. You may have a teenager who knows the right words but seems unmoved, or a child who struggles with the same selfish patterns year after year. In these times, sovereignty keeps us from panic. We can say, "I do not see all that God is doing, but I know He is not absent."

Resting also means leaving the results to the Lord. We naturally long for evidence that our labor matters, some sign that the seeds are taking root. Yet, God often performs His deepest work in the hidden places. Roots grow in the dark, and much of the truth we plant may not yield a harvest until a season we cannot yet see. Leaving the results to Him allows us to do the next faithful thing without demanding immediate proof. We open the Bible again, we pray again, and we seek forgiveness again. We continue our work not because we see the end clearly, but because we trust the Master of the harvest to bring forth fruit in His perfect time.

This perspective is our only hope when dealing with regret. Many parents carry a list of missed opportunities or harsh words they wish they could take back. Resting in the Lord means confessing these failures honestly and refusing to believe that our weakness is greater than His mercy. The gospel is for parents, too, and Christ's cross covers every regret. Rest looks very ordinary. It is the act of naming each child before the Lord before we sleep. It is telling Him our specific fears and thanking Him for small glimpses of grace. It is choosing to lay our heads down in peace, knowing that the Shepherd of our home never slumbers. It is the steady rest of a soul that knows God is God and we are not.

Resting in the Lord is a lesson learned slowly, through many seasons of trial and return. As we grow in our trust of His sovereignty and goodness, our hearts begin to settle. The work of parenting does not become easy, but it becomes marked by a peace that passes understanding, a peace that grows from knowing our family is in His hands.

A Closing Picture

Think of your home as a small garden. God has provided the soil, seed, water, sun, and seasons. Your role is to prepare the ground, plant, remove weeds, water, and shield the plants. You cannot command life to appear, but life is God's joy. Throughout it all, the Gardener remains close. He knows each plant and works beneath the surface, unseen. So, pick up your tools again today: teach, correct, encourage, pray, laugh, speak truth, and forgive. Keep Christ at the center of everything. Then rest peacefully, for the garden belongs to Him. This is the balance Scripture offers. Faithful parenting and trust in God's sovereignty go hand in hand. Deuteronomy guides us to love and teach throughout everyday moments. Ephesians reminds us to train without breaking the spirit. The whole counsel of God calls us to pray and to rest, for He is the One who saves. Hold these truths together, and you will walk with your children in hope.

APPENDIX 1

A FRESH LOOK AT PROVERBS 22:6 (THE "PARENTING VERSE")

By Cliff McManis

Train up a child in the way he should go:
and when he is old, he will not depart from it (KJV)

Introduction

Proverbs 22:6 "is probably the best-known verse in Proverbs on child training" says one commentator.[1] And at the same time other Bible commentators say it is one of the most difficult verses in Proverbs to interpret and apply.[2] Many Bible expositors fail to even comment on it

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[1] Sid Buzzell, "Proverbs" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord (USA: Victor Books, 1988), 952.

[2] Two of the most highly respected Evangelical Bible scholars, Walter Kaiser and F. F. Bruce, collaborated on a book that became widely popular called *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996). It addresses only the most difficult passages as determined by the saints for the past two millennia. They tackle knotty problems in almost every book of the Bible including Proverbs. Of the 915 total verses in the 31 chapters of Proverbs, they only deal with ten verses/passages in Proverbs. And Proverbs 22:6 is one of them. Even more telling is Gleason Archer's classic work called, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (1982), where he also tries to explain the most difficult passages in every book of the Bible. When he gets to the Book of Proverbs, he only deals with two passages and Proverbs 22:6 is one of them. And he dedicates several pages to his exegetical explanation of it. The works of Kaiser, Bruce,

in their written works.[3] One Bible scholar says it is futile to even attempt to explain it. The Septuagint (LXX), which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced just before the time of Christ, completely neglects this verse altogether, as it skips from 22:5 straight to 22:7! Maybe those Greek-Jewish scholars found the verse too difficult to deal with and just gave up?

But that should not be the approach of a Bible-believing Christian. We don't wave the white flag of surrender when confronted with a challenging passage in God's Word. Proverbs 22:6 definitely belongs in the Bible (John 10:35; Rev 22:19), was written by King Solomon (Prov 10:1), was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16), and was intended by God to guide and encourage believing parents (Prov 1:1-4).

Since the time King Solomon penned Proverbs 22:6 (around 970 BC), it has been a verse of hope and encouragement to believing parents regarding the spiritual development of their children. For some it has even served as a foundational pillar for their overall parenting philosophy. At the same time, this verse has proved to be a source of guilt, confusion, and even frustration for many parents as their children left the faith never to return when they got older, a heart-breaking reality that flies in the face of what this proverb seems to promise at face value. Because of the long-standing and universal reality of countless children turning their backs on the biblical faith of their parents, many have questioned the popular interpretation of this verse. More and more scholars and Bible teachers have likewise questioned the traditional understanding of this verse, thus engendering caution before presumptuously glomming onto its surface, promise-oriented words to parents. As a result, in the past century the meaning of this Hebrew maxim has been highly disputed in the believing community with respect to how it should be understood and applied by faithful parents. The goal of this chapter is to reexamine this divinely inspired maxim and get to its true meaning so that parents can have confidence in reading it, understanding it, and applying it.

Before coming to a conclusion on how to personally apply this verse, parents should first be aware of three important considerations surrounding it. Being conversant with these three considerations will bolster one's ability to understand the proverb in keeping with the

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and Archer are a good reminder that Proverbs 22:6 poses a great challenge for us as Bible readers, so we need to tread carefully and diligently in pursuing its meaning.

[3]Andrew F. Walls, "Proverbs" in ed. by Francis Davidson, *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956).

original author's intention. The three pressing considerations include the following: (1) an awareness of the popular views suggested; (2) establishing a correct translation of the text; and (3) understanding the genre of the Book of Proverbs. We begin with a survey of the popular views that have been suggested throughout the centuries.

Popular Views

Over the course of Church history (and 1,000 years of Jewish tradition before that), at least six different popular views on the meaning of Proverbs 22:6 have been proposed. This has been a great source of confusion and frustration for the average Christian reader. The main views include the following: (1) the promise view; (2) the guideline view; (3) the tailoring view; (4) the warning view; (5) the baptismal view; (6) and the apprentice view.

The Promise View

We begin with the "promise" view, which has been the most popular view for ages. The promise view takes this verse as it is written in the *King James* version at face value. This view assumes this proverb is saying that if you start teaching your child beginning in their most impressionable years then you will set indelible convictions that he will retain for life. And these views will be religious and biblical in nature. In other words, if parents teach their children the Bible starting when they are young, then they will believe the Bible when they are older. Some even say this verse promises parents that their children are guaranteed salvation when they are older if they are taught the Bible as children. So, the obligation of the parent in this view is to "teach" the child biblical truth in an ongoing manner, in every context possible. This is consistent with Deuteronomy 6:7 which commands parents to "teach [Bible truths] them diligently to your sons and … 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 up." The key here is to "teach" your children well and in every circumstance of life.

Teaching our young children biblical truth is a priority in parenting. It is essential to helping them develop a Christian world view. But "discipling" our children includes more than just "preaching" to our children. Children need to grow in four domains: spiritually, socially, physically, and intellectually (Luke 2:52). There needs to be a balance. Those holding the traditional promise view can at times over-emphasize a rigid didactic, preachy approach to parenting, with the priority of imparting head knowledge through "teaching" while

neglecting development in the other three areas. It holds that if a parent teaches the right things to their kids, then God's promise is the children will turn out right, maybe even securing their salvation. This view can lend itself to a mechanical, even one-dimensional, approach to parenting, with the idea that just teaching the right information will prove to be the panacea to successful parenting. This view can also foster a legalistic approach to parenting due to its one-dimensional view if proper precautions for balance are not put in place.

The popular pastor, Charles Bridges, championed this view 150 years ago and it is still widespread today.[4] He called this verse a "rule" and a "command" for parenting. Children will become what they were taught by their parents. Bridges called the second part of this proverb "the parental promise" and "a plain promise." He states categorically, "The man will be, as the child is trained." Proper biblical instruction will bring results that are "sure," he wrote. If the child becomes a "prodigal" at any point, he will certainly "return" to the faith later. Bridges goes on to say that if the children get off track later in life and leave the faith, then it was the parents' fault. A child defecting is proof positive that the parents compromised their biblical mandate to teach their children properly. The children became defective because the parental instruction was defective or inconsistent somewhere along the way.

More and more Bible teachers are rejecting the traditional "promise" view for various reasons. One obvious one is that it blames the Christian parents for a child who becomes a rebel later in life. It operates on the faulty premise that good, consistent parenting will guarantee that a child will become a faithful, believing adult. A cursory reading of the Bible exposes such thinking as folly, for the greatest parent ever, YHWH of the Old Testament who is God the Father of the New Testament, had many children that He reared who defected. As a matter of fact, the majority of God's "children" in the Old Testament, the Israelites, rebelled against the faith. Yet, God is the perfect parent. The Book of Isaiah begins with God lamenting in

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[4] For Bridges' whole extensive discussion on this verse see his commentary, *Proverbs* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 401-406; more modern advocates of the "promise" view include R. Laird Harris, "Proverbs" in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 574; J. Terence Forestell, "Proverbs" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 503; R. F. Horton, "Proverbs" in *The Expositor's Bible*, Vol III, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 422-425), 1943.

heartache over His children who turned against Him and His perfect, loving, fatherly care:

> Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me" (Is 1:2).

The "promise" view has some challenges at face value. It is not wrong for suggesting that Proverbs 22:6 makes a promise. In fact, I believe it does make a promise. The question is, what is that promise? I don't think the promise is that parents can be assured that their kids will be eternally saved contingent upon the parents' aptitude in teaching Bible doctrine to their kids. The promise is something else which we will examine shortly.

The Guideline View

The second popular view is what I call the "guideline" view. Proponents of this view usually accept the *King James* translation of the verse but emphasize that this verse is not a hard-and-fast truism, or a guaranteed promise. Their focus is on the disputed phrase, "he will not depart from it." As such, they say that this proverb is just a suggested guideline, albeit a Divine one at that. It's a rule of thumb, a general truism; but it is not a binding promise. Generally speaking, says the guideline view, children raised with biblical instruction are likely to live in accordance with a modicum of biblical principles later in life, but there are always exceptions. Advocates of this mitigated view argue that the whole Book of Proverbs consists only of wise guidelines and not axiomatic, universally guaranteed truths.[5] They do so to accommodate the reality that many good and godly parents have produced children who have rejected the faith. They say ultimately it is the child who is responsible to either believe in Christ or reject Him. Parents can't coerce their children to believe; therefore, this verse cannot be an iron-clad promise.

This view has some merit but has challenges as well. An obvious weakness is that it is based on a wrong view of the Book of Proverbs, categorically saying that all the proverbs are only general guidelines and

[5] Sources that hold this view include John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), 908; Walt Kaiser*, Hard Saying of the Bible, 288.*; *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997), 1064; *The Moody Bible Commentary*, ed. Michael Rydelnik (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 943.

not promises. That is just not the case. The Book of Proverbs has over 500 individual proverbs which are written by different authors and contain a wide variety of literary composition. Not all the proverbs are the same. Proverbs 22:6 is in a section of the Book of Proverbs that has many clear divine promises as well as universally true and binding axioms. For example, Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good." That assertion is indeed always universally true and binding. And 22:2 says, "The rich and the poor have a common bond, the Lord is the maker of them all." Those two proverbs are Hebrew couplets written in synthetic parallelism just like Proverbs 22:6, and those two verses are not just sacred suggestions or godly guidelines. They are always true for everyone.[6]

Another shortcoming of the "guideline" view is that it fails to highlight, or even mention, that Proverbs 22:6 is an imperative.[7] The main Hebrew verb that begins the sentence is a command, an imperative from God to parents. In that regard, Bridges was correct in seeing this as a divine mandate which entails a promise. And it is a definitive command from God which He expects believing parents to obey. Ironically, the proponents of the "guideline" view would not typically label other commands in the Bible as mere "guidelines" that are sometimes true and sometimes not.

The Tailoring View

The third view I call the "tailoring" view and it is rising in popularity. This view takes the verse to mean, "Tailor your parenting priorities in keeping with your child's unique personality, particular needs, individual propensities, and innate abilities, for every child is different." Advocates of this view prioritize the middle phrase, "in the way he should go." The "promise view" people prioritize the last phrase in the verse: "he will not depart from it." The "guideline view" people prioritize the first phrase in the verse: "Train up a child."

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[6] For more information on the different kinds of Hebrew couplets and their implications see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 13 (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1973),1270; *The Interpreter's Bible*, "Proverbs," ed. George Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1955), 771-772.

[7] Claus Westermann correctly says it is "A maxim expressed in the form of an imperative"; cf. *Handbook to the Old Testament*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), 237; Hildebrandt calls it a "verbal imperative," cf. Ted Hildebrandt, "Proverbs 22:6a: Train Up a Child?" *Grace Theological Journal 9.1* (1988) 4. The main verb, "dedicate" (Heb., *chanak*) is a masculine singular imperative in the *Piel* stem which is not stative but transformative/causative; cf. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, ed. Bruce K. Waltke (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 401.

Those holding the "tailoring" view understand the phrase, "in the way he should go," to mean, "according to his way." They emphasize and personalize the pronoun "his" as the determining factor, and the phrase "his way" becomes the determining exegetical definer of this proverb. They argue "his way" means each child's unique "bent" that God instilled in them from the time of conception. So, they understand this proverb to say, "Train up each child according to his or her unique bent." One child may be born as an introvert while a sibling may be born as an extrovert. One child may be an artistic, left-brained thinker, while his twin could be born a right-brained thinker drawn toward engineering. The parents need to figure these details out and then parent accordingly, catering all available pedagogical resources and energy to each child's differentiating internal "bent."

Understanding each child's specific personality is key to this approach. In this view, the child's personal DNA drives the parenting process. Parenting is then "reactive" and "responsive" more than it is "directive." Parenting "accommodates" more than it "dictates." Each parent, then, must assume the role of a privatized Sherlock Holmes, to discover the innate mysteries of each child that will unlock his full potential. Of all the views, practically speaking, this approach is one of the most "child centered." Pastor Chuck Swindoll has been one of the more popular advocates of this view for the past generation, and many have followed suit.[8]

Similar to this view is the more general interpretation which says "his way" refers to the unique life and growth seasons that all children go through from birth to adulthood. This view is a little less individualized than the preceding view but is still in the same *genus*. This view follows the behavioral model of secular psychology. Gene Getz has popularized this view.[9] He says there are four specific seasons of life humans go through as they develop: (1) the *security* phase which is birth to age one; (2) the *exploratory* phase, age one to two; (3) the *imitation* phase, ages two to three; and (4) the *identification* phase, up to age four. Parenting and the instruction of young children needs to be tailored to

[8] See his parenting book, *You & Your Child* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1982, 1998), 5 ff.

[9] Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), 864-865. Keil and Delitzsch advocated a similar view in 1872; see, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs 18-31*, Volume 6 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 86.

their unique needs in light of their age and development. "Don't treat little kids like adults," is the gist.[10]

Although this view has practical wisdom with respect to common sense in parenting, it does not actually represent what Proverbs 22:6 teaches based on the grammar, syntax, and context. This view is quite recent compared to the promise view which has been around for millennia. This "new" view infuses too much specific artificial meaning into the one generic prepositional phrase, "according to his way," at the neglect of other key terms and phrases in the verse, especially the main imperative which begins the verse. In fact, it categorically gives an illegitimate meaning to the adverbial phrase, "according to his way." It is a common phrase, or idiom, in the Hebrew Old Testament and never means, "according to his bent." It is best translated as, "according to his way," or "the way he should go."[11] Its many usages show that it means, "what is appropriate to an established authority or standard."[12] The way a child should go is determined by God's universal standard, not the child's individual DNA. This view also holds too narrow of a meaning for the Hebrew word for "child" (Heb. *na'ar).* It does not only refer to infants and toddlers as Getz seems to imply. The Hebrew word can also refer to teens and young men.

The appeal of this view for parents is the practical suggestion that children should not be treated like adults with unrealistic expectations that could frustrate or exasperate the child (cf. Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). And Scripture does command parents not to exasperate their children. That is good advice. But that is not what this verse is emphasizing. Another appeal of this view is that it suggests that children go through developmental stages of growth that need to be attended to and

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[10] Christian parents need to be aware that some popular secular pedagogical and parenting methods operate according to this presupposition, namely, that children need to be guided more than indoctrinated; children need to engage in discovery and self-exploration in order to learn. This is passive instruction and is the basis of the widely popular Montessori method of education. The Montessori method of education is contrary to a biblical worldview at the foundational level, as it imbibes secular, ecumenical, and liberal Catholic ideology; cf. Alair Marie August, "A Theological Analysis of the Educational Method of Maria Montessori," Thesis for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2023, 113-116.

[11] Roland Murphy, *Word Biblical Commentary: Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 164.

[12] Waltke says, "Here *his way* dictates the orientation of his dedication," meaning, his way as a youth (Prov 1:4; 7:7) needs to be brought into conformity with God's rule (Prov 8:22) as clearly laid out in Proverbs (11:5) and the Law (Deut 10:12); cf. Waltke, *Proverbs*, 205; cf. Hildebrandt, "Train Up a Child," 16.

guarded, giving them what they need when they need it; parents should teach their children in age appropriate ways. This is also true. Paul speaks about this in 1 Corinthians when he reminded his readers,

> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways (1 Cor 13:11).

But this biblical truism is not the point of Proverbs 22:6 either.

The Warning View

The fourth popular view of Proverbs 22:6 is the "warning" view. This is the only view that sees this verse strictly from a negative perspective. It understands the statement to be an indicative, or declaration, and not an imperative. Advocates say it is to be understood as saying, "if you let your child go 'his own self-centered way,' without parental intervention, then he will go the wrong way and end up living for himself like a fool." "His way" according to this take is "the way of the fool" which is mentioned many times in Proverbs (cf. 1:7; 10:18, 23; 12:15; 14:9; 19:1; 28:26).

So, according to the "warning" view, Solomon is here warning parents that if you let your kid do whatever he wants to do during the younger years, then he will live for himself in his later years. This is understood to be a warning against permissive, child-centered parenting. It is a rebuke to parents who fail to discipline their disobedient children.[13] Advocates say that the Proverbs knows of only two ways: God's way and the fool's way. The way of the fool comes naturally to all children who are born sinful. As such, they need deliberate, remedial, corporeal training by the parents to save them from themselves. Dr. Jay Adams, the grandfather of the modern biblical counseling movement, popularized this view in the modern church.[14]

The main problem with the warning view is that it treats the main verb which begins the sentence as an indicative (or declaration) and not as an imperative (or command). Contrary to the Jay Adams warning view, this verse is not passively declaring what might happen if parents

[13] Eli the high priest and King David both failed to discipline their children, being passive fathers, and suffered dire consequences as a result; cf. 1 Sam 2:27-34; 2 Sam 13.

[14] See his *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 158.

fail to do something. It is commanding parents to do something proactively.

The Baptismal View

The fifth take on Proverbs 22:6 is what I call the "baptismal" view. This view is held strongly in certain liturgical enclaves who practice infant baptism. It alleges this verse is commanding parents to baptize their infants with water as a sign of dedicating their eternal souls to God forever. Bird, who is Lutheran, explains:

> Dear parents, your own children are not your own. They are yours, yes, but more importantly, they are the Father's children…God loves them perfectly from all eternity…he bought them with the price of blood. Dedicate them to him…who claimed them on the cross. As important as the training of your children is, much more important is handing them over to God--from the very beginning, from infancy, and beyond. This happens in a liquid exchange, as we hand over our children to the father, in word-filled water. In the dedication of baptism, God claims every little one as his tiny temple…The child enters a new way, a new mode of life…they can't leave this behind or depart from it, because it is God's doing, not their own.[15]

The one positive nuance of this overly sacramental view is that it recognizes the personal and solemn element of "dedication" or "consecrate" inherent in the verb *chanak* as it is used consistently in the Old Testament. This solemn element is directed at the overall attitude of the parents regarding the gift of children entrusted to their care. God expects parents to "dedicate" their children to Him from the beginning. The debate is over how or in what manner the parents are to dedicate the children. Does infant baptism alone fulfill this mandate?

This view has obvious weaknesses. The main one is that the author of this view equates the verb for "train up/dedicate" with "baptize." This is illegitimate. And Solomon did not teach infant baptism. Infant baptism does not exist in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Infant baptism is a man-made religious practice foreign to the Bible

[15] Chad Bird, "'Train up' or 'Dedicate'? The Hebrew Gem in Proverbs 22:6"; https://www.1517.org/articles/train-up-or-dedicate-the-hebrew-gem-in-proverbs-226.

that crept into Christian churches during the second and third centuries AD. As such, it is clear that Proverbs 22:6 is not commanding infant baptism.

The Apprentice View

The sixth and final view is the "apprentice" view which is a recent interpretation that assigns rigid, nuanced meanings to all the key words and phrases in the verse. This view says the verb "train up" actually means "to dedicate or celebrate" and the word for "child" refers to a young man, probably a teenager, of high status who is socially in the "upper class." Taken together, this proverb is not to be used as support for early childhood training, nor can it be applied to all children. Instead, it refers to a young man who "is a royal squire who is in the process of being apprenticed in wisdom for taking on royal responsibilities consistent with his status as" a young man with royal blood.[16] After all, Solomon the King wrote this verse.

This verse then exhorts parents of high status or royal blood to give due respect and dignity to their boys when they become young men while celebrating them and launching them into society with all rights and privileges as mature citizens. While there is not direct application for most parents today, who are non-royalty, there is the general application or principle reminding parents to treat their children as adults when they become adults with the proper balance of letting go of the restraints while providing needed support for them to thrive as independents during the apprentice stage of life.

This view is probably the most creative, and yet it most likely is not what this verse is teaching. It is illegitimate to constrain the meaning of the word "child/youth" (*na'ar*) to mean "a young man of high status." And it is also unwarranted to narrow the verb for "train up" (Hebrew, *chanak*) to mean "celebrate" in Bar-Mitzvah-like fashion that is just a one-time event. *Chanak* means "dedicate" and has the capacity to include the idea of "celebrate," but not only that idea. This view is rather novel. It is hard to accept that Solomon's true intention of Proverbs 22:6 was not discovered in its fullness until almost 3,000 years after he wrote it.[17] The truths of the proverbs of Solomon were written to be understood clearly by all believing parents and young people and

[16] Ted Hildebrandt, "Proverb 22:6a: Train up a Child?," (Grace Theological Journal 9.1, 1988), 14. Ted Hildebrandt, Train Up a Child, 14.

[17] Hildebrandt's intriguing view was not introduced to the world until 1988.

implemented for daily living (1:1-4), not as secret puzzles that only the small minority of the initiated could discover.

Translating Proverbs 22:6

After examining popular views of Proverbs 22:6, it is time to establish an accurate translation of the verse. The first rule or hermeneutics, or Bible interpretation, is actually "translation," or making sure we render the original language of a biblical text into another language accurately. One of the reasons we have so many English translations of the Bible is because the translators are trying to preserve the original meaning of the Hebrew and Greek in a way that we English speakers will understand. And the English language is fluid, always changing from one generation to the next in different ways.

The *King James Bible* was translated in 1611 and it has many words we don't use today, such as when the woman with an issue of blood touched Jesus' garment, and the *King James* says, "immediately her issue of blood *stanched*" (Luke 8:44). We don't use the word "stanched" today. And sometimes the *King James* simply had misleading words or phrases that needed to be corrected by updated translations, such as its rendering of Genesis 4:21 where it says, "Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and *organ*" (Gen 4:21). Jubal lived around 3,500 BC and there were no organs. The Hebrew word here just refers to blowing into something, hence a simple wind instrument. And so, appropriately, the *New American Standard Bible* says Jubal invented the "pipe" and the *New King James* says "flute." So, reexamining the translation of Proverbs 22:6 is a priority.

All six main views examined above have their strengths and weaknesses. The problem with the first four views is that they base their interpretations and applications on taking the 1611 *King James* translation of Proverbs 22:6 at face value. Only the "baptism" and "apprentice" views base their interpretations on a different translation than suggested by the 1611 *King James* rendition. I propose that the *King James* translation needs some tweaking in light of the Hebrew text, and in doing so will impact one's interpretation and application.

The *King James* translation reads as follows:

> Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old,
> he will not depart from it.

This verse was probably written originally by King Solomon as a Hebrew poetic couplet and thus could be rendered:

> Train up a child in the way he should go:
> and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

This format preserves the most dominant feature of Hebrew poetry which is parallelism. Line A, which begins with the verb, "Train up," is advanced by the second part, line B, which advances line A in some regard, either by way of contrast, synonymously, or through elaboration. Most of the modern English translations closely follow the *King James* rendering including the NASB, NKJV, ESV, LSB and the NET Bible.

"Train Up" or "Dedicate"?

The first consideration in reexamining the proper translation is to look at the verb which begins the sentence in English and in Hebrew. The popular English Bibles say, "Train up," which is only one word in Hebrew, namely "*chanak*." This verb occurs only five times in the Old Testament and the other four usages are best understood as "dedicate" or "consecrate." All four instances refer to the "dedication" of a new house (Deut 20:5) or the Temple (2 Chron 7:5).[18] The word is used when Solomon solemnly and publicly "dedicated" the brand-new permanent Temple of God that he built in Jerusalem which replaced the portable Tabernacle. Upon dedicating the Temple, God's presence took up residence within the holy place. 1 Kings 8 describes the historic and glorious occasion:

> Solomon offered for the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered to the Lord, 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the sons of Israel **dedicated** [*chanak*] the house of the Lord. On the same day the king **consecrated** [*qadash*] the middle of the court that *was* before the house of the Lord, because there he offered the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat of the peace offerings (1 Kings 8:63-64a; NASB; emphasis added).

At this celebratory national gathering, Israel and King Solomon formally "dedicated" the Temple to God. "Dedicated" is the Hebrew word, *chanak*, the same verb used in Proverbs 22:6 which the *King James* rendered as "train up." Notice also that the use of the word "dedicated" is immediately followed by the use of the word "consecrated," which

[18] Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 147.

in this context serves as a synonym to "dedicate." Solomon dedicated and consecrated the Temple of God.

The four usages of *chanak* outside of Proverbs 22:6 refer to dedicating a building, two times in Deuteronomy in reference to a house and the two other references describe the "dedication" of the newly built Temple of God in the days of King Solomon. The Deuteronomy verse reads as follows:

> The officers also shall speak to the people, saying, 'Who is the man that has built a new house and has not **dedicated** it? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man **would dedicate** it (20:5; NASB; emphasis added).

We saw above how the verb *chanak* was translated as "dedicate" in 1 Kings 8. The parallel passage is in 2 Chronicles describing the dedication of Solomon's Temple and translates the verb in the same manner as 1 Kings 8:

> Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the Lord. King Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Thus the king and all the people **dedicated** the house of God. The priests stood at their posts, and the Levites also, with the instruments of music to the Lord, which King David had made for giving praise to the Lord—"for His lovingkindness is everlasting"—whenever he gave praise by their means, while the priests on the other side blew trumpets; and all Israel was standing. Then Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that *was* before the house of the Lord, for there he offered the burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings because the bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to contain the burnt offering, the grain offering and the fat (2 Chron 7:4-7; NASB; emphasis added).

In addition to the five usages of the verb *chanak*, there are eight occurrences of the related noun, and in all eight cases it is translated as "the dedication" (cf. Num 7:10, 11, 84, 88; 2 Chron 7:9; Neh 12:27 and the superscript in Psalm 30). So, taken together, aside from Proverbs 22:6, all twelve usages of the verb and noun of *chanak* are rendered as "dedicate" in our English Bibles. Even the *King James Bible* translates all four other usages of the verb *chanak* as "dedicate" or "dedication," so

there is no real precedent to translate the same verb as "train up" in 22:6. Although no current English Bible translation renders the phrase as, "Dedicate a child in the way that he should go," most scholarly and exegetical commentaries acknowledge the fact that that is what the verb *chanak* means. The CSB (2017) moves in this direction with its, "**Start** a youth out on his way" as does the NIV which gives a similar rendering: "**Start** children off on the way they should go."

All four Bible references that translate the verb *chanak* as "dedicate" in reference to a building, whether a soldier's house or the Temple, emphasize the newness or novelty of the building, thus emphasizing the building was in its "infancy" stage regarding its usage. Metaphorically this parallels a young child as mentioned in Proverbs 22:6 who would be in his infancy stage in life. The verb "dedicate" then would have the nuance of "initiation" or "consecration," something in its beginning stages of usage. Hence the CSB and the NIV legitimately try to catch this nuance with the verb "start." In light of the foregoing, the first phrase in Proverbs 22:6 should be translated as, "Dedicate a child."

Because all four other instances of *chanak* in the Bible clearly refer to the act of dedicating or consecrating a new building for practical use and service, many Bible scholars believe *chanak* should be understood in the same manner in Proverbs 22:6, and hence should be translated as "dedicate" or something comparable. And since all four usages of the verb refer to something that is new, it should have the nuance of "initiate," something in its beginning stages.

Another argument in support of the "dedicate/consecrate" view is that the verb *chanak* is never used in the Old Testament in reference to teaching, instructing, or training. It's not a pedagogical term. The Old Testament uses a host of other terms to describe the pedagogical process. The most famous verse of all regarding the mandate for parents to teach their children is Deuteronomy 6:7 and does not use the word "*chanak*/dedicate," but *shahnan*, and is translated as follows:

> "You shall **teach** [*shahnan*] them diligently to your sons 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 up (NASB; emphasis added)."

Other common terms referring to teaching and instruction in the Old Testament include *lamad* (Deut 4:10), *yarah* (Deut 33:10), *darak* (Ps 25:5), *sakal* (Ps 32:8), *basar* (Ps 40:9), *nachah* (Ps 73:24), *yada* (Prov 9:9),

nathan (Prov 9:9). So, to say *chanak* in Proverbs 22:6 refers to traditional "training" or "teaching" is not consistent with Old Testament usage. Other terms are reserved for that imperative. In light of the foregoing, the error of the Living Bible's rendition of Proverbs 22:6 becomes obvious as it reads, "**Teach** a child to choose the right path …." Whatever *chanak* means, it should not be translated as "teach."

Which "Way"?

The next part of Proverbs 22:6 to reexamine regarding translation is the adverbial prepositional phrase that the *King James* rendered, "in the way he should go." The Hebrew is just three words—two prepositions plus the noun "way" (*derek*). The noun has a singular personal pronoun attached, so it is literally "his way." Taken together a literal rending is, "according to his way." The *King James* translation is not the best as it does not properly reflect the wording used by Solomon in the phrase. The phrase in the *King James*, "should go" is misleading leaving the English reader to think that this is a verbal phrase in English, but in Hebrew it is literally "according to," which is a prepositional phrase that modifies the main verb, "dedicate."

So, the longstanding *King James* translation needs to be amended to be in line with what the Hebrew text actually says. Adding the main verb previously addressed, the translation is then, "Dedicate a child according to his way." This whole phrase is the mandate from God to parents: God requires parents to dedicate, or consecrate, a child according to his way. Remember that "dedicate" (*chanak*) is an imperative or command. When God commands believers to do something, He expects them to do it, and He also empowers them to do it. He does not require us to do something on a practical level that we don't have the resources for.

"He Will Not Depart"

The last part of the verse to reexamine regarding translation is the whole second part of the verse that we earlier called line B, the second part of the poetic couplet, which is rendered in the *King James* as, "and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is a word-for-word translation of the Hebrew text and cannot be improved upon much. So, after 400 years the *King James* translation of this phrase has stood the test of time, despite an ever-changing and amorphous English dialect. Kudos are in order for the *King James* here.

The Hebrew word for "old" (*zaqen*) is used about twenty-seven times in the Old Testament and consistently refers to the "aged" or

older adults. In Genesis 18:13 *zaqen* is used to describe Sarah who was way beyond childbearing years; she was eighty-nine! In Proverbs 22:6, "old" is used in a direct and deliberate contrast to the word "child" (*na'ar*) employed previously in phrase A. This is a classic usage of Hebrew parallelism in action. "Old" here does not mean when your kids are in college or their early twenties. It is referring to when they are much older, as in their twilight, and even senior years. If that was Solomon's intent, then many, if not most parents won't see the full fulfillment of this promise in their lifetime. Many parents pass away and die before they see their children reach "old" age. Christian parents make a mistake when they apply this verse to their young, high school or college-age kids.

The word for "depart" that concludes the verse is the verb *sur* and occurs over 300 times in the Old Testament and seventeen times in the Book of Proverbs. Its literal usage means to "turn away from" something and then go in a different direction. It is used this way when speaking of Moses who "turned aside" from the path he was walking on to go in another direction to see the burning bush where God would speak to him (Exod 3:3). It is also used metaphorically to "turn aside" from obeying God's commands in favor of sinful behavior (Exod 32:8). It is also used metaphorically in a positive sense to "turn away from" evil toward God's law and obedience (Prov 3:7).

Of the seventeen usages of the verb "depart, turn away from" in Proverbs, sixteen are metaphorical and only one is literal (cf. 9:16). Proverbs 22:6 uses it metaphorically in reference to moral behavior. On twelve occasions in Proverbs the reference is positive (i.e., to turn away from evil and toward God); five are negative (describing a fool turning away from God's truth). In 22:6 the usage is positive. Eleven times the verb is used in the context of an indicative statement or general truism. Six times it is used in relation to an imperatival statement. Proverbs 22:6 is one of those instances. In that case, parents are commanded to "dedicate" their young children, which in turn leads to the positive, metaphorical statement that, later, their children will not leave or "turn away from" the way intended.

A Fine-Tuned Translation

In light of all that has been argued thus far, a fresh translation that is faithful to the original Hebrew can be rendered as follows:

> Dedicate a young child according to his way,
> and when he is much older he will not turn away from it.

Reading the Book of Proverbs

Now that we have surveyed popular views of Proverbs 22:6 and established a literal translation, it is time for a brief word on how to read the Book of Proverbs. The popular and dominant view propagated by Bible teachers and even some "scholars" today says that the proverbs are just general truisms, not universal binding promises. For example, one popular author says, "the Proverbs are wise sayings and truisms—not necessarily inviolable rules" and as such, "Proverbs 22:6 is not a promise for Christian parents to claim that will guarantee their children will never depart from the way of truth."[19]

As mentioned earlier, it is overstating the case to say that all the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs are the same and should be treated accordingly. Pigeonholing and conflating all 900-plus proverbs illegitimately neutralizes all of its remarkable literary diversity and versatility.

The Book of Proverbs is made up of many kinds of different proverbs and sayings, written by different authors, under varying conditions, at different times in Israel's history. A brief survey clearly reveals the great diversity of the book, as it is composed of at least five different units.

The first unit includes chapters 1-9, which are discourse oriented, tending to be longer poems written from a father to a son. One author notes, "These discourses differ markedly from the two-line aphorisms people usually associate with proverbs."[20] The second unit covers 10:1-22:16, made up of the traditional two-line aphorisms. This section is attributed to Solomon (970 BC). There are roughly 375 couplets in this section, which is the heart of the book. Each couplet stands on its own structurally and the defining feature is Hebrew parallelism, where the first line is advanced by the second line. The third unit includes 22:17-24:34 and is called "the sayings of the wise." This unit is different in style than Solomon's couplets, as many of the sayings are extended beyond two-line proverbs. The fourth unit covers 25:1-29:27 and is credited to the time of Hezekiah (700 BC). The fifth unit includes the last two chapters which are attributed to Agur and Lemuel and have their own unique literary styles.

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[19] John MacArthur, *What the Bible Says About Parenting* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2000), 17-18.

[20] David Finkbeiner, "Proverbs" in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 884.

When reading a proverb, the reader needs to be aware of what section of the book they are in and must meditate on the individual proverb in light of its immediate context. Each of the couplets written by Solomon in chapters 10-22 stand alone. Some are general truisms; some are universal truths; some are basic warnings; some are indicatives or simple assertions of reality; and some are imperatives or commands. Proverbs 22:6 is an imperative which is its distinguishing feature that needs to be considered by the intended audience, which is believing parents.

Applying Proverbs 22:6

In light of all the foregoing it is now time to apply this classic parenting verse. The principles of application suggested here flow from the updated translation of the Hebrew text given above, which, again, is as follows:

> Dedicate a young child according to his way,
> and when he is much older he will not turn away from it.

The first principle to consider regarding its application is to understand that it is a one-sentence couplet composed of only eleven Hebrew words and is self-contained. Being self-contained means that it stands on its own. So, when you read it, keep it simple. It is meant to be read by itself and meditated upon. And as a one sentence proverbial couplet, like a parable, it conveys one main truth. Take it at face value and don't try to infuse it with more than Solomon wanted to convey. The main truth is that parents have an obligation toward their children. The main truth is not how to secure eternal salvation for your child by some unstated parenting methodology. You can't milk it for more than is there, in futility trying to develop a comprehensive philosophy of parenting. This proverb contributes only one plank in the vast structure of a parenting philosophy. Its main, plain, surface truth is that parents are commanded to dedicate their children to God when they are young in a comprehensive manner, doing all things in parenting in keeping with God's way of truth, and if you discharge that duty faithfully, then it will have a long-term influence on the child.

The second principle to keep in mind when meditating on Proverbs 22:6 is to remember that it is a command, for the lead verb is an imperative. Believing parents have a duty from God with respect to their young children. Here God gives a parental charge, and the parents are expected to obey. And as is true with all of God's commands to His

people, He gives them the resources to follow through successfully. As mentioned previously, this is the main point of the proverb. It is a parental command to be obeyed and fully discharged.

The third principle to consider with applying this verse is with respect to the translation of the main verb. The specific command to parents is "to dedicate." Because the *King James* translation reigned supreme for so long, this is probably the most eye-opening principle to consider. We saw that the Hebrew verb is *chanak* and is used four other times in the Old Testament, and in those instances it is translated as "dedicate." Its related noun form is used twelve times in the Old Testament and is always translated as "dedication" or a related form. So, there is no good reason to translate the verb as "train" in Proverbs 22:6.

Using the verb "train" does not do justice to the verb *chanak*. "Train" is too narrow, focusing only or mostly on teaching, whereas "dedicate" is broader, more inclusive and holistic. "Dedicate" includes teaching but is not limited to teaching. "Dedicate" has a broader reach. It is all-encompassing, as it inherently includes internal attitudes, not being reserved for only external methods as didactic teaching tends to be. Teaching is a one-dimensional enterprise, emphasizing the delivery of information. "Dedicate" includes the heart attitude as the prerequisite to all following methods and behavior with respect to parenting the young child. When Solomon "dedicated" the Temple, the point of emphasis was reverent devotion and exaltation toward the Giver of gifts, the gift being the Temple. As a gift from God, the Temple was also a stewardship responsibility of the people of Israel, especially King Solomon, and the priesthood. So, also are children a gift from God to parents and a stewardship responsibility of the parents (Ps 127:3). The parenting task needs to have at its foundation single-minded devotion and adoration toward God, the great Gift-giver (James 1:17).

When Solomon was commanding parents to dedicate their young children to God it is likely that he had some specifics in mind from his day to inform this responsibility. An obvious scenario that comes to mind from the era of Solomon is when Hannah dedicated her young child, Samuel, to God. Hannah was married and barren for a time. She knew that God was the author and giver of life. Only YHWH could open the womb. She pleaded boldly with God continually asking for a child from Him:

> She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head" (1 Sam 1:10-11).

Before she conceived, Hannah already had an attitude of "dedicating" her child to God. She knew that as a parent, she would be a mere temporary steward of the life God had entrusted to her. God answered Hannah's prayer, as she conceived and gave birth to a son. Again, she wholeheartedly dedicated the young child (*na'ar*) back to God, as "she named him Samuel, saying, 'Because I have asked him of the Lord'" (1 Sam 1:20). From the child's birth onwards, Hannah was committed to continually dedicating her beloved child back to God, knowing ultimately his soul belongs to the Creator. As the boy grew, she verbalized the priority and importance of dedicating her son to God, as she spoke to Eli the priest at the tabernacle:

> "For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there (1 Sam 1:27-28).

Immediately following this event Hannah prayed to God, once again dedicating the child, and herself, completely to the sovereign care of God. Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 is one of the most stunning and profound prayers in all of Scripture. Hannah dedicated herself and her young son Samuel to God, completely and unreservedly. Samuel would grow up to be used by God as a leader in Israel and would one day anoint David as king. King David was Solomon's father. Solomon, no doubt, possessed the written account, as well as the vivid spoken memories from his father, of Hannah's exemplary attitude and actions of what it means to be a reverent and responsible steward over the child entrusted to her care.

Hannah's dedication of her young child was not a one-time transaction. It was all-inclusive and ongoing. "Dedication" is a mindset, framework, and worldview in which faithful parents teach, train, discipline, model, shepherd, love and discharge the fullness of all their parenting duties. Understanding the mandate of Proverbs 22:6 as "dedicate" instead of "train" does not negate the importance of properly teaching and disciplining children. In fact, the opposite is true.

Parents need to diligently teach, train, and discipline their children to the full because they have dedicated their children completely to God from the time they are in the womb, holding on to no self-serving agendas as parents. Christian parents too often short-circuit the parenting process by allowing personal agendas or vendettas to leak in or intervene, such as when the parent wants the child to pursue a certain course in life that may not be God's choosing or God's "way" (*derek*). The mandate for parents to wholly "dedicate" their children to God should help guard against any illegitimate micro-managing tendencies or usurping idolatrous idiosyncrasies that plague many parents.

Earlier it was noted that *The Living Bible* translates the first phrase of Proverbs 22:6 as, "Teach a child …." And we explained why that is misleading. *The Living Bible* is a paraphrase that was not based on the original languages of the Bible, but instead was trying to make the old English more accessible to the modern-day reader. The fact that it rendered the *King James*, "train" as "teach" shows that when people read or hear the word "train," they think it means "teach" first and foremost. Hence the importance of understanding the better translation of the verb *chanak* as "dedicate." That changes the entire paradigm. In light of this consideration, to close out the practical benefit of understanding the main imperative in 22:6 to be "dedicate" as opposed to "train," consider the following implications of how these two verbs inform our attitude about parenting priorities:

1. "Train" focuses on what I do; "dedicate" focuses on what God deserves.
2. "Train" focuses on external methods; "dedicate" focuses on inner attitudes.
3. "Train" focuses on the child; "dedicate" focuses on the responsibility of the parent.
4. "Train" is one-dimensional; "dedicate" is holistic.
5. "Train" is primarily pedagogical; "dedicate" is doxological but includes pedagogy.
6. "Train" looks down to the child; "dedicate" looks up to God.

The fourth principle to consider when reading Proverbs 22:6 deals with the challenging second phrase that stumps many, "and when he gets older he will not turn away from it." Two things to keep in mind help keep the balance. First, this verse is not promising salvation to a child because of parenting methods without consideration of the doctrine of

election. Election is true and is God's side of the salvation process. This verse is emphasizing the human side of the salvation process, a process that God sovereignly oversees and even orchestrates. But He does choose to use human means to accomplish His divine ends. God does choose to use the faithfulness of many parents to bring their children to Himself. There are exceptions, but that is the most common means of positively influencing children illustrated in the Bible. And that is the common testimony of saints throughout the ages, as they get older and testify how the godly influence of their parents made an indelible impression in their walk with God. Second, this verse is not addressing any exceptions to the rule. It is a straightforward command with a promise, similar to the Fifth Commandment (cf. Eph 6:1-3). If the preconditions are met, then the Divine promise follows. Parents who faithfully discharge their parenting duties by dedicating their children to God can be assured and confident that they did what God required … and they are to trust God with the long-term results. Good parenting can be achieved. Beware the skeptics who turn this verse on its head or undercut its positive flair. Virtually any command with a promise in Scripture can be viewed in light of the exceptions to the rule. But that is the wrong way to read such promises. We are to be faithful and take God at His Word.

Regarding this fourth principle, it is hard to improve upon the concise and potent summary written by a godly saint from centuries ago who comments on it as follows:

> A good reason for it, taken from the great advantage of this care and pains with children: When they *grow up*, when they *grow old*, it is to be hoped, they *will not depart from it*. Good impressions made upon them then will abide upon them all their days. Ordinarily the vessel retains the savour with which it was first seasoned. Many indeed have departed from the good way in which they were trained up; Solomon himself did so. But early training may be a means of their recovering themselves, as it is supposed Solomon did. At least parents will have the comfort of having done their duty and used the means.[21]

[21] Matthew Henry, *Commentary of the Whole Bible, Vol. III* (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 917.

Conclusion

Proverbs 22:6 is considered by many to be a key parenting verse and at the same time it is frequently a stumbling block. It seems to make a promise that often does not come true for parents, namely, that if believing parents teach proper Bible doctrine to their children, then the children will be saved as adults. This chapter proposed that that is not what Proverbs 22:6 intends. Instead, we argued that the focus is on the parental mandate and not on the child's ultimate destiny. This view results from understanding the Hebrew properly as reflected in an updated literal translation which reads as follows:

> Dedicate a young child according to his way,
> and when he is much older he will not turn away from it.

The main verb in the sentence is an imperative, a command directed at parents. And that command is "to dedicate." It is not the common understanding of "to train" or "to teach" as the *King James* renders it. The verb "dedicate" occurs five times in the Old Testament and four of those times it refers to a building, including Solomon's Temple, being dedicated and consecrated to God. Parents are to likewise dedicate and consecrate their young children to God, recognizing that He is the ultimate Gift-giver, and that children are temporary stewardship gifts entrusted to parents. Parents are to guide and love their children in God's ways, not in any self-serving ways. Parents who faithfully discharge this calling are promised that such parental investments will result in fruit that bears out as the child grows old. Faithful, believing parents can have confidence in their parenting as they entrust the long-term results to God's sovereign care.

APPENDIX 2

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR NEW MOMS

By Peony Quesada and Debbie McManis

Introduction *(By Cliff McManis)*

If you are about to have a baby for the first time, then this chapter is for you. Or, if you recently gave birth and feel like your life and world have been turned upside down, then this chapter is for you as well. Or maybe you gave birth recently and this is not your first child, but you could use some reminders and encouragement during this challenging season.

Having children is a blessing from God. He is the Giver of life (1 Sam 2:6). And yet, giving birth is a brutal challenge. I don't exaggerate when I say "brutal." God severely punished Eve (and all women after her…which includes you!) for her disobedience, and the consequences would be manifest in her two most vital roles: as a wife and as a mother. God said to Eve, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16).

Most English translations of this verse mention "pain" twice, which highlights the agonizing nature of this curse from God. In the Hebrew text Moses actually used two different words for our English words "pain." One of the words emphasizes excruciating physical pain (hence, my previous word, "brutal"). But the other word could be translated as "sorrow," as the *King James* legitimately does. This is significant because

God was telling Eve that there will be physical pain as well as emotional or psychological, and even spiritual sorrow. And this two-fold agony was to extend to the whole birthing experience: from conception to the day of labor and beyond. Based on the terminology used in Genesis 3:16, it is a mistake to limit God's curse on the prospective mother to the few hours of physical labor at the end of the ninth month. The first part of this verse covers the whole pregnancy and birthing process.

Half of this curse is on the marriage relationship, which is mentioned in the second part of Genesis 3:16. Giving birth directly and immediately impacts your marriage. Having children strains the primary relationship of husband and wife in many ways. This challenge could prove devastating without God's intervention of grace and help (see 1 Cor 7:28).

All of the above flies in the face of what the unbelieving world has to say. The world's filter of viewing life and all its challenges is through the lens of random evolution, as well as false, man-made religious views. This is why it is a priority for Christian moms to make sure they have a fully informed biblical worldview.

God wants to help His children. That includes help with the challenges posed in the curse of Genesis 3. God has graciously provided the solution to the hard realities posed by the judgments in Genesis 3 that intrude on a woman's priority roles as wife and mother. One specific way God seeks to alleviate the curse of Genesis 3:16 is with Titus 2:4, which says young Christian moms need to "learn" to love their children.

Moms need to "learn" to love their children? That sounds odd. Many people ignore this verse or don't seriously consider its implications because conventional wisdom says moms intuitively and instinctively love their children in every way. However, God has said otherwise. Humans are naturally sinful. The human heart is innately and inherently wicked (Gen 6:5; Jer 17:9). Without God's grace, humans have an insatiable bent toward selfishness, including moms. Left to themselves, apart from God's direction and empowerment, moms and dads are inclined to parent their children out of convenience, fear, ignorance, and pragmatism. This usually takes the form of "child-centered" parenting. This is not God's way of parenting. As such, new moms need to "learn" how to be godly moms. They must learn how to parent in every way with a complete and holistic biblical worldview. That needs to be taught, not just caught.

Moms who did not grow up in a biblical home or with a Christian mother are at a disadvantage in many respects. They did not see biblical

mothering modeled to them, nor did they directly reap its benefits during the formative years. Or maybe you had a Christian mom, but she wasn't discipled by other godly women with respect to parenting and had some deficiencies. These are precisely the practical parenting voids that Paul is addressing in Titus 2:4. Young Christian moms need ongoing, deliberate, hands-on help with parenting their babies. They need to be informed by other godly, seasoned women who have a mature and balanced biblical worldview tempered and refined by their real-world experiences.

New moms, loving your children the way God wants you to love them does not come naturally or easy. You need help. Godly older women in your life can come to the rescue. That is God's design. God does not want you to be passive here. He expects you to proactively seek the help and resources He has provided (James 1:5; 4:2). To that end, as you prepare for the coming of your baby, or now that your baby has come, keep the following disciplines:

- Keep filling your mind with the truth of God's Word from Scripture.
- Stay in prayer throughout the day.
- Don't isolate yourself from the local church, your spiritual family.
- Become familiar with Titus 2.
- Seek out a plurality of other experienced, godly moms to walk you through this season of life.

If you do these things, then you will find help and comfort from your caring and kind heavenly Father. As a father, He knows more about babies and parenting than anyone.

Finally, there is one more thing to do, and that is read these following words of encouragement from Peony Quesada and my wife, Debbie McManis. They are experienced and godly mothers in our church who have applied specific biblical principles as parents of new babies many times over. Peony is a mother currently parenting four young children from the ages of one to eight years old. Debbie has four adult children and several young grandchildren. Both Peony and Debbie can testify with confidence that God is true to His promises. His ways truly are better than the world's ways, or even our own ways. As a new mom, don't just read the following and forget about it. Read and re-read it. Keep it by your bedside. Memorize the main principles. Read it devotionally with your husband regularly. The idea is to ingrain these truths into your mind so that they become second nature, as you

transform your mind more and more in keeping with God's truth (Rom 12:1-2). God promises to give you peace of heart and mind if you do (Phil 4:6-9).

To New Mothers (*By Peony Quesada*)

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward (Ps 127:3).

Undoubtedly and absolutely, children are a gift from the Lord. It is amazing to watch them grow, and especially sweet to watch babies learn how to clumsily navigate the world for the first time. Yet it is also true that the Geneva Convention classifies sleep deprivation as a war crime. These tiny little babies, barely able to hold their heads up, bring so much joy while also bringing you to your knees with the countless late nights and constant needs. God uses them to show us how weak and dependent we are upon Him, and that is exactly as it should be! This is one way in which He graciously and kindly reveals His strength to be perfected in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

In the midst of this new phase of motherhood, while we are undergoing this refining and sanctifying process, I believe there are several truths to keep at the forefront of your mind. These truths should influence the practical decisions you make for raising your brand-new baby. Though the application may look different for each family, the practical tips I give here are an example of how I lived them out with my four children. Some of these come straight from a note that I wrote in the first month of having my first baby, and I continued to refer to it on my phone when I needed the encouragement.

A Biblical Family Dynamic Is Parent-Led, Not Child-Led

Our lives are completely transformed when we enter our new role as parents. Yet, the father and mother must retain their authority in deciding what is a priority for the family and then show their children how to follow. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." This command calls for intentionality on our part. Training children is a divinely instituted responsibility given to us as parents that begins at infancy. God's command for children? "Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph 6:1). Our job is to train; their job is to obey.

Even in their earliest years, we are to develop patterns of authority, submission, liturgy, and worship, so that our children will grow up understanding how to live in God's world. If we're not intentional about leading, we may start basing all our decisions on whether it works

with our baby and our perceptions of what he or she wants. Suddenly, the baby is dictating whether or not we can go to the Bible study, or if staying for the fellowship meal is an option. Instead of helping the baby adjust to the activities and family life that you and your husband have decided are important, you may find yourself following the baby's lead.

As a new mother, I struggled with being overly tied to my baby's schedule and neglected being active in the church. In truth, it is not self-centered to deviate from what you think is "ideal" for the sake of the church or fellowship. You may have to wake up your baby from his nap early to get to church on time or allow her to wait an extra 20 minutes to nurse so you can worship through singing, but it is all well-worth it! In fact, it is often through these unspoken patterns of life that our children are instructed in the way they should go. It is a beautiful thing for a child to never remember life outside of the church. Our ability to be flexible demonstrates the importance of making time for these non-negotiables.

It is, of course, absolutely permissible to scale back in activities during this new period of transition. There's nothing wrong with saying "no." The key is that this is a calculated decision with your husband and considers the overarching goal for the family: living a godly life that is pleasing to the Lord and in service to others.

Help Your Baby Establish Order and Learn Independence

We know that we have a God of order (1 Cor 14:33). We see it in the uniformity of His creation (Gen 1:14). We see it in how He established liturgies for Israel (Num 10:10) and the church (1 Cor 14:40). And we see wisdom in having an ordered, disciplined life (Prov 6:8; 20:4; 21:5). As a new mother, it is good to guide your baby to have an order and rhythm to their day. When you proactively have a plan for meeting their needs, it will allow you to better identify and predict when the baby is hungry vs. sleepy. You will also be better able to manage your day, make time for fellowship and your own care, and reestablish your own sleep.

I found that my four children took to this general rhythm quite naturally: Feed→Wake/Play→Sleep. When my baby woke up, the first thing I did was nurse, then take care of any diaper or hygiene needs, allow them to spend some time awake as appropriate by age, and then put them back down for a nap in the bassinet. As a newborn, the wake window averaged about an hour and the baby would basically go right back down after being nursed and changed.

The beauty of this rhythm is that you are able to better discern and troubleshoot the baby's needs. For example, if you just fed, burped, and

changed the baby, and yet they are still crying, you can make an educated guess that it's from being tired. There are, of course, always "exceptions to the rule" (like growth spurts and teething), but it's helpful to remember that sleep is a need that babies will cry for. I realized a couple months in with my firstborn that I was actually keeping him from sleeping by interfering and all he wanted was some peace in his crib.

At first, the pattern of Feed→Wake→Sleep is a sliding target that cycles every 2.5 to 3 hours. Over time, those cycles should start to look more consistent by the clock. There's a bit of a feedback system, in which the baby's hunger becomes more predictable and habitual because of the regular intervals. You should also find that the baby's sleep cycle slowly extends during the night, and that the baby's body becomes more accustomed to getting calories during the day time, instead of at night. It is intentional that we keep feeding and sleeping needs as separate as possible so that the baby learns to sleep independently. By having a Wake time in between, the baby doesn't have to be nursed to sleep every time.

I'm a proponent of beginning as you intend to go. I knew that I needed to sleep to be a functional wife and mom and that I wanted to give the baby a predictable schedule that met the baby's needs. For us, that meant being thoughtful about a consistent and independent sleep environment. I would swaddle my baby, sing the same song, and turn on a white noise machine before putting the baby to bed. In my experience, it was much more gentle for the baby to be in their own sleep environment from the beginning, instead of trying to introduce it later.

With that said, remember that these little babies aren't robots with a predictable output when given the right input. You may feel like you have found the right combo, only for the baby to act differently out of the blue, and everything feels like chaos! There are so many phases and changes that your baby will go through and expecting that there will be deviations should free you from fear when it does happen. You're aiming to establish a flexible rhythm, not a military march, and your baby's needs should actually be made more apparent when he or she responds differently from the norm. The point is that you have a norm

to deviate from. After that growth spurt or development leap, you'll find your way back to the routine which is comfortable for you both.

This Phase of Sleeplessness Is a Sacrifice, but It Won't Last Forever

With some exceptions, your baby needs to be fed every 2.5 to 3 hours during those first few weeks. It's your job as primary caregiver to fill that need. For probably the first time in your life, you will feel prolonged sleep deprivation. While it doesn't necessarily take the sting away, I have found that the life-changing difference is when a sacrifice is given willingly, not clawed from a tight grip. There is a certain level of difficulty that is part of the job of being a mother and realizing that helped me to let go of the anxiety that something was wrong just because it was difficult. This too, is from the Lord.

Embracing the challenge does not mean you should white-knuckle through on your own or allow the phase to last longer than necessary. Lord willing, you have family, a church community, and a husband who will gladly give a literal hand with the baby while you rest as well. Now is the time to accept it! You will be a much more joyful and productive wife and mother when you work towards a reasonable sleep schedule for yourself and sometimes that involves allowing your community to come alongside you (Eccl 4:9-10).

Rest is a God-given discipline to enjoy, and being intentional with guiding your baby to healthy sleep habits will also help you reach a more normal sleep schedule. Take heart! The fruit of those efforts will come in time and be a blessing to the whole family. Pray and have faith that God will provide you with the rest that you need to tackle each day, even if it is less than the ideal at the moment.

Be Intentional in Prioritizing Your Husband and Allowing Him to Grow in Fatherhood

It is astonishingly easy for everything to suddenly revolve around the baby and for your husband to seem like someone who doesn't know the "right" way to do things. Don't allow that to take hold! Invite him into what you're doing and give him the space to hold and play with the baby the way he wants. Remember that the father's and mother's roles are distinct (Eph 5:22-25). God made him masculine, so his parenting instincts will be different and that is good! I remember being scandalized when my husband started "baby roughhousing" with my first son or feeling disappointed when he didn't think an outfit was as cute as I did. It's funny how these little preferences can get in the way

of just enjoying family time. Don't let it! A father brings a different touch of strength and reliability, while a mother brings a nurturing and gentle love. Both are necessary in the raising up of a child.

The newborn stage can be deceptive to you as a new mother, seeming at times like things have only changed for you, and not your husband. Guard yourself from this mindset (2 Cor 10:5). Do your best not to suffer in silence or adopt the mentality of a martyr. Your husband is just as much your shepherd and protector as you are his helper. Don't close yourself off from him during this time. Tell him how you're doing and let him be a support to you. Never stop fostering that primary relationship which God has established. Try to steal away moments for the two of you to enjoy. This might be sharing chocolate together for a 15 minute break or watching a familiar show together. Whatever it is, create some space for the two of you! You want to be building and modeling a healthy marriage to your children throughout their childhood and that will continue to be a wonderful example to your baby long after he or she has grown up and moved out of the house.

If your husband is working during the day, it's important to help protect his sleep at night. As husband and wife, you have two separate God-given roles and here is where you can divide and conquer your responsibilities. Work together to ensure that you're also able to get rest, but your husband should be able to sleep at night so he can work and provide for the family during the day. Parenting certainly tests the partnership in a marriage and both husband and wife should seek to be a blessing to the other during this unique transition.

Seek Advice from Older Women at Your Church

We live in a time where AI is becoming a very real intellectual crutch for many. As new mothers desperate for answers, the multitudes of forums and social media voices can seem ear-splittingly loud, but there's nothing like advice that has been lived out and weathered and shown to be effective. Outside opinions, studies, and authorities will change with the culture, and what is popular at that time. Often, these parenting trends will come directly in conflict with what the Bible says about the family structure and the role that parents should play as the authority over their children. Older women in the local church, however, can serve to ground us in biblical truth and wisdom. This will

guard us from being tossed to and fro by every wave of parenting doctrine (Eph 4:14).

There is such a wealth of information and wisdom in the church and Titus 2:4-5 teaches us to mine from it faithfully. It might be tempting to google everything and quickly find the answers yourself, but it is such a blessing to have other women in the church come alongside you and be an encouragement. It's vital that we seek advice rooted in Scripture and a biblical worldview, but it's also a means of building godly relationships. The beauty is that you can seek women of good repute who have already seen their children grow up and want to continue to be a source of support and love to the younger women.

Online, you have hardly any evidence of each "expert's" credibility, and yet you're influenced by their information, and then you scroll away. There's no accountability there; no skin in the game for these online voices. They have no vested interest in you personally, unlike the godly women in your local church who actually know you. Don't let the internet be a shallow replacement for the wonderful, deep relationships that are built within the body of Christ.

Cherish This Time with Your Child, Instead of Dwelling on The Hardships

The time for raising children is short and the newborn phase is just one of many phases that are each sweet in their own way. Enjoy this time as best you can! Take some time to snuggle, squish their little baby rolls, and take lots of pictures! Don't forget to share the blessing of your baby with others as well. As a mother, nothing brings more joy than friends and family fawning over your child. Allow other trusted adults to hold your baby and don't be scared of your baby crying. This aids in teaching your baby to grow in their independence and will help them understand that he or she can trust other people outside of the family too. It's good for your baby to be accustomed to friends throughout childhood and even for you to be reminded that others can love on your child also.

I wish I could go back in time and reassure myself that every cry from the baby was not an indication that something was terribly wrong. Healthy babies will cry! It is not always a life or death situation. There were even times when my son would make a noise in his sleep and I would inadvertently disturb him by picking him up. I would wake to cries that weren't there. I didn't co-sleep and wasn't set up to do so, but I would wake up in a sweat, afraid that I had forgotten to safely put the baby in the bassinet. I certainly allowed irrationality to get in the way of

cherishing and enjoying this time. It was a cycle of fear getting in the way of rest and lack of rest leading to more irrational fear.

If you find yourself having a hard time with anxiety and fear during this time, pray. Cast your anxiety and cares on Christ (1 Pet 5:7). Ask others to join you in prayer and let them bear this burden with you (Gal 6:2). There's so much love and joy around the corner and entrusting God with the well-being of the baby and your own emotions is pivotal. The Creator of the universe who keeps everything spinning knows you and your baby. He is trustworthy, and able to answer your prayers for peace of mind and a healthy baby.

Conclusion

These truths were absolutely essential to me during my first year of motherhood, and I'm thankful for the many wise women who didn't mind repeating them to me when I needed it. While the exact application may vary from family to family, I hope that you find the principles helpful as you make decisions for your children and form your family culture.

Your primary objective as the parent is to love and cherish your baby and to raise him or her up to be an adult who loves the Lord (Eph 6:4). It can be an all-consuming task that chokes out other Christian priorities, if you allow it. When your children leave the home one day, you want to be sure that you have not left a void and neglected your own growth and people in your life. We can be faithful parents to our children while also nurturing relationships in marriage, the church, and the family. Seeds are being planted now for a reaping that seems far into the future and you must be sure that you have also been attentive to your own garden, not just your children's. Be diligent, faithful, consistent, and, most of all, be prayerful and trusting in our loving Father.

On Becoming a Mother (*By Debbie McManis)*

Dear young mother,

There is something I want to pass on to you in these early days of motherhood that I wish every young woman could hear: **you are not doing something wrong simply because this is harder than you imagined.**

Before you became a mother, you may have pictured the sweetness of motherhood—the tiny fingers wrapped around yours, the wonder of holding a child who has been entrusted to you—and those things

really are wonderful. But there is another side of these early days that we don't always talk about. Giving birth and infancy can be unbelievably difficult and overwhelming. Your body may be exhausted and recovering in ways you never expected. You and/or your baby may be struggling with nursing and all the variables and pressures associated with it. You long for sleep, cry more than you thought possible, or wonder why you don't feel the way you thought you would.

Sometimes motherhood arrives with joy and difficulty intertwined. For some women, the transition is surprisingly easy. For others, it is physically and emotionally overwhelming. Postpartum depression and anxiety are real struggles for many mothers and experiencing them does not mean that you are ungrateful for your baby or that you are a bad mother. You can love your child deeply and still find yourself struggling to get through each day.

I want you to know that **both things can be true.**

You can be deeply grateful for this precious child and desperately tired. You can feel overwhelming love and overwhelming anxiety. You can treasure your baby and miss the life and person you were before. You can know that your child is a gift from God and still sometimes wonder, *how am I going to do this? Will I ever be the same?*

Psalm 127:3 tells us, "Children are a heritage from the Lord." Your child is indeed a gift. But gifts can also bring us into places of sacrifice, stretching, and dependence upon God that we have never experienced before.

Perhaps that is part of what makes motherhood so profound. God gives us this tiny person to love, and suddenly our hearts become capable of a kind of love we could not have imagined.

You may find yourself amazed at how deeply you can love someone so small. Their needs may interrupt your sleep, your plans, your schedule, and nearly everything you thought your life would look like—and yet you would gladly do almost anything for them.

There is a scene in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* that makes me smile because it captures something that is difficult to put into words. The Grinch's heart was "two sizes too small," and then, as he began to understand love, "the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day."

Sometimes becoming a mother feels a little like that. **It is as though God has made room in your heart for a love that wasn't there before.** You look at this tiny person and realize that somehow your heart has expanded beyond what you thought it could hold. You can be exhausted beyond words and still find yourself overwhelmed

with love. You can be frightened by how vulnerable this little life makes you feel and, at the same time, amazed by the depth of joy that has entered your life.

That love is beautiful.

But, dear mother, **you need care too.**

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Notice that He did not say, "Come to me, particularly the exceptional and high performers." He invited the weary. He invited the burdened.

So, come to Him exactly as you are.

You do not have to prove that you can handle everything. Accept help when it is offered. Tell someone when you are struggling. Let someone hold the baby while you shower or sleep. Eat something. Sit down. Cry if you need to. Pray simple arrow prayers:

"Lord please help me get through today!"

"Lord, quiet my anxious thought!"

"Jesus, give me strength for this moment!"

And remember that God sees you.

One of the most tender pictures of God's care is found in Isaiah 40:11: "He will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." I love that Scripture, because it reminds us that God is not impatient with mothers who are tired. He knows exactly what this season requires of you, and He promises to lead you gently.

You may feel that these days will last forever. They won't.

There will come a morning when you realize your baby slept a little longer and maybe cried a little less. There will be new challenges, of course, because motherhood keeps changing, but there will also be new joys.

And someday, perhaps, you will be the older woman sitting beside another young mother, telling her what I am telling you now.

So, give yourself grace.

You are learning how to be a mother while your baby is learning how to be a baby. Neither of you has done this before. And, from one mother to another, motherhood is the hardest job you'll ever have.

There is no perfect mother. There is no perfect beginning. There is only this child God has entrusted to you and the grace He has already given to you.

Galatians 6:2 tells us to "bear one another's burdens." You were never meant to carry motherhood alone. Let other women walk beside you. Let those who have gone before you encourage you. And when

the day comes that you have the strength, become that woman for someone else.

Most of all, remember this: **your child is a gift, but you are not merely the person who cares for the gift. You are a beloved daughter of God yourself.**

He cares about your heart, your body, your exhaustion, your fears, and your joy.

The days ahead will hold both hard things and beautiful things. There will be moments when you feel completely inadequate and moments when your heart feels so full you can hardly contain it.

Receive them both.

And, in all of it, God is with you.

APPENDIX 3

CHRISTIAN PARENTING AND ADOPTION

By Derek and Amy Brown

Introduction

Twenty years ago, we had just moved to Louisville from the San Francisco Bay Area. Our move coincided with our desire to start having children. After about a year of trying to conceive with zero success, we conceded it may not be God's will for us to have biological children. This realization was devastating for both of us, but in God's providential kindness, we had recently joined a church where many families had adopted children, several internationally.

After much prayer and discussion between ourselves and other families, we decided to pursue adoption as the path by which we believed God would build our family. After twenty-one months of arduous paperwork, heartbreaking setbacks, and two trips to Ethiopia, we brought home our ten-month-old son. Over the next seven years, God would add our son from China and our daughter from Ethiopia to our family.

Nearly two decades after our first conversation about adopting, we cannot adequately express our gratitude to God for His mercy to us in

giving us three wonderful children when we thought we might have none. We treasure this verse:

> He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord! (Ps 113:9)

God's Love for the Orphan

Earthly adoption is a picture of a greater spiritual reality. All Christians have been adopted into God's family. Prior to our salvation, we were spiritual orphans, without a heavenly Father, family, or inheritance. But when God had mercy on us, He secured our place in His eternal family through the death and resurrection of His only Son, forgiving us our sins, and making us His legal heirs. We are God's children *by adoption*.

It is for this grand spiritual reason Scripture highlights orphan care so often. Throughout the Old Testament, God calls on His people to care for the orphan and to make sure parentless children are not taken advantage of or experience destitution. Under the New Covenant, Christians are instructed to "visit orphans and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27). This practical love for the orphan is an aspect of "pure and undefiled religion" that shows our faith is real and not a sham (James 1:22-25). Adoption, therefore, is not only a legitimate way to bring children into one's family; it reflects our adoption into God's family and God's own care for orphans. Adoption is a practical way to walk in pure and undefiled religion and provide discipleship opportunities for those who may otherwise never hear the gospel

Stepping into Suffering

As wonderful as adoption is, however, a married couple should never approach it as a means of boasting in their own virtue, or because it is trendy, or to secure pictures of cute babies for their social media accounts. Adoption is the deliberate act of stepping into a world of unknowns, loss, grief, and a host of unique challenges that do not exist with biological children. Adoption is glorious, and it is *hard*. If couples are naïve about the challenges that await them when they return from their child's birth country or birth state, they will become easily discouraged and even start to question whether they should "keep" their child.

Sadly, we've heard many stories of families who gave up their adopted child to other families because of the difficulties they experienced after their child was home. When a family relinquishes legal custody of their adopted child to another family it is called a "disrupted adoption." For a child who has already experienced the loss of their birth parents, the instability caused by losing their adoptive parents can be devastating. How can this child have any confidence that the family they are part of *now* will be there for them tomorrow?

Most importantly, such a scenario is contrary to the nature of our adoption as God's children. When God makes us His child, He secures our legal standing and relationship with Him *for all eternity*. We never have to fear being cast out of His family. For parents to give up their adopted child because the adoption wasn't what they thought it would be, they are acting contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christian couples need to be fully aware of all the challenges that accompany domestic and international adoption so they will be able to persevere through the many difficulties that await them.

Different Ways to Adopt

There are two main ways to adopt a child: domestic and international. When adopting domestically, a family has three options. The first is infant adoption where a birth mother is matched with a prospective adoptive family and that family usually brings their baby home from the hospital closely after birth.

A second option is foster-to-adopt, where an adoptive family first fosters a child in their home for a time and then legally adopts their child when the birth family's rights have been fully relinquished. Children adopted via foster-to-adopt can be adopted at varying ages and sometimes in sibling groups.

The last domestic option is called "snowflake adoption." This is when an adoptive family can adopt unused frozen embryos from a birth family's IVF process. The adoptive family would then go through their own IVF process to bring their adoptive child to full-term in the womb of their adoptive mother.

With international adoption there are a variety of countries open for adoption. Each country has its own set of standards for adoptive parents and regulations for their country's adoption process.

The Basic Process

The adoption process requires a lot of work, and it can be more or less difficult depending on the type of adoption you pursue. Every adoption requires you to first apply through an adoption agency. We recommend locating an adoption agency that aligns with your Christian beliefs so you can avoid a potentially compromising situation where you are asked to do or withhold something from your child that you deem to be good and right. Some adoption agencies, for example, require parents to sign a document that says they will not spank their children. If you believe that Scripture calls you to lovingly discipline your children and that this sometimes requires spanking, you would not be able to proceed with an agency that has narrow policies as to what is allowed in training and disciplining an adopted child.

Second, every adoptive family must complete a home study. A home study is conducted by a licensed social worker who gathers pertinent information about your family through multiple interviews and document collection (original birth certificates, marriage certificates, financial documents, medical evaluations, etc.) to determine whether your family is fit to adopt. A finalized set of documents called a "dossier" is usually required for international adoptions and will be sent overseas to the child's country of origin. The process of the home study and dossier completion can take anywhere from three to six months, depending on the type of adoption, difficulty locating documents, scheduling, and other factors.

Once you've completed your home study, you are ready to be matched with a child. In the case of international adoption, this match usually comes *after* you have submitted your dossier. In a domestic adoption, a child may be chosen prior to the home study process, depending on the situation.

After the match, parents must wait for the court to finalize the adoption. If the child is adopted from another country, that country must deem the adoption legal. If the child is adopted domestically, a Superior or District Court in the parents' or child's county will finalize the adoption. We recommend parents adopting internationally also complete the legal process in their county after they have brought their child home. This is called "re-adoption."

After the legal process is complete, the child is now yours, and you may bring them home. (In a foster-to-adopt situation, the child will

already be living with you.) This is truly a joyous occasion. So much of the adoption process, with all the paperwork and various requirements, can feel tentative—like it will never happen. Once you bring your child home and they are legally yours, you and your spouse will breathe a thankful sigh of relief.

Most adoptions require visits with a social worker after the adoption is completed. These usually continue for three to six months (and sometimes up to a few years), depending on state laws. Beyond this, some birth parents may require some amount of access to the child post-adoption. This is one of the challenges with domestic adoptions that is nearly nonexistent with international adoptions. Birth parents may want to remain in contact with their children, even after the adoptive parents have made the child legally theirs. Adoptive parents must be ready to navigate these kinds of scenarios, and determine, before they begin the process, if they are willing to allow birth parents access to the child after the adoption has been legally finalized.

With international adoptions, some countries may have additional requirements besides the social worker visits. Ethiopia, for example, requires updates on the child to be submitted to the government once a year. Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Burundi, Madagascar, and Eritrea all require post-adoption reporting up to age eighteen.

The cost for adoption can be significant. Domestic adoptions are usually much less expensive than international adoptions. Domestic adoptions can cost as little as $2,500, while some international adoptions can cost upwards of $60,000. These costs include paperwork processing fees, court fees, care of the child (while in an orphanage), and travel expenses.

Parenting Challenges

As we've already mentioned, adoption is wonderful, but it also comes with many unique challenges. Once a child is old enough to understand they were adopted and that their birth parents, for whatever reason, chose not to keep them, they can begin to experience deep questioning of their own worth. "Why did my mom not *want* me?" can be the anguished cry of a young boy or girl who is starting to realize what adoption really means. Rather than rebuking your child for not being thankful for the parents God gave them, we believe it is much better to grieve alongside your children (Rom 12:15), gently share the truth with

them (if you know the reason why their parents gave them for adoption; for international adoptions, this information is often unknown), and express often how much *you* want them and love having them as your son or daughter.

We live in a fallen world where some children are abandoned by their birth parents or given to a different family because the birth mom knows she can't take care of another child. Whatever the case, a child's grief over the fallenness of the world and the circumstances of their adoption are not a cause for anger, rebuke, or parental insecurity. Rather, it is a time to show our children that we are also sad over the brokenness of this world and that we love them with all our hearts.

In some cases, depending on the age of the child or the circumstances by which their adoption came about, adoptive parents may find their child has a difficult time connecting with, trusting, or showing affection to them. This can be devastating for adoptive parents, especially moms. Some parents may find their love deeply tested, as they care for a child who appears to not love them in return.

It is also challenging to navigate health concerns when you do not know a child's biological history. Again, these concerns may be less acute with domestic adoptions where there is likely more access to this kind of information. Even so, when you do not know what kind of genetic problems a child may have (since you don't know the child's parents or grandparents), it can make you feel as though you are unable to rightly care for your child's medical needs.

Then there are the challenges that come along with looking *different* than your adoptive parents. In some domestic situations, a child may not appear to be adopted because they share the same skin color and similar physical features as the parents. When a child does not share the same skin color or physical features as the parents, their adoptive status becomes "conspicuous," as adoption experts call it. In other words, it is obvious to everyone that the child is adopted. This can lead to a child feeling uncomfortable around their parents and other family members, questioning their identity, and wondering why they just can't be like their friends. As a child enters grade school and middle school, these difficulties can become more severe.

Nevertheless, it is our recommendation that parents of adopted children *do not hide the fact that their children are adopted.* Rather, parents should speak openly at home about the goodness of adoption, how

much God has blessed the parents through adoption, how earthly adoption is a picture of the gospel, and how much joy they have in their adopted children. One practice we have kept up for the last sixteen years is that we celebrate each child's "Gotcha Day" (like a birthday, only it's the day that child legally become ours). We celebrate with donuts and, while we are sitting around the table, Amy reads them the story of their adoption, complete with photographs, and we always ask if they have questions about their story.

While we know there are many challenges our children face because they are adopted, we want them to love adoption and to love the fact that they are adopted. That doesn't mean they won't grieve over the loss of their birth parents or struggle with their identity, or, at times, even wish they weren't adopted. But, on the whole, we're aiming to instill in our children not only a love for earthly adoption, but a love for the gospel—the good news that God takes sinners and adopts us into His family through the death and resurrection of His Son. It is this gospel that enables adoptive parents to persevere through the many challenges they and their children face and not "grow weary in doing good" (Gal 6:9).

APPENDIX 4

RECOMMENDED PARENTING AND MARRIAGE BOOKS

While no book (besides the Bible) is perfect, we believe the following resources are helpful in providing a biblical perspective on parenting, marriage, and the family.

Parenting

- **Shepherding a Child's Heart** - Tedd Tripp
- **Instructing a Child's Heart** - Tedd and Margy Tripp
- **What the Bible Says About Parenting** - John MacArthur
- **The Fulfilled Family** - John MacArthur
- **Being a Dad Who Leads** - John MacArthur
- **The Extraordinary Mother** - John MacArthur
- **Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family** - Paul David Tripp
- **The Age of Opportunity** - Paul David Tripp
- **Raising Men Not Boys** - Mike Fabarez
- **The Faithful Parent** - Martha Peace and Stuart Scott
- **The Blessing** - Gary Smalley and John Trent
- **Educating Your Child: Public, Private or Homeschool**? - Cliff McManis
- **Better Dads, Stronger Sons** - Rick Johnson

Marriage

- **God Defines and Defends Marriage** - Cliff McManis
- **What Did You Expect?** - Paul David Tripp
- **When Sinners Say I Do** – Dave Harvey
- **This Momentary Marriage** – John Piper

Husbands and Wives

- **Strong and Courageous** - Derek Brown
- **A Man after God's Own Heart** - Jim George
- **Different By Design** – John MacArthur
- **The Quest for Character** - John MacArthur
- **Disciplines of a Godly Man** – R. Kent Hughes
- **Disciplines of a Godly Woman** - Barbara Hughes
- **The Excellent Wife** - Martha Peace
- **God's High Calling for Women** – John MacArthur

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WITH ALL WISDOM PUBLICATIONS

With All Wisdom Publications is the book publishing ministry of Creekside Bible Church in Cupertino, CA. We started this publishing ministry out of the simple desire to serve our local body with substantive biblical resources for the sake of our people's growth and spiritual maturity. But we also believe that book publishing, like any other Christian ministry, should first and foremost be under the supervision and accountability of the local church. While we are grateful for and will continue to support the many excellent traditional publishers available today–our shelves are full of the books they have produced–we also believe that the best place to develop solid, life-giving theology and biblical instruction is within the local church.

With All Wisdom is also unique because we offer our books at a very low cost. We strive for excellence in our writing and seek to provide a high-quality product to our readers. Our editorial team is comprised of men and women who are highly trained and excellent in their craft. But since we are able to avoid the high overhead costs that are typically incurred by traditional publishers, we are able to pass significant savings on to you. The result is a growing collection of books that are substantive, readable, and affordable.

In order to best serve various spiritual and theological needs of the body of Christ, we have developed three distinct lines of books. **Big Truth|little books®** provides readers with accessible, manageable works on theology, Christian living, and important church and social issues in a format that is easy to read and easy to finish. Our **Equip Series** is aimed at Christians who desire to delve a little deeper into doctrine and practical matters of the faith. Our **Foundations Series** is our academic line in which we seek to contribute to the contemporary theological discussion by combining pastoral perspective with rigorous scholarship. All books are free electronically at www.withallwisdom.org.